

SOUTH YUBA RIVER CITIZENS LEAGUE

— SYRCL
I M P A C T
R E P O R T —
2 0 2 0





A scenic landscape photograph of a river flowing through a forested valley under a cloudy sky. The river is in the foreground, surrounded by rocks and lush greenery. The background shows a dense forest of evergreen trees extending to the horizon under a blue sky with scattered white clouds.

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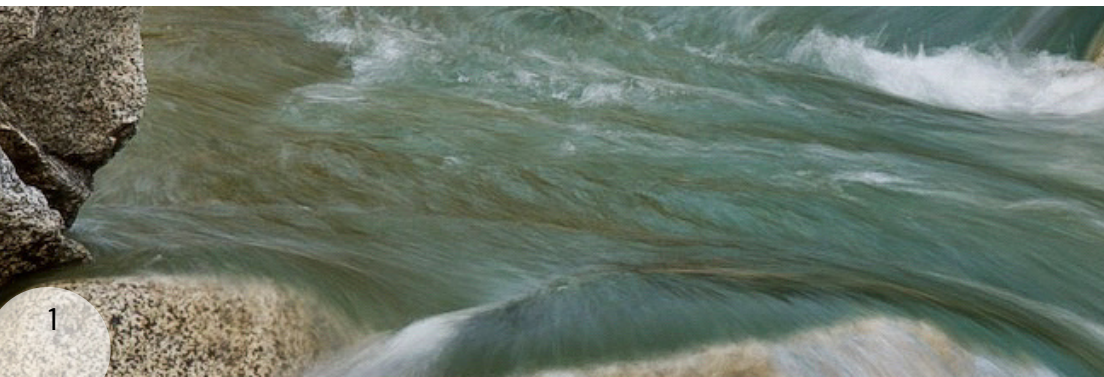
A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Supporters,

A grassroots organization founded on the premise that people can save a river, SYRCL continues the work of protecting and restoring the Yuba River 38 years after our founding through advocacy, science, restoration, education, and outreach. We are dedicated to protecting the river we love, the threatened species that call it home, and the surrounding ecosystems that sustain it.

You, our supporters, continue to provide the foundation for our organization today. Over 1,000 volunteers help us care for the river, educate students and visitors, and inspire others to become environmental stewards. SYRCL's 3,500 members provide essential financial support for our teams to develop innovative projects that are allowing more salmon back upriver to spawn and creating more resilient forests and meadows.

We accomplished a lot in 2020 despite the challenges COVID-19 posed. In January, our Wild & Scenic Film Festival was a vibrant community gathering with 7,900 attendees. Though the world seemed to shut down in March, closures did not stop us from restoring, educating, and advocating. SYRCL scientists adopted COVID safety protocols that allowed them to continue restoration work. Our River Education department was able to pivot its programming to dynamic virtual offerings.



Our advocacy work persisted via virtual channels and we strengthened partnerships in the process. Thanks to our dedicated volunteers, we even hosted an extended version of our annual Yuba River Cleanup that allowed for social distancing.

Staying engaged in our work is critical, especially as the threats to our watershed worsen. We are moving from one dry year to another, which heightens the likelihood of high-intensity wildfire. The increase in visitors also has significant impacts on our river and surrounding areas. Legislation rolled back during the previous administration continues to threaten our vision of achieving a sustainable water future that is just and equitable for our diverse communities.

