

Hidden gem: Bear River Recreation

Melinda Booth
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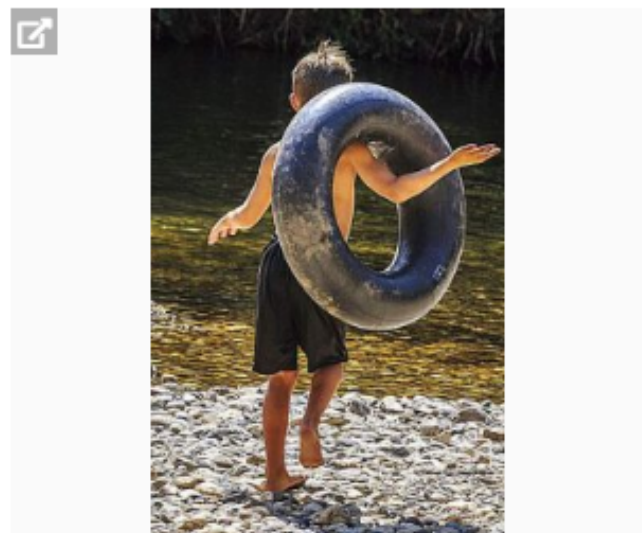


Photo by Gary Moon

Inner tubes run from the Colfax access all the way to the Dog Bar Bridge in the latter season.

[◀ PREV](#) | 2 of 4 images | [NEXT ▶](#)

Hidden in a lovely canyon running along the Nevada and Placer County borders, the Bear River Recreation Area, between Rollins and Combie Reservoirs, is a little known gem for families and river lovers seeking quiet river recreation.

Easy access points near Colfax and Grass Valley offer places to hike, fish, pan for gold, swim, picnic, camp and go tubing on the river.

One great spot with free day use parking and access to 250 acres of parkland is the Bear River Park and Campground, with access from Colfax off Milk Ranch or Plum Tree Roads. This spot has a wide, cobble stone beach area with plenty of room to spread out and enjoy a day relaxing on the river.

Steep forested slopes surround the recreation and camping areas, and the Bear runs through a diverse ecology of lush vegetation from willows and alders at the river's edge to towering Ponderosa pines and Douglas firs.

A maintained network of trails is easily accessible to hike along the river or into the nearby hills to experience a healthy Foothill river canyon. These forest trails are a favorite for wildflower hikes and bird watching.

Hikers encounter an abundance of wildflowers including trillium, fairy lanterns, Humboldt lily, bleeding heart, and shrubs such as manzanita, ceanothus, California buckeye, and elderberry. A mature oak woodland shades much of the area with Canyon live oak, Interior live oak and black oaks; many are especially gigantic and very old.

Wildlife abounds in this riparian oasis, and visitors will see a wide variety of birds, including seasonal song birds such as Black-headed and Evening Grosbeaks, colorful Western Tanagers, and an assortment of warblers. Keep an eye out for deer, bear, coyote, raccoon, the shy nocturnal Ringtail cat, and Bobcat.

Bear River's currents have a range of personalities. In the spring, advanced kayakers skilled in class 4 and 5 rapids like the stretch of river from the Highway 174 bridge to Ben Taylor Road, or the mellower and longer class 2 run to Lake Combie.

In the later season, inner tubes run from the Colfax access all the way to the Dog Bar Bridge. Gold-panners find ideal conditions in the Bear's riffles, too.

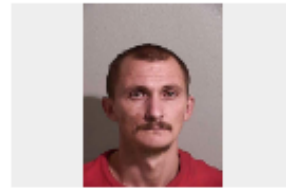
For easy access, park next to the Bear where Highway 174 crosses into Placer County. Head out under the bridge onto the trail on the Nevada County side of the river. The trail winds over a mile along the river past well-known swimming and fishing holes.

Dog Bar Road crosses the Bear farther south in Nevada County, providing good access. From there, hike upriver to Duck's Bill — a classic jumping spot into a refreshingly clear pool. On this mellow stretch, the day can end with a swim the half mile back to the car.

The Bear River is often overshadowed by the nearby Yuba and American river systems. But the gentle Bear has family-friendly, local access and great recreation opportunities for the whole family.

This article came from the Adventure Nevada County Magazine. Melinda Booth is the executive director of the South Yuba River Citizens League. She brings more than 16 years of experience in environmental conservation and advocacy to protect and restore the Yuba River watershed. Before joining SYRCL, she focused her career on saving iconic species like bears, wolves, and salmon in the American West.

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