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Caleb Dardick: Loving the Yuba to Death

By **South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL)** - August 22, 2016, 05:59:06 AM

August 21, 2016 – The Union won't find any disagreement that "few summer pursuits are as enjoyable for Nevada County residents and visitors as a day out on the Yuba River" (*Five Yuba River Swimming Holes to Beat the Summer Heat*, July 21st). But when the *Yuba Fire* broke out upstream of Edwards Crossing twelve days later, the larger public connected the dots long familiar to the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL): the Yuba is in danger of being loved to death.

Kudos to *YubaNet* and *KVMR* for convening firefighters, law enforcement, public lands managers and SYRCL for an emergency town hall on August 8th to hear community concerns about the urgent need to stop

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illegal campfires that threaten the entire Yuba River canyon.

North Canyon. Photo: Jenn Tamo

The discussion reminded us that every minute counts when responding to a wildfire. Cal Fire Battalion Chief said that if the report had come 15 minutes later the fire might still be burning. But there are so many challenges to ensuring a quick response: access is difficult in the steep canyon; communication is limited and cell service non-existent; and illegally parked cars block emergency vehicles coming down the narrow canyon roads.

Speaker after speaker made it clear what is needed: law enforcement foot patrols, including at night, to put out illegal campfires before they turn catastrophic; more consistent ticketing of illegally parked cars; and improved emergency communication systems and even cell phone coverage to call 911 in an emergency.

Admirably, the official representatives who have jurisdiction and responsibility for managing the South Yuba River canyon spoke about the need to work cooperatively to prevent wildfires, enforce parking regulations, and improve public safety. But they noted that their efforts are severely limited by a shortage of resources and lack of adequate staffing.

For example, State Parks staff reported that in the past five years, the number of annual visitors to the park increased from 490,000 to more than 700,000, and that the number of parks rangers decreased by fifty percent. Similarly, BLM's jurisdiction, which extends upstream of Purdon Crossing towards Washington, is patrolled by only one ranger.

No one will deny money is scarce. But we must work together to get the necessary political and financial support.

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Remember when the state threatened to close the South Yuba River State Park, which would have left 20 miles of the Yuba unprotected? The community rallied to SYRCL's call that saved the park, and helped secure funds to repair the Bridgeport Covered Bridge, too.

Fire retardant still coats dry foliage two weeks after the Yuba Fire. Photo: Jenn Tamo

A key to finding solutions is agreement about the scale of the problem. We need to collect information about what's happening at the river not just exchange anecdotal horror stories. Law enforcement agencies and elected officials respond to quantifiable data – so call 911 or the Nevada County Sheriff's non-emergency number (530-265-1471) if you see campfires, illegal camping or dangerously parked cars. You can even email pictures to sheriff@co.nevada.ca.us and be sure to note the date and location. (SYRCL will keep a log, too, if you copy us on your emails (RiverWatch@syrcl.org)).

The river needs your eyes and ears in the same way your residential block is served by Neighborhood Watch. In fact, the Neighborhood Watch concept underlies the work of our volunteer [River Ambassador](#) program, which is a partnership with State Parks. This summer, nearly 50 volunteers are spending their weekends at the major river crossings from Labor Day to Memorial Day. So far, they've spent 400 hours on the river and talked to more than 5,500 visitors reminding them to "pack out and recycle what they pack in" and that glass has no place at the river. They've handed out doggy poo bags to keep our trails clean and prevent water pollution. They've educated campers that the tinder-dry Yuba canyon is no place for a campfire.

Finally, there is one more thing we can all do to protect the

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river: volunteer for SYRCL's 19th annual Yuba River Cleanup on Saturday, September 17th. Last year, 760 volunteers cheerfully removed 15,000 pounds of trash and recyclables from 86 miles of river shoreline in just one day! Sign up today at www.yubariver.org.

Keeping the river clean, safe and healthy requires all us who love the Yuba to be active stewards: contact your elected officials and tell them the river matters to you; report problems at the river to law enforcement authorities; and [join the 3,500 members of SYRCL](#) "united for the Yuba."



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