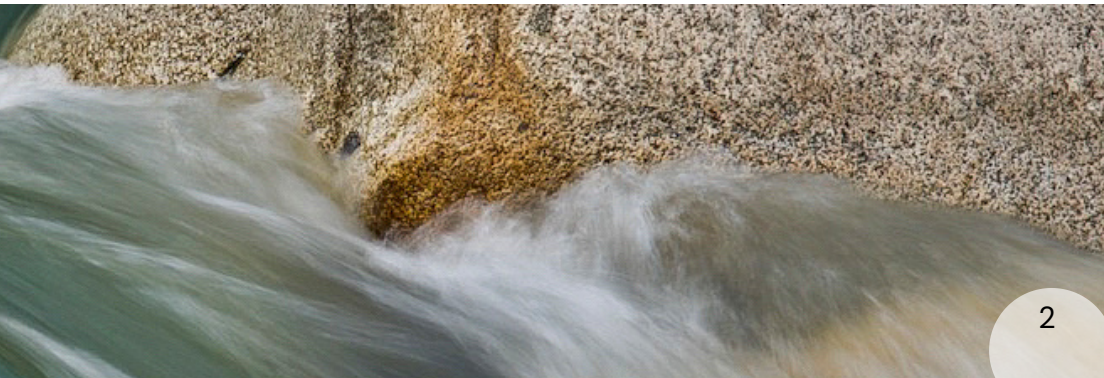
We know that challenges lie ahead, and we are grateful to be part of a community dedicated to increasing our impact through time, generosity, and support. We hope this report helps to highlight the accomplishments we made with your help in 2020, and can make together moving forward.

For the Yuba,



Melinda Booth

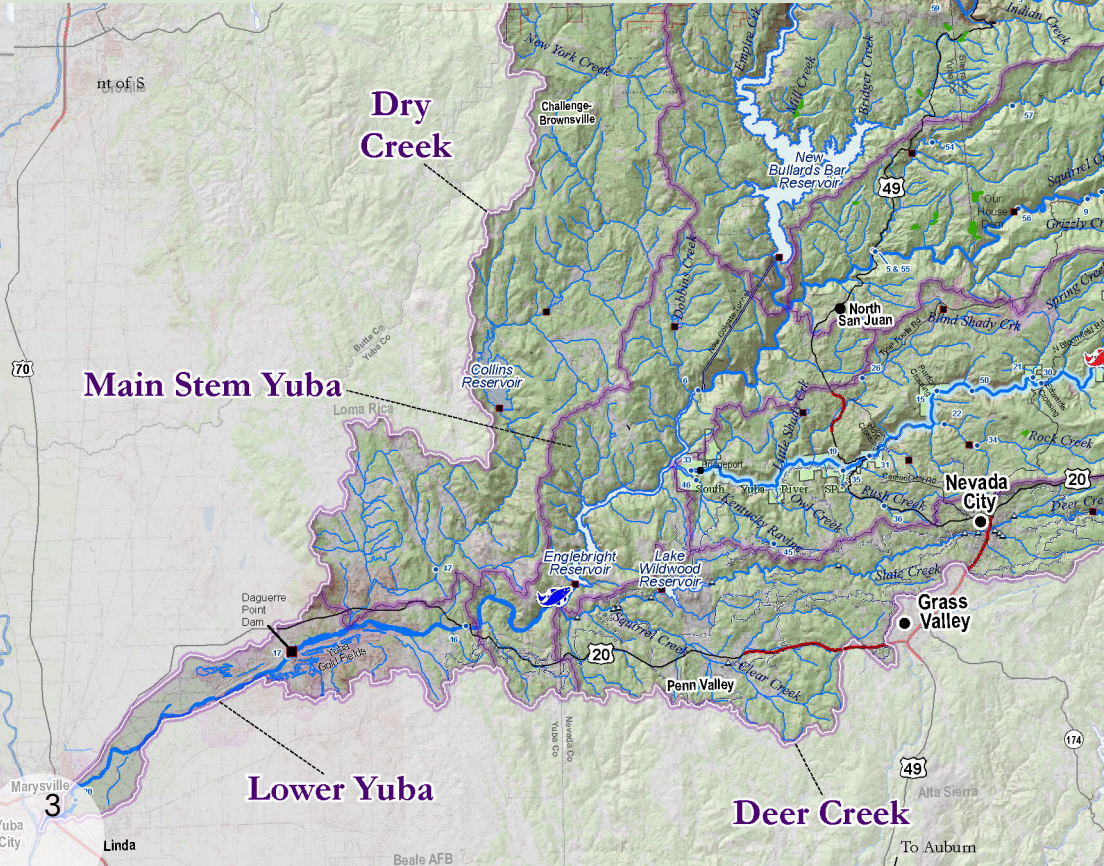
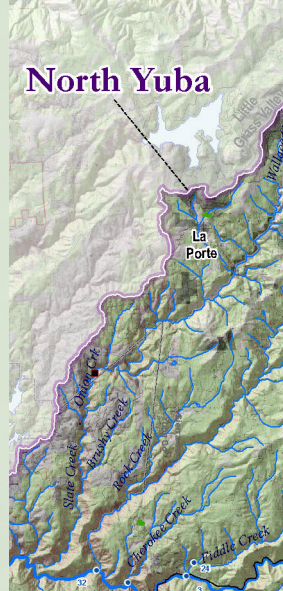
Executive Director



