

## **Rachel Nicholson, Oak Ridge High School**

For generations, my family has lived near the flowing waters of the American River Canyons. Among my first memories are the sounds of the water flowing over rocks and trees gently swaying in the wind. My mother always told my siblings and I that her job was to give us roots, but also give us wings, and my roots are firmly planted in this community. I have literally spent every day of my life within sight of the flowing rivers. They are my home, and it hurts me to see that people would consider destroying them.

It seems like debates about these areas have been raging my entire lifetime. Some of my neighbors cringe with the thought of more people exploring our home. I have good friends who would rather see this area untouched by humans, and saying that this is the best way to preserve wild natural resources. I disagree. Now, I'm not a huge fan of crowds of people either, but I have come to realize that visitors are the key to preserving resources. The idea of tranquil, wild spaces without any human footprints might sound appealing, but the reality is that unless people are encouraged and allowed to experience the wonder of the American River Canyons, there won't be enough passion and energy in the future when the question regarding building a dam arises once again, as it certainly will. By encouraging people to drink in the natural beauty of the North and Middle Forks, they will come to appreciate preserving these areas in their natural state.

I would want a bridge to be built so people can see this beauty for themselves, and want to keep it in its pristine state. Building a bridge connects people to nature, while building a dam abruptly stops the natural flow of our lives. A dam would not only interfere with my and many others food supplies, but also change the natural shape of the canyons. A bridge located at the old Auburn Dam construction site that connects all of the trails on either side of the river will bring in more visitors. As some of my other friends would be appalled to see more humans in our home, I would sit happily in the pine trees, waiting to see the looks on their faces while gazing in awe at the beautiful scenery, and knowing that will make a difference. There is too much history and natural beauty at stake for the lack of awareness for the importance to save these areas.

It all starts with human's appreciation - such as the one turning in this essay - of nature and animals such as me, the bald eagle. I hope people realize that preserving the natural beauty of the American River Canyons is imperative to the survival of future generations of wildlife and plantlife. Encouraging more citizens to appreciate the natural beauty by creating more access points will help raise an overall awareness to preserve our home.