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I deeply love the Auburn State Recreation Area. As a child, my parents introduced me to the American River, taking me on hikes and swimming adventures. As I grew up, I began to appreciate the astounding natural beauty sitting right outside my backdoor. When COVID started, I began to spend more time outdoors as a way to stay active and relieve stress. I started mountain biking in the canyon and it's become a passion of mine. It's a great way to improve fitness, enjoy the outdoors, and hang out with friends, plus it's super fun.

In 2021 I joined the Placer Foothills Mountain Bike Club, a local organization where high school students from local schools ride together and train for XC mountain bike races. I spend around three days a week with my team, exploring and enjoying the world-class trails in the canyon. The views of the canyon walls, crisp fresh air, stunning landscapes, vibrant plants, and animal life never fail to amaze me. Outside of mountain biking, I also love spending time down at the river, hiking to various lookout spots, and checking out all the neat equipment and infrastructure left from the mining era. I'm amazed that there is always something new to explore.

I'm concerned, however, about the threat wildfire poses to the safety and well-being of both the residents of Auburn and the ASRA at large. In September 2021 a brush fire was lit by an arsonist near the Foresthill Bridge, exploding in size and coming dangerously close to the town of Auburn. Thanks to the quick response of firefighters the damage was minimized, however, the Bridge fire had the potential to be catastrophic and deadly. While the proximity to town and ease of access to recreation is amazing, it also is a possible danger if another fire were to jump out of control. It scares me to think of how trail users and residents could be easily caught off guard and trapped by a fire.

Riding my bike, I've seen firsthand how incredibly dense and overgrown portions of the canyon are. This provides fuel for wildfires to grow rapidly. I've seen community members take action in preparation since, clearing areas around the neighborhoods that border the canyon. Personally, I have volunteered with FATRAC, a local trail association, to help with maintenance and upkeep of the canyon. It's a nice way to give back to my sport, improving the well-being and protection of the trail system. I think the effort of brush removal should be continued and expanded, especially to other high-traffic areas such as the Confluence.

Millions of people visit the American River Canyons each year. We need to increase awareness of fire danger and how to combat it. Together we can preserve the natural beauty and rich environment of the majestic American River and its canyons.