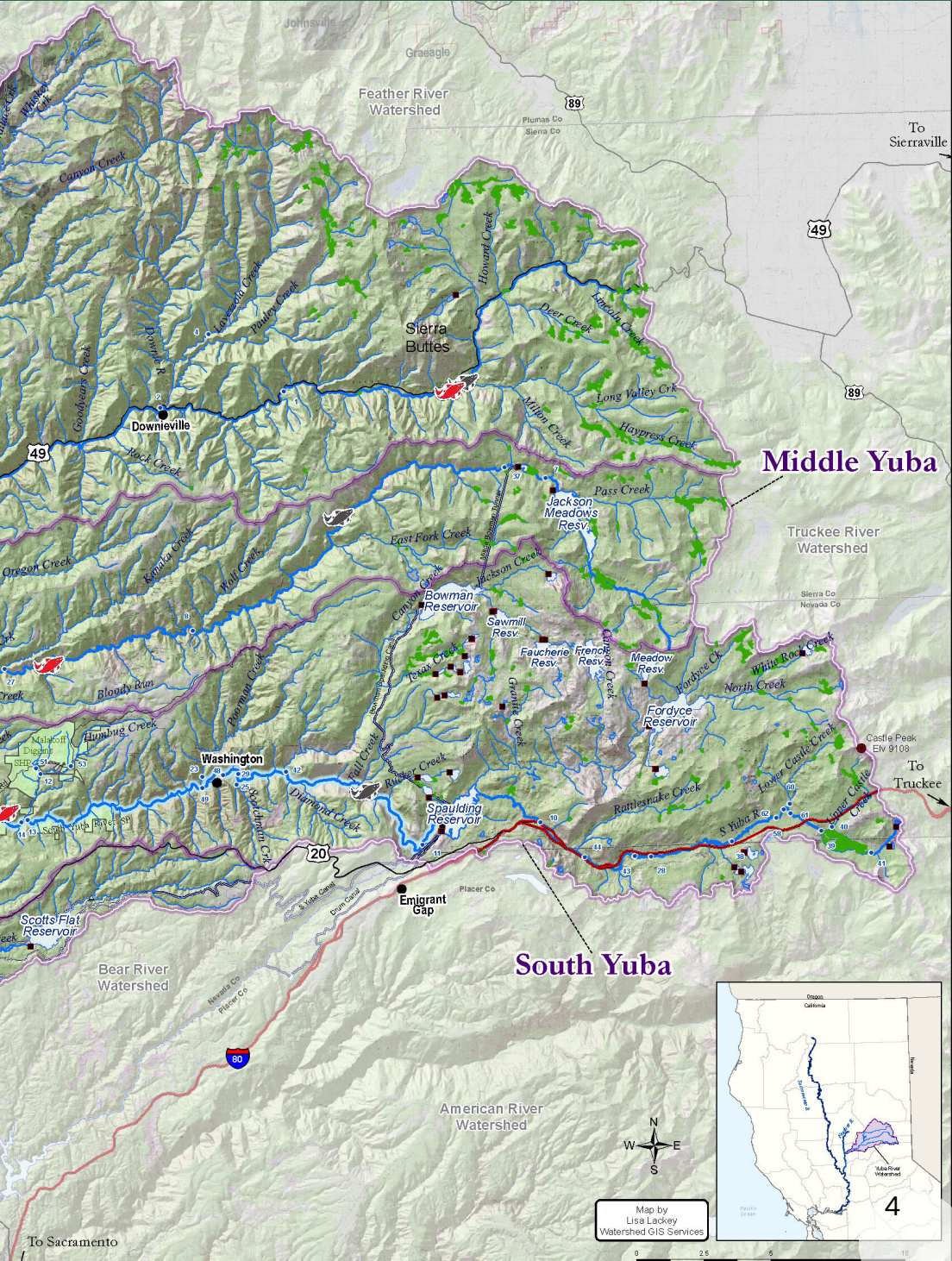
LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

SYRCL works throughout the Yuba River watershed on the Ancestral and Traditional homelands of the Nisenan Tribe, and includes shared boundaries with the Mountain Maidu, Konkow, and Washoe peoples. These tribes have lived here for millennia and live here still.

