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Marysville Appeal-Democrat

## RAFTING

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For and is overseeing.

### Yuba River expedition

Teacher Laura Hansen took her 22 fourth graders out on the river on Tuesday.

They launched from Parks Bar just off the Highway 20 Bridge and floated to Sycamore Ranch Park – about 4.5 miles downriver – stopping in different areas to learn about topics such as restoration efforts, what a spawning ground looks like, salmon lifecycles, and how mining has impacted the river over the years.

“I think the fact that many of these kids haven’t had an experience like this before, just giving them an opportunity like this is special,” Hansen said. “They all were really excited to just be learning something new outside of the classroom.”

Members of the South Yuba

River Citizens League led the salmon expedition.

The nonprofit environmental group out of Nevada City has been running the river education program since 2002. Ray Lubitz, river education manager for SYRCL, said the program is meant to teach people about the lifecycle of salmon, but also about the importance of preservation along the Yuba River.

“Because we now only have 24, out of 150 miles of spawning habitat left, we really want the kids to learn about salmon and restoration efforts along the river, but it’s also an opportunity to just have a great time on the river and to inspire them to come back and be future stewards,” Lubitz said. “It’s just a really cool outdoor classroom.”

SYRCL has taken students and community members from all around the region out on the river to learn during salmon expeditions, typically seeing about 700 people a year. This year, they plan to educate up to 1,200 people.



Cody Wasuta (right), restoration coordinator for the South Yuba River Citizens League, talks to fourth graders from Ella Elementary School about the indigenous people – Nisenan tribe – that lived along the Yuba River and their fight for federal recognition, during a salmon expedition on Tuesday.

“My favorite part is giving them a chance to experience the treasure that we have here in the Yuba River and this beautiful landscape that is in our backyards,” Lubitz said. “There’s nothing better than getting to see the grin on their face during the rapids or the moments they express excitement and curiosity.”

Many of the students had never

been on a raft before. Several of them expressed their favorite part was going over the rapids, more specifically the section in the river known as “the unicorn fart.”

“This is the first time I’ve been on a trip like this,” said Jenny S. “This has been the funnest field trip we’ve had.”

Next steps

In addition to the water-related field trip, students will receive an experiment box with correlating curriculum, participate in an interactive water assembly, and showcase the work they’ve done for family members during a water day.

Students are also given refillable water bottles with stickers to decorate and water journals to document their water educa-

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tional experiences. Each participating school will have a water bottle refilling station installed on campus as part of the program.

Participating schools include Ella Elementary, Arboga Elementary, Olivehurst Elementary, and Johnson Park Elementary. The plan is to expand the

program to other local schools in future years.

Dede Cordell, communications manager for the Yuba Water Agency, said these types of programs are important for the students to better understand and appreciate an asset like the Yuba River.



**Fourth grade students from Ella Elementary School identify different invertebrates found along a shallow portion of the Yuba River.**

“We hope that students learn about the history, the good and the bad, and learn how important it is that we preserve and protect this asset so that it is able to continue to be a gift for us and for many generations to come. This is one of the many ways we are investing in Yuba County in an effort to enhance the education our students receive and improve the quality of life,” Cordell said.

The water agency offers a few different educational programs for local students and has plans to develop more in the future. One of the biggest projects in the works is a Watershed Experience Center, where students and community members will be able to go to learn about the

Yuba River in an interactive experience.

“I am so excited to think about what the next few years hold in store as we continue to roll out even more programming and build a first-class riverfront water education facility,” she said. “It’s going to be a game changer for Yuba County.”

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