

Devon Earp, Del Oro High School

"You feel mighty free and easy and comfortable on a raft." - Huckleberry Finn

The American River and its canyons have always been a special place to me. The river cutting through the green hills of Auburn and the trails running along the mountains bring visitors from all around to enjoy the recreational activities the American River has to offer. The American River and the surrounding wilderness also provide a perfect sanctuary for wildlife like hawks, deer, coyotes, and other creatures from the nearby cities and roads.

Nature has always been important to me because it gives me a place to step away from the chaos and fast pace of everyday life and feel at peace.

Growing up in the town of Loomis, the American River has always been easily accessible. As long as I can remember, I have craved trying to harness the power of the river with just a pair of oars. My first white-water rafting experience was neither easy nor comfortable. It ended with me stranded on a boulder after my dad nearly flipped the raft and told me to "abandon ship!" Despite some early mishaps, the river has become my happy place. While this memorable experience seemed like it could have been a disaster, I have always felt the joy of riding the rushing rapids through the green hills of Auburn. Now as a senior in high school, ten years and hundreds of river miles later, I am the one guiding the raft on the American River.

My love for rafting and the American River encouraged me to take the AP Environmental Science class. Throughout the class, my teacher encouraged us to take action and find ways we could improve the local environment. I spent time at the Auburn Fish Hatchery learning about the life and development of the different species of fish in our river. Unfortunately, the American River salmon population has decreased from around 150,000 to around 20,000 and even less returning to their original spawning grounds to lay eggs. While at the fish hatchery, I discovered that pollution and trash in the rivers has been one of the factors for the decreased fish population.

I decided to take action and recruited classmates and other willing participants to attend the American River cleanup. The goal was to remove trash from the river and surrounding hills to decrease the pollution that enters the river and Folsom Lake.

The American River and its wildlife have always been a beautiful pocket of nature for locals to enjoy the trails, scenery, and amazing white-water experience. I would be devastated to lose rafting and hiking experiences due to a lack of upkeep of the Auburn canyons. Through advocating, performing personal cleanups, and attending service projects to clean the rivers, I hope that we can protect this gorgeous landscape so everyone can enjoy and come to love the American River and its canyons like I do.

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