We acknowledge and mourn the painful history of genocide and the devastation of lands and waters irreversibly altered. We are grateful for opportunities to partner with the tribes to create a shared vision and rebalance our relationship to this place.



YUBA WATERSHED MAP



Middle Yuba

South Yuba



Map by
Lisa Lackey
Watershed GIS Services

THANKS TO YOUR SUPPORT WE WERE ABLE TO:



conduct restoration work on 668 acres of meadow, 275,000 acres of forest, and 171 acres of floodplain & riparian areas



educate 2,800 students across 10 counties in California



advocate for Chinook salmon, steelhead trout, and green sturgeon through public processes and litigation



unite 750 volunteers to remove more than 6,800 pounds of trash from 70+ miles of river



inspire 85,000 people with 140+ environmental films in dozens of states across the US

THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE WORK



SYRCL Staff, December 2020

Our offices may have closed due to COVID, but the work at SYRCL didn't stop. Thanks to an incredible staff of 25 dedicated and innovative people, we found ways to stay in the field and stay connected—to one another and our supporters. The work showcased in this report is all the more amazing given the circumstances under which it occurred.

ADVOCACY

The Yuba River cannot speak for itself in hearings or regulatory meetings. Neither can the threatened species that call it home. Our advocacy team seeks to give the river and its inhabitants a voice and provide scientific evidence to strengthen our arguments.

This work, which was integral to SYRCL in its formative years, continues today as we track legislation, attend hearings and meetings, and urge lawmakers to do what's best for our community and our watershed.

ACTIONS

Attended more than 150 hours of hearings

Partnered with over 23 organizations on policy work

Engaged 1300+ dam watchdogs to oppose Centennial Dam

Participated on legal and steering committees for state and national organizations

Collected over 1,400 signatures for the SYRCL action advocating for forest health to Congressmen Doug LaMalfa & Tom McClintock



OUR INITIATIVES INCLUDE:

Stop Centennial Dam – Using public engagement strategies and public comment opportunities, SYRCL, the Foothills Water Network (FWN) and many Dam Watchdogs made community opposition to Centennial Dam heard loud and clear—even with COVID-19 restrictions making in-person meetings impossible. As a result, Nevada Irrigation District’s focus on pushing the dam proposal forward has stalled significantly—for now. We continue to watchdog the project.

Yuba Salmon Now – In order to advance our ambitious vision of a healthy salmon population that can swim freely from summit to sea, we worked closely with important regulatory agencies such as the National Marine Fisheries Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife regarding salmon reintroduction, met with key leaders to advocate for this threatened species, and provided accurate and up to date scientific data to inform future management plans.

Growing Green for the Yuba – SYRCL collaborated with Nevada County and Nevada County Cannabis Alliance to make Best Management Practices for legal cannabis cultivators more accessible, filed comments to inform California Department of Food and Agriculture’s regulations on regional cannabis appellations, and collaborated with UC Berkeley Cannabis Research Center on a joint proposal to develop pilot projects to promote compliance.

Dams and Hydropower Reform – Alongside a coalition of other nonprofit organizations and State Water Resources Control Board, SYRCL filed numerous comments and appeals before eventually filing litigation challenging the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission’s waiver of the Clean Water Act at the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals. We took this issue to court because the outcome will impact over a dozen dams and how they operate for the next 30–50 years.

