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When I think of the American River and its canyons, the first thought I have is of fond memories going on hikes with friends, for field trips, or with family. I think of the gratitude and connection I felt to my hometown of Auburn when I first saw the Hidden Falls while on a hike with my family. With amusement, I remember how on my fifth grade class's field trip to Lake Clementine, I was one of the slowest hikers. However, I suppose it made it so I could fully appreciate the scenery! I also think of the time my friend and I started our own "hiking club" in the fifth grade. We named it the Wild Weasel Hiking Club, and its members consisted of my friend, her dad, her dog, and I. Our first hike as a "club" was at the Foresthill Divide Loop Trail. I still remember reaching the top of the hill at the end of the trail and looking down at the sprawling view of the canyon. These experiences have allowed me to grow closer to the people in my life and have increased my appreciation of my hometown, which is why I care about and value the American River and its canyons.

In high school, I have had the opportunity to turn my love of the American River, its canyons, and the environment as a whole into action by joining the Placer High School Environmental Club. As a member of this club, I have been able to participate in events that have helped protect the American River and its canyons from pollution and other harms. For instance, for the past two years I have participated in our club's E-Waste drive, helping to collect our community's unwanted or broken electronic devices to be recycled. Last year, we were able to collect an entire truck bed's worth of e-waste, thereby preventing it from being improperly disposed of and entering our local waterways and ecosystems.

My appreciation of nature is what inspired me to join my school's environmental club, and what I have learned about environmental problems has inspired me to be a better steward of our local ecosystems. Therefore, I believe the best way to protect the American River and its canyons for the future is by both encouraging people to participate in more outdoor activities and educating them on how to help our local river and canyons. If more people experience the majesty of our river and canyons, they will be more likely to appreciate and care for them. For instance, it is one thing to tell people not to litter, but this message is more likely to be heeded if people experience the beauty of the river and canyons firsthand. Essentially, if more people develop a personal connection to the American River and its canyons, there will be more people who care about them and will work to protect them for the future.

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