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The South Yuba River Citizens League hosts The State of the Yuba

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SYRCL Community Engagement Manager Jenn Tamo speaks about some of the many things that the league does to help the environment during Wednesday evenin...

The [South Yuba River Citizens League](#) hosted its fourth annual State of the Yuba event on Wednesday night, where over 250 river enthusiasts gathered to learn about strategies the organization is implementing to help protect and restore the wildness and biodiversity of the Yuba.

86,000 cubic feet of water per second ran through the lower Yuba river at the peak of this winter's storms, a huge increase from recent drought years, when the highest flows were recorded at an average of about 7,000 cubic feet per second.

"This year, the Yuba ran wild," said Rachel Hutchinson, SYRCL's river science director. "Places you knew on the river won't be here this year. The river has changed."

SYRCL announced that it plans to help the river's process of change over the next 10 to 15 years by implementing floodplain restoration projects to remove debris left over from gold mines that is clogging up the river's floodplain.

The projects will help increase available habitat for Chinook salmon and steelhead, which were measured last year to have the lowest population numbers since 2008.

Hutchinson said that salmon population levels are representative of the overall health of a river ecosystem.

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"A healthy salmon population translates to a functional food web," she said.

Through the buildup of mining debris, the river has been trained to stay in place and not spill over into its historic flood areas. It would take over 1,000 years for the river to naturally evacuate all of that debris, but SYRCL plans to assist that process by using heavy equipment to enhance high-flow channels, and planting riparian trees to attract salmon.

"It's time for this river to resist," said Hutchinson.

SYRCL is also sponsoring a resistance program called "Dam Watchdogs." A group of citizens have signed up for the program, where they've pledged to scrutinize Nevada Irrigation District's proposed Centennial Dam project and raise awareness of the project's impacts on the Yuba and Bear Rivers, along with impacts on water supply and wildlife.

More than half of the upper Middle and South Yuba River watersheds are currently diverted to the Bear River. SYRCL is concerned that more water might be taken from the Yuba if the proposed dam is built and struggles to stay full.

The watchdogs plan to regularly attend NID's board meetings to hold the agency accountable, a response to the board's [recent denial of a request to live-stream video footage of their meetings](#), which critics say shows a lack of transparency that seems, well, fishy.

Caleb Dardick, SYRCL's executive director, quoted local poet Gary Snyder at Wednesday's event, who wrote that "we who live in terms of centuries, rather than millions of years, must hold the watershed and its communities together, so our children might enjoy the clear water and fresh life of this landscape we have chosen."

Since the Trump administration took office, said Dardick, "it's seemed like we're living in days and weeks rather than years and centuries." SYRCL, he said, is prepared to organize resistance.

"Despite the Trump administration's hostile, anti-environmental rhetoric, we know these issues aren't black and white," Dardick said. "We know we must listen and learn from one another to find lasting solutions to complex problems so we can best manage our limited natural resources for future generations. That is why we are assertively challenging NID's proposal to build Centennial Dam. We do so in the spirit of respect and understanding that we live and work here in this watershed together."

Over 1,600 individuals have signed up for the watchdog program.

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