

FEATURED

A hope for Yuba River salmon

Environmental group raises funds for Chinook restoration

By Jake Abbott / jabbott@appealdemocrat.com Dec 21, 2018



A student holds up a fish found in the lower Yuba River during salmon spawning season while on a float expedition with the South Yuba River Citizens League and H2O Adventures in October.

Courtesy photo

SYRCL hosting fundraiser through Dec. 31

SYRCL has a fundraiser going until the end of the month and all donations will be matched by a donor dollar-for-dollar, up to \$35,000.

“We have a generous donor that has come out and is matching all donations one-for-one. We’ve had some donations but we haven’t reached our goal yet. We hope that folks thinking about making any contributions will do so because this would be a great time to do that and have their dollars doubled,” said Melinda Booth, executive director of the South Yuba River Citizens League.

For more information about the Yuba Salmon Now campaign or to donate, visit www.YubaRiver.org or call SYRCL at (530) 265-5961.



Chinook salmon populations in the Yuba River have decreased to record lows over the past few years, some experts are saying.

A group of environmentalists is working to restore the conditions in the lower portion of the river in hopes of seeing those numbers start to rise.

“We’ve been involved in tracking salmon numbers in the lower Yuba for years. The last couple of years we’ve had record low numbers,” said Melinda Booth, executive director of the South Yuba River Citizens League. “One of the things identified by SYRCL and other groups that would be most helpful in boosting those numbers is to do restoration of the lower river.”

There are a number of factors contributing to dwindling salmon populations, including drought conditions, temperature of the water, hatchery conditions and even ocean conditions. Booth said one of the main factors contributing to the decline of the Yuba River ecosystem was due to hydraulic mining during the Gold Rush.

The life cycle of salmon is methodical. Salmon are born in freshwater like the Yuba River. Once they grow big enough, they swim out to the ocean where they spend a few years fattening up. When ready, they make the long trek back to where they were born to spawn and die.

The method for finding gold resulted in tons of gravel and sediment washing down the river, where it came to rest and ultimately changed the landscape. That means when fish wanted to return to spawn in the upper Yuba River, they were met with an unnatural landscape, making it more difficult.

Booth said restoration projects aimed at creating more spawning and rearing habitat for spring-run and fall-run Chinook would help. SYRCL has carried out some similar projects in the past and have plans to restore about 200 acres of habitat in the lower Yuba River in the next several years.

So far in 2018, SYRCL has counted only 2,700 salmon in the river. Booth said that number is dismal.

“When you see these record lows for multiple years in a row, it’s devastating. When we look at dwindling spawning and rearing habitat, that’s where we think we are in a position to help fix things. Our vision is to see the river full of fish all the way up to Englebright Dam,” Booth said. “Making the population stronger is a goal of ours that is achievable.”

It’s important to see the populations thrive again, she said, because salmon are an indicator species for the health of a river. If the ecosystem is suffering, so, too, do salmon. It’s all linked, she said.

A source with the Yuba Water Agency was called and emailed, but did not respond for this story.