

July 8, 2014

## Join the Yuba's "Neighborhood Watch"



What would you do if vandals dumped trash in your neighborhood, tagged your home with graffiti, partied on your lawn and left their broken beer bottles behind? What if they built a campfire on your lawn at the peak of fire season? Relieved themselves on your rose bushes or let their dog poop in your garden?

Would you throw up your hands and say nothing can be done? Or move out? No, you would organize with your neighbors as a "Neighborhood Watch" because you'd realize that the best way to protect your home is to unite as a community.

Every day this summer, thousands of local and out-of-town visitors cool off at the Yuba River. Most of them treasure their visit and treat the river with respect. But a few bad apples threaten to ruin our time at the Yuba.

That is why SYRCL established the River Ambassador program, the Yuba's Neighborhood Watch group, three summers ago. Because we needed to be more than the voice for the Yuba, we need to be her eyes and ears too.

In coordination with State Parks Rangers, these river ambassadors are out at all four major crossings (Bridgeport, 49 Bridge, Purdon and Edwards) every weekend from Labor Day to Memorial Day. And what are they doing? They are talking one-on-one to visitors. Reminding

them to keep the river clean, and “pack out what they pack in,” and that glass has no place at the river. Handing out doggy poo bags to keep our trails clean and prevent water pollution. Educating campers that the tinder-dry Yuba canyon is no place for a campfire.

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When we engage people in one-on-one conversations about river conditions, we build relationships and find solutions based on mutual respect and shared desire to protect the Yuba. But when we see threatening or inappropriate behavior, our ambassadors won't hesitate to report them to the authorities because we all deserve to feel safe at the river.

State Park Ranger Dan Youngren personally trained this year's cohort of river ambassadors on how to work safely and effectively with visitors, and communicate with law enforcement in an emergency. When a rattlesnake bit a young woman in early June, our river ambassadors helped keep her calm and used their radio training to call for help. As a result, she was treated quickly and successfully. Ranger Youngren praised the ambassadors saying, “This is just another example of how important and successful the partnership between SYRCL and State Parks is and that the volunteers are a valuable asset to both of our organizations.”

The results are impressive. With only 21 volunteers in 2012, 28 in 2013, and 34 this summer, our river ambassadors have spent 1,874 hours on the South Yuba River and engaged in face-to-face talks with over 10,130 visitors. They have been good role models, too: removing 9,192 pieces of trash and picking up 1,974 piles of dog waste. Since not all of our visitors speak English, we have hired a Spanish-speaking River Captain to expand our outreach efforts.

But the river is a big place with over 890,000 annual visitors. To reach out to a greater percentage of these visitors, to keep a watch out for inappropriate activities, to report medical emergencies and answer questions, we encourage you to become a river ambassador, too.

Imagine the positive impact we could see at the river, if the number of trained river ambassadors grew from 34 to 100 or more? We could cover more sites and be present on weekdays too. Together, we can set a new community standard for civility at the river.

Typical volunteers commit to spending three to five three-hour shifts over the summer under the supervision of SYRCL's hired River Captains. Training by State Parks and SYRCL staff is required. We cover non-violent communication, Leave No Trace ethics, radio use, in our fun and informative sessions. The third and last training this summer is scheduled for July 10 (please contact Jenn Tamo to register email [jenn@syrcl.org](mailto:jenn@syrcl.org) or call 530-265-5961, ext. 201).

We need to change the culture so that more people see themselves as river stewards dedicated to keeping the river clean, safe and healthy. One way to make that vision a reality is to support the river ambassadors with your time and money. Please visit [www.yubariver.org](http://www.yubariver.org) for more information.

Caleb Dardick is the Executive Director of SYRCL, the South Yuba River Citizens League. The River Ambassadors are funded in part thanks to the generosity of the California State Parks Foundation.

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