WATERSHED SCIENCE

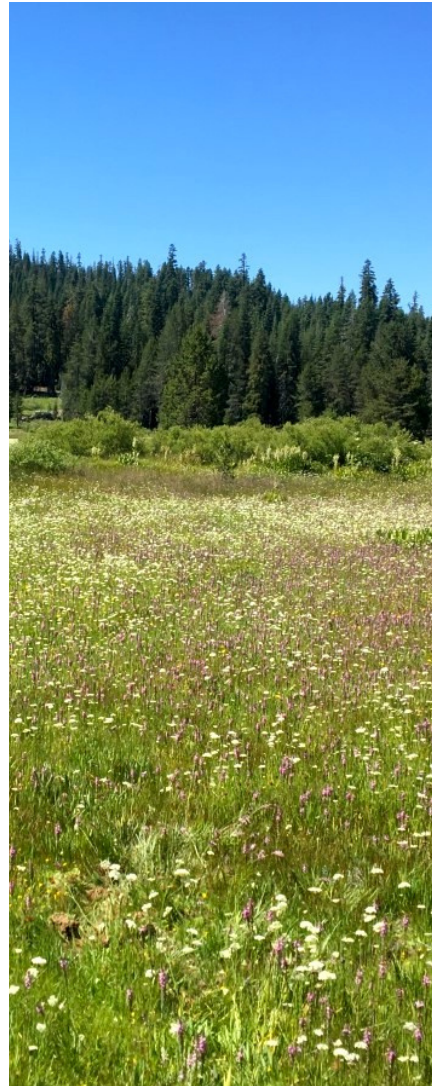
Our Watershed Science team is working with more than 20 partners to restore and protect 171 acres along the Yuba River, 668 acres of meadows, and 275,000 acres of forest.

MEADOW RESTORATION

Meadows are key to a healthy watershed because not only are they critical habitats for many species of mammals, birds, fish, and amphibians, but they impact the health of ecosystems downstream. Of the 200,000 acres of meadows in the Sierra Nevada, 50–70% are in a degraded state.

Van Norden Meadow – Watershed scientists collected information about baseline conditions in the 485-acre meadow and developed models that will inform restoration efforts and help to assess restoration impacts.

Haskell Peak Three Meadow Complex – SYRCL and partners studied water quality in three meadows, conducted baseline vegetation surveys, and began planning a series of beaver dam analogs.



FOREST RESILIENCY PROJECTS

Many forests in the Yuba watershed are unhealthy. They are overstocked with small trees and brush and susceptible to high-severity wildfire. Climate change is exacerbating these threats. Our forest resiliency projects seek to protect communities, reduce the risk of high-severity wildfire, protect and secure water supplies, secure cultural resources, and support the development of a local restoration economy.



Freeman Meadow, Image: SYRCL Staff

North Yuba Forest Partnership (NYFP) – Our staff worked with nine local, regional, and national partners to assess and design a 275,000-acre forest resiliency project—the first of this scope and scale in the Sierra Nevada. A small delegation traveled to Washington, DC in February to present the project to agency heads and legislators—we were met with resounding support. Subsequently, significant funding was awarded to the NYFP that will help fund the landscape-scale planning efforts needed for this innovative initiative.

Yuba Forest Network (YFN) – SYRCL launched and is facilitating a new watershed-wide stakeholder group focused on sharing resources, creating support, and working together to accelerate the pace and scale of forest health projects in the region.



RIVER RESTORATION

The Yuba River once supported a thriving ecosystem with an abundant fish population and habitat for wildlife, but the impacts of legacy mining and dam construction have caused fish populations in the lower Yuba River to decline precipitously. These declines are exacerbated by frequent drought conditions made worse by climate change. Our work helps to restore habitat so these populations can recover.

Long Bar – SYRCL scientists developed a plan to remove roughly 380,000 cubic yards of gravel over 50 acres from the floodplain to increase quality rearing habitat for juvenile Chinook salmon.

Hallwood – As a vital project partner, we assisted in restoring 91.5 acres of side channel and floodplain habitat and removed 1.2 million cubic yards of hydraulic-mining related sediment that had buried the floodplain for a century. In just a few short months, we witnessed beavers building dams, trees sprouting, and Chinook salmon building redds.

Rose Bar – The baseline assessments of Chinook salmon redds we collected during this first year of the project will help gauge the impact of our future restoration efforts.



South Yuba River, Image: SYRCL Staff

RIVER MONITORING

2020 marked 20 years of continuous river monitoring and volunteer-based citizen science!

