

## **Bryce Lund, Placer High School**

I am beyond fortunate to say that my home is much more than just a place at which I live. My home is the place where I learn, explore, and reach to understand ideas that go beyond myself. This place is Auburn, California, with its scenic landscape of the American River canyons. The Auburn canyons hold a special place in my heart, filled with countless memories of immeasurable significance. It was the place where I had taken my first tumble on my beloved childhood bicycle, the spot where my family and I have shared our fondest summer evenings at Lake Clementine, and the place that taught me the significance of caring for the environment that surrounds me.

This great appreciation of nature began to develop early in my formative years, as I was surrounded by rushing rivers, swaying pine trees, and endless miles of winding trails. Weekends indoors were not on the agenda. Upon entering my teenage years, I was already in love with the outdoors. I am grateful to say that this love didn't form from online images or great ideas, but rather lived experiences that I will forever cherish. It was the days of water skiing on Lake Clementine and the never-ending hikes led by my dad that grew my appreciation for time away from everyday activities, and instead engulfed me in the stillness of the outdoors.

As the years flew by, the canyons seemed to be stuck in time, preserved within their natural beauty, and only changed by those who passed through. But, as I matured with age, I began to notice the ever-increasing attention that the American River canyons were attracting. Social media had captured Auburn's beautiful landscape, sharing it with the world and bringing a high level of tourism. In what seemed like an instant, the Auburn State Recreation Area went from a quiet habitat to a bustling park. In an unavoidable fashion, the increasing crowds began to disrespect the area I called home, littering the trails and ignoring nature's slogan, "Leave no trace."

After years of Auburn's nature serving me, I knew it was my time to return all that I had been given. I made my first step going to PARC's American River Cleanup day, and that event was the first time I realized that the outdoors surrounding me had affected much more than just my own childhood. Further compelled, I decided to spend my summer after junior year working at the Auburn State Recreational Area. While working for the state park, I learned about everything behind the scenes, only growing my appreciation for the American River and all that it has to offer.

These experiences have brought me a community, a place that I will forever call home, and memories I will forever cherish. As I move forward in life, I will work to ensure that these experiences are available for generations to come, affecting others just as they have affected me.

**PARC High School Essay Contest Winner, 2026**