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Why is Vanity Fair Interested in the Yuba Watershed?

Melinda Booth, Executive Director of South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL), along with nine other California Coastkeeper groups, are featured in the most recent edition of Vanity Fair. In the Summer 2018 edition, released June 6, reporter Bruno Navasky explores local Californians' fight for protecting our most important resource—water.

Navasky spent a month following 10 leaders from grassroots environmental organizations in California. This group of environmental leaders represents the California Coastkeeper Alliance, a subset of the Waterkeeper Alliance made up of more than 300 organizations that patrol and protect more than 2.5 million square miles of rivers, lakes, and coastal waterways on six continents. The California Coastkeeper Alliance focuses on the belief that healthy oceans and rivers are vital to California's economy, public health, and way of life.

Navasky toured the Yuba and Bear watersheds with SYRCL and learned about the range of issues the organization is taking on. In the article he called attention to SYRCL's efforts to restore floodplains and fish habitat in the lower Yuba River, in partnership with mining companies. He also gave a shout out to SYRCL's River Ambassadors.

SYRCL joined the Coastkeepers and the International Waterkeeper Alliance in January 2016 as the Yuba River Waterkeeper. Local concerns for the Yuba inspired the creation of SYRCL 35 years ago, and now, their current programs to protect and restore the Yuba watershed are being linked to state and national priorities.

The California Coastkeeper Alliance is dedicated to fostering regional and statewide coalitions to address complex issues related to water quality and watershed health, including the restoration of wild salmon. Yuba River Waterkeeper's aim is to combine SYRCL's 35-year record of strong grassroots advocacy with the power of the Waterkeeper Alliance, an international coalition of river advocates. It allows SYRCL to collaborate with a network of like-minded organizations as they navigate issues in our watershed.

According to Melinda Booth, Executive Director of SYRCL, our local concerns are paving the way

for national issues. “The work that we do here, locally, has significance for the region, the state, and the nation” says Booth. “Our efforts to stop Centennial Dam from being built have impact on water policy issues statewide. Our affiliation with the international Waterkeeper Alliance helps foster regional and statewide coalitions. And our Wild & Scenic Film Festival’s On Tour component furthers the environmental movement as a whole around the globe.”

As a new member of California Coastkeeper, SYRCL is benefitting from the Alliance’s experience in advancing statewide policies and programs. This state-wide platform will help SYRCL’s campaigns and programs like the lower Yuba restoration work and stopping Centennial Dam. Other NGOs across the nation are watching SYRCL and the fight against the dam. They are acutely aware that success or failure here could be precedent setting for other dam proposals.

Melinda spent time with Navasky showing him around our community, explaining the environmental issues we face and how we are meeting these challenges. Looking back Melinda said, “[Bruno Navasky] had spent a month visiting the 10 Coastkeepers and learning about their work. He articulated to me that what he found unique about SYRCL and our community was that he felt the hope. Our community offered him that in just one day—he felt it palpably and I must admit that I do, too. And I value that positive outlook.”

About SYRCL: The South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL, pronounced “circle”) is the leading voice for the protection and restoration of the Yuba River watershed. Founded in 1983 through a rural, grassroots campaign to defend the South Yuba River from proposed hydropower dams, SYRCL has developed into a vibrant community organization with over 3,500 members and volunteers based in Nevada City, CA. See: www.yubariver.org

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Image by Daniel Månsson, Vanity Fair Magazine, Summer Edition 2018