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Is it Safe to Swim in the Yuba?

California Legislature proclaimed July 25th as “Swimmable California Day”, to recognize our rights to coastlines, beaches, estuaries, rivers, streams, and lakes that are clean and safe for swimming, and to encourage Californians to enjoy and use their waters. But as the date nears, the South Yuba River Citizens League and officials urge river lovers to stay safe and stay out of the Yuba.

Water levels on the Yuba dropped over the July 4th weekend but as of Monday, July 15, they have returned to higher flows. The iconic images of lazy, shallow, emerald pools are typical when the water is flowing around 50 cubic feet per second. Yet now flows are 7-8 times that volume and are dangerous to swimmers, especially at popular beaches and river crossings. Officials warn those iconic pools on the river may not be appearing until mid to late August—or later.

“We’ve had a lot of people asking us if it is safe to swim at the Yuba,” says Melinda Booth, SYRCL’s Executive Director. “Unfortunately, no one can ever predict when or where the Yuba could be safe, especially when flows are 8 times stronger than average conditions this time of year. The safest course of action now is to stay out of the river. People are currently swimming at the Yuba, but unfortunately people are also drowning.”

Get Your Yuba River Safety Bandana

The greatest challenge with river safety in our community is getting the word out to visitors, especially those traveling great distances to enjoy the Yuba. Hundreds of out-of-town visitors are coming from Sacramento, Marysville and San Francisco with no knowledge of the dangerous river levels at the Yuba this year.

To better communicate the river safety message, a coalition of community groups, agencies and government officials, known as the Yuba Safety Cohort, developed and sponsored a Yuba River Safety Bandana. The bandana shows a map of the river and highlights important safety information to know during a visit. Guests can pick these up for FREE at SYRCL’s River Ambassador booths on the weekends at river crossings until Labor Day.

If you are still looking for a fun place to take a dip on July 25, Nevada County offers many beautiful alternatives for swimming at this time of year, including the Bear River, Scotts Flat, Englebright Reservoir, and Sycamore Ranch on the Lower Yuba, to name a few.

Citizens can check daily river flows on the Yuba and other waterways of California at Dreamflows.org.

About SYRCL: Based in Nevada City, CA, 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 more than 3,500 members and volunteers. See: www.yubariver.org

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