

**Press Release: July 24, 2020**

## **Loved to Death: The Yuba River and Local Communities Feel the Impact of Visitor Surge**

Nevada City, CA--Local river communities are feeling the impact of increased visitorship on the South Yuba River. Due to COVID-19 shutdowns, many people from outside the local area are searching for a quiet place to cool off this summer and the South Yuba River has been impacted more than usual. With recreation sites closed around the state, visitors are flocking to the South Yuba River to enjoy its emerald green pools. Unfortunately, the river is being “loved to death” as evidenced by the mounds of trash and hundreds of cars lined up along roadsides—and even within the roadways. This summer tourism season is harming the health and safety of our river and community.

SYRCL has been at the forefront of on-river advocacy for nearly a decade. “This has been a tough year. Typically our River Ambassadors are at the river crossings each weekend talking to visitors from out-of-town and picking up trash. But with the COVID-19 pandemic, we are unable to safely implement the River Ambassador program that, in normal years, helps mitigate negative impacts. This summer, the program has been pared down to posting signage and sharing safety messaging on social media,” says Daniel Belshe, SYRCL Community Engagement Manager. “Without this important program and with the increase in visitors, the problems are compounded.”

Local North San Juan resident Darlene Markey spurred online conversation this week by commenting, “We are experiencing more litter, graffiti, overuse of trails, polluted waters, sun lotion slicks, lack of bathroom facilities, increased fire danger, more rescue operations and increased exposure to COVID. We live in fear and frustration each weekend. Residents no longer have sanctuary—any quality of life—at our river crossings. We are cleaning up what 800,000 plus visitors bring and do to our beloved river and community. Enforcement is inadequate and spotty. Signs are completely ignored...what can we do?”

In addition to the litter issues, many visitors are ignoring social-distancing guidelines as they pack trails and beaches. Parking lots fill up quickly, prompting dangerous roadside and illegal parking that blocks access for fire, medical, and rescue personnel. Blocking these river access roads also blocks residents, not just an inconvenience but a safety concern for emergencies.

Local residents are requesting more be done to keep the river and river community safe this summer. Wildfire is a huge concern in the Yuba River canyon. One spark can put thousands of homes and lives at risk. Campfires and BBQs were made illegal at the river two years ago, but uninformed visitors still start them. Local beaches and trails are littered with illegal camps, garbage, facemasks, tents, picnic refuse, and glass.

“We’re hearing from our members and larger watershed community that this dangerous situation needs to be addressed through more awareness and more interventions by agencies,” says Booth. “We are seeing a lot more ‘first-timers’ to the river. Out-of-towners need to know it’s not safe to come to the South Yuba right now—from Emerald Pools to Bridgeport. Our rescue personnel are stretched thin, while the hazardous parking conditions and serious fire risk endanger visitors and our community. Also, it’s almost impossible to practice physical distancing right now.”

According to Booth, SYRCL is also hearing from the Yuba community that road and enforcement agencies seriously need to address the traffic dangers. “The small parking lots can’t accommodate all the cars this summer, and drivers are making poor decisions, desperate to find parking. Residents who drive

our roads everyday are horrified by the sheer number of visitors in cars and on foot, and the safety issues it is creating in our community. While our law enforcement and safety personnel are doing the best they can with the resources they have, it's not enough. These problems are not new, but they are compounded by increased visitation and less capacity for SYRCL volunteers to be out educating the public. These issues have been ignored for too long – and here we are, a predictable bad situation made worse by an unpredictable public health crisis.”

“SYRCL and many of our local community members are willing to help to raise awareness, but what we really need are additional resources and enforcement from local and state agencies helping implement solutions that will immediately reduce risk,” say Booth.

About SYRCL: The South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL, pronounced “circle”), based in Nevada City, CA, 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. See: [www.yubariver.org](http://www.yubariver.org).