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Hikes for Change

The only home I have ever known is my house on Birdsall Avenue in Auburn that looks across the Sierra Mountains and down at the North Fork of the American River. My earliest memories are from summers spent playing under the Curved bridge with my friends and hiking in my Dad's back pack up to our favorite spot by the "Rainbow" tree above the Confluence. The American River and Canyon is not only my backyard but it is my home. Growing up, I found that even as I traveled and experienced many sights of the world, nothing compared to the familiarity and beauty of my home. Today I spend my weekends exploring the canyon through hikes with my dog and friends and in the summer I try to find the perfect swimming hole and still hunt for tadpoles along the American River.

My love for the American River and Canyon has played a huge part in my decision to study environmental science when I go to college next year. The beauty that I see in nature around me is threatened by human impact on our planet and I hope to make people aware of this effect and inspire communities such as ours to take action. Thus, my vision for improving recreational opportunity in our American River Canyon is to organize and offer educational hikes and field trips for students from 4th through 10th grade. These hikes would be led by local ranchers and environmentalists (Placer land trust and ARC members, etc .) and supported by Placer County High School students who would be members of the extra curricular group called Foothill Friends of the American River. I believe that if we created such a program that talked about our own environmental concerns here in Northern California, such as drought and fire danger, while giving a first hand visual experience of these issues on a nature hike it could inspire the next generation to take action. A beautiful hike through our canyon will expose the youth to the beauty of nature around them that is so often lost in the digital age. The hikes would simultaneously leave the students with a lasting impression of the issues that we face here in Northern California and give them the knowledge and insight about how to help fight them. To begin these environmental hikes I would hand out flyers to people attending the Wild and Scenic Film Festival to reach parents who want their children to learn about nature and the environment. Also, I would reach out to local land organizations and collect names of potential hike docents. Hiking in nature is one of the most therapeutic and relaxing rewards I can give myself and I believe that if we can give the gift of hiking to many more young people, they will carry that on and have a greater appreciation and understanding of nature and our environment.