

Layton Birchell, Placer High School

One of the fondest and most vivid memories I can conjure of the six years that my family and I have lived in California stems from an excursion that my godfather Lepton and I had in the American River Canyon. The memory comes from the submersion of Lepton and I in the fairly frigid waters. The reason for our unintentional outing into the rabid torrent was the fact that a turbulent current had flipped our inflatable kayak and tossed us into the river. I can recollect an intense mix of fear, exaltation, and exhilaration. This section of the river we were in could dash us against the rocks or suck us under. Thankfully, Lepton's experience allowed us to get back on our vessel and leave the river unharmed. This is only one of the incredible adventures that I've had that creates a foundation of love and wonder that I feel for the American River and all the life and landscape that surrounds it. My various exploits into the canyon helped me cultivate a great affinity for the environmental inhabitants in the canyons, so much so that my lack of action dismayed me. The beautiful wildflowers and stoic oaks in the American River Canyon enthralled me and acted as the catalyst and motivation for what happened next. I committed to creating a California native pollinator garden that would act as a food source for local wildlife. This realization led me to Rock Creek Elementary, where my enthusiasm has infected those who tend to a vegetable garden there. They have designated a huge area at the school for me to develop a new pollinator garden that will hopefully enrich the education of the children who go there, just as these canyons have enriched my life, and urged me to become a more fully realized individual.

Placer County residents already know how to enjoy themselves at the confluence, but most of them are woefully ignorant of an ecosystem's fragility, and that the place they recreate is constantly under peril by both minute and significant threats. The way to truly connect people to the canyon is for them to understand the biological makeup that makes American River so special. Tours along the waterway can educate of wildflowers and the habitat that they support, and classes can teach how to plant and care for natives at their own house. This knowledge will enrich people's experiences and their personal connections to this place. I desire that the residents that call this place home can see the ravine through the same lens that I do, with the knowledge that I have, and with the fanaticism I possess. Who knows? If the effort is truly put in to enlighten every age group, particularly children, of the delicate and intricate web of life here in-Auburn, maybe one day it-will be-considered nearly standard to have a native landscape at every house, where little splotches of wildflower color can grow, spread, and wave in the warm California breeze.