



Yuba River 'loved to death' by visitors amid COVID cabin fever

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Marlei Martinez

Reporter



NEVADA CITY, Calif. — COVID-19 cabin fever is driving large crowds to the South Yuba River. Locals say the surge in visitors is overwhelming the area.

“We have some concerns that it’s maybe being loved to death,” said Melinda Booth.

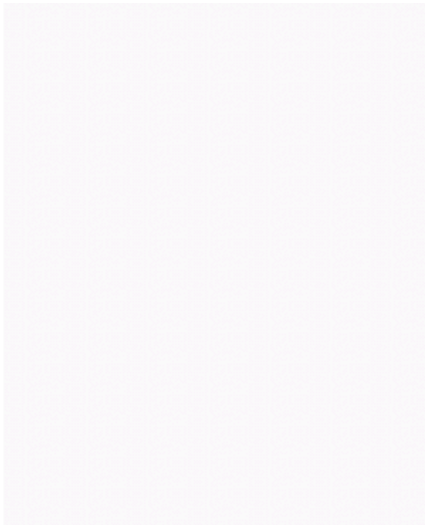
Booth is the executive director of the on-river advocacy group South Yuba River Citizens League. With other recreation sites closed across the state, she estimates Yuba River tourism is up 25%.

“With the increased visitation, we’re seeing so much more garbage. People are not caring for the place as much as we’d like to see,” Booth said.

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Along with the influx in visitors, Booth and people living nearby said they have noticed mounting trash and an increase in both dog waste and human waste with the lack of infrastructure.

“We’ve got broken glass,” said Booth. “So it’s really bad for little feet and little paws.”

Locals said they are now picking up what out-of-town visitors are leaving behind.

“This is our home. This is our backyard,” said local Samantha Rodriguez. “I have to pick up every day after people and it’s really sad.”

Maia Grenell also lives near the river. She said lately, she has been visiting the river three times a week to pick up trash. She is particularly worried because of fire danger in the canyon.

“Somebody put a small grill with hot smoking coals under the bridge unattended. So I poured water on it, took care of it,” Grenell said.

The parking lot along Highway 49 is now consistently full with overflow vehicles parking along the roadway. Friends and families are now opting to walk along the busy highway to get down to the river.

“Oftentimes emergency vehicles actually can’t get through,” said Booth.

Saturday, like previous weekends, saw a lot of visitors. Some people, like Gaja Naik, said they are visiting because of the relative safety of outdoor activities.

“We are pretty far apart, we’re not mingling in one place. So I think I’m OK,” Naik said. “When I’m up close to somebody, of course I wear a mask.”

However, Booth is worried about the narrow trails along the river where it is impossible to keep six feet away from other hikers.

“I’m pretty darned concerned, both for the health of the river, but also this is not somewhere I would personally choose to come and hang out right now for my personal safety,” she said.

If people decide to visit, Booth urges visitors to be mindful of their trash by packing it in and packing it out, don't bring glass to the river, pick up after your pets, obey traffic and parking rules and practice COVID-safe guidelines.

“We’re looking for people to have some personal responsibility around their visit to the Yuba this year, more than ever, always, but more than ever,” she said.