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Connor Ryan - Placer High School

I originally came to know the American River Canyon as did many others - through trail running. My earliest memory is from the summer after fifth grade, when Coach Fee opened his local Thursday Night Run series to middle schoolers. I recollect running, almost sprinting really, down Robie to the old railroad grade in the hot, manzanita-dust air that'd been baked by the sun. I was slightly less enthusiastic on the way out, but the spell had taken hold. Over the next eight years, that original enchantment has expanded: swimming Clark's Hole over summer, hiking from Stagecoach to the Foresthill Bridge in a spring drizzle, and eating lunch at Robie Point, overlooking the vastness of the space sunk between the canyon's walls.

For me, the canyon speaks in hardpacked brown dirt, in blankets of velvety green winter grass, in oak leaves trembling in the wind, and in scudding clouds richer than an oil painting. It has given me solitude, and training grounds; peace, and places to explore; knowledge of nature, and appreciation of its worth.

For our community, I see it providing much the same benefits. After all, is the canyon not a large reason why many call Auburn their home? It gives us, collectively, a place to recreate; to explore; to be free; and to experience beauty. It helps out our physical health, our mental health, our city's economy, and our collective resolve to protect and preserve nature - a key ideal in today's consumerist world.

Much like my first run down Robie, then, I believe that to truly help our canyon, we must employ publicity and programs to help more people discover its beauty and benefits; to help more people realize that it is a place desperately worth protecting.

We could organize guided runs, mountain bike rides, and hikes, the latter perhaps with a naturalist who knows local wildlife, and specially promoted to high-school and middle-school students. We could create an app that has historical and ecological information geotagged to certain locations in the canyon, that could serve to educate people. We could also organize guest speakers for local schools on the canyon; I was lucky enough to listen to a lecture on the Auburn Dam in my Environmental Science class, and it fascinated me. They could also pass out maps and information-pamphlets, and give safety classes about the river, or rattlesnakes. Finally, as an Eagle Scout, I've noticed that Scouts often do not know what to do for their Eagle Scout project; we could reach out to local Boy and Girl Scout troops, whom I'm sure would be more than willing to conduct community service projects to beautify and improve the canyon.

Behind projects, organizations, and information, however, are people; and I think the best way we can benefit the canyon is to tell people about it, take them into it, and share the gift it gives, one that we have been incredibly lucky to experience.

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