

**Chuck Jaffee**  
**Special to Prospector**

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## **Dammed if you do; Dammed if you don't**



### **KNOW & GO**

**WHO:** South Yuba River Citizens League's Wild & Scenic Film Festival and American Rivers present

**WHAT:** Screening of DamNation and discussion on Yuba Salmon to benefit SYRCL and American Rivers

**WHEN:** 7 p.m. Sunday, July 20

**WHERE:** Nevada Theatre, 401 Broad St. Nevada City

**TICKETS:** \$15 general, \$50 VIP (includes pre-event wine reception and reserved seating), available at [www.wildandscenicfilmfestival.org](http://www.wildandscenicfilmfestival.org) or at the SYRCL office, 313 Railroad Ave., Nevada City, CA.

**INFO:** Call or email Melinda Booth: [Melinda@syrcl.org](mailto:Melinda@syrcl.org); 530-265-5961 x 202.

**Editor's Note:** The following review is about a film presented by SYRCL (South Yuba River Citizens League) and American Rivers as a fundraiser at 7 p.m. Sunday at the Nevada Theatre.

A sign at a Glen Canyon Dam overlook says, “Defacing natural features destroys our heritage. Graffiti is unsightly and illegal.” This observation crystallizes the essence of the film “DamNation.” Unintentionally, it is a clouded crystal.

See “DamNation” if for no other reason than to drink in the beauty and sustenance of the waters. You can see “DamNation” as a smooth ride corroborating that “Just like any resource development in America, we took it too far.” You might also see “DamNation” as a reminder that making the case for tearing down dams requires more than kumbaya sensibilities.

Thoroughly documenting obsolete value propositions of dams ... this is difficult to make into a satisfying trip to the movies. This film chooses to be easier to watch, sometimes even playful, rather than methodical or hard hitting.

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It seems to rely on sympathy for drowned native cultures rather than thoroughly debunking the misguided case for the cultures of big industry and consumptive comfort. It seems to rely on sympathy for free flowing fishies rather than demonstrating more roundly the ill effects of blocked rivers and slack, silted waters for miles upon miles.

Actually, “DamNation” covers a fair amount of muckraking ground. It might have gone farther in exposing the economics, politics and bureaucracy that repurposes sanity and hushes researched conclusions.

In the heyday of big dam projects, Floyd Dominy came to be head of the Bureau of Reclamation. The film quotes him saying about Glen Canyon, “There was nothing there.” Some would say that hydroelectric power and Lake Powell is something there that America needed and wanted more.

That sign at Glen Canyon Dam lifts the argument to political poetry, in part because it can call to mind the monkey-wrenching tactics of activists highlighted in the film. Some would say that the monster dam burying the natural treasure and natural cycles of Glen Canyon is what’s unsightly and heritage-destroying. Some would say we rail against graffiti because it deflects us from attending to more profound, more troubling messages.

There’s always a price to pay, whether it’s getting things done or getting things undone. Either way, it costs mega-more than a ticket to a good awareness-raising film like “DamNation.”

Chuck Jaffee of Nevada City likes to plug people into the spirit of independent filmmakers. Find his other articles for The Union at [www.startlets.com](http://www.startlets.com).

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