

## SYRCL says the Yuba River isn't yet safe to swim in

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**Victoria Penate**  
Staff Writer



Take it from SYRCL — it's not safe to swim in the South Yuba River.

The South Yuba River Citizens League described the Yuba River as having too low a temperature and flowing too swiftly for safety, adding that “most drownings occur in the spring” as a result of these conditions coinciding with warm weather, a news release states.

In addition, SYRCL said “unprecedented numbers of people are utilizing river access points,” raising concerns over the difficulty of social distancing in the river's narrow canyon paths as well as how an uptick in unsafe outdoor activity will put a strain on local health and safety personnel.

Eleven people died because of [drowning](#) on the South Yuba River between 2008 and 2018.

According to National Weather Service meteorologist Emily Heller, current rates of snowmelt may be higher than those normally seen at this time of year, worsening river conditions.

“We are seeing some hot temperatures, a lot hotter than normal for this time of year, so that is increasing snowmelt,” said Heller.

Heller explained that the lowered water temperatures can quickly become a life-threatening factor in any incident.

“This time of year, the average temperature is about 60 degrees or less – which, in minutes, could cause hypothermia,” she said.

Melinda Booth, the executive director of SYRCL, gave context to the urgency behind the organization’s decision to create the recent press release.

“It is kind of a COVID-related warning,” she said. “When you’re asking someone to come rescue you, you’re putting their safety at risk not only for the rescue itself but for COVID, so we’re just trying to bring some additional awareness to that.”

Booth also explained the scale of how quickly the river’s water is flowing relative to safe conditions.

“Most people are used to swimming in the Yuba in the summer when it’s really hot out, from around June onward, and the flow at that time is less than 100 cubic feet per second,” she said.

In comparison, she summarized the past week’s water flow measurements as “hovering around 400 cubic feet per second.”

According to Booth, recent stay-at-home orders have come with increased visitation of the Yuba River as many experience workplace closures and limited options for recreation.

She added that the danger of drowning or other injury is especially heightened for new or infrequent visitors to the river, who are traveling there now, because this group may not have as much knowledge of how to stay safe.

“You can easily get into a dangerous situation because you’re expecting it to be calmer than it actually is,” she said.

*Victoria Penate is a staff writer with The Union.*

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