Due to the challenges of COVID, four staff and SYRCL AmeriCorps Service Members did the job of 40 volunteers. With hard work and determination, they continued this award-winning program and ensured the longest-running water quality data set was not interrupted.

ACHIEVEMENTS

668 acres of meadow under restoration

171 acres along the Yuba River under restoration

Planning underway for 275,000 acres of forest restoration

20 years of citizen-led water quality data collection

Bi-partisan political support received for our forest restoration activities from Senator Feinstein & Congressional Representatives LaMalfa and Garamendi

Grant money secured for the NYFP is expected to generate at least 12 external jobs that support our local restoration-based economy

RIVER EDUCATION

To know the watershed and understand it is essential to care for it. Our River Education program creates lifelong stewards of the Yuba River watershed through a variety of opportunities for kindergartners through adults. Thanks to the support of foundations, major donors, and funders, thousands of students and community members join us to learn about our watershed and the wonders it contains each year.

Wild & Scenic Film Festival – In 2020, our education programming reached more than 1,350 students and community members during the festival to engage them in contemporary environmental issues.



Salmon Expeditions – Thanks to a generous grant and the work of our dedicated educators and scientists, we transformed Salmon Expeditions into a seven-episode virtual series that reached over 700 students in 10 counties across California.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Reached over 2,800 students across 10 counties in California

Awarded Youth Environmentalist of the Year scholarship to Amelia Heinritz

Connected with 14 Title 1 schools

Created 155 minutes of virtual programming + curriculum

2020 was a difficult year. We could not gather together in the ways we usually do. Wanting to prioritize safety, SYRCL canceled most of its volunteer opportunities and annual events, including Quiz Night, State of the Yuba, and Wild for the Yuba and used digital communications to stay connected with the community.

River Ambassadors – River Ambassadors, a collaborative effort with CA State Parks, is one of the most important ways we can teach visitors to the watershed about river safety and etiquette. Although the River Ambassador program had to be modified due to park closures and COVID safety concerns, we did place signage at all river crossings, employed traditional and social media outlets to communicate river safety and etiquette to visitors, and worked with the Yuba River Public Safety Cohort to design and distribute 3,000 Yuba River safety bandanas to guests featuring river safety rules. We also helped implement and maintain a program that placed life jackets for use at river crossings in partnership with Nevada County and the South Yuba River State Park.

Yuba River Cleanup – With a little innovation and a lot of will to succeed, we were able to hold our 23rd annual Cleanup by extending it over 12 days to allow for social distancing. This was a much needed event after an unprecedented peak season.



Image: Jennifer Roberts

ACHIEVEMENTS

Removed 6,800 pounds of trash and recycling from the river, its banks, and tributaries

908 volunteers logged 4,969 hours, a contribution worth over \$135,000

WILD & SCENIC FILM FESTIVAL

SYRCL's Wild & Scenic Film Festival is one of the nation's premier environmental and adventure film festivals and has been inspiring activism and environmental stewardship since 2003. It is also SYRCL's largest annual fundraiser.

In 2020, before COVID, we kicked off the festival in Nevada City and Grass Valley where we welcomed 7,900 moviegoers over the course of five days to join us for over 140 award-winning films about community activism, environmental justice, energy and climate change, adventure, and conservation.

Festival-goers had the opportunity to attend a variety of free public programming, including workshops, an EnviroFair, Virtual Reality, talks with filmmakers, and an art exhibition. Family-friendly movies and programming created opportunities for parents and their children to learn about the pressing environmental issues facing us today.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Screened over 140 films in 11 venues throughout Nevada City and Grass Valley

7,900 attendees during the festival, 2,130 of which were students and educators participating in the School Program

69 visual artists presented at 7 different venues

480+ volunteers filled 830 shifts

On Tour events reached 85,000 attendees

10,500 Facebook fans and 5,300 Instagram followers



Image: Josh Miller Photography

ON TOUR

After the festival ended, we began sharing a selection of films via our On Tour program. COVID-19 restrictions changed the format for our hosting partners, who adapted to the public health crisis by offering over 150 virtual events that reached 85,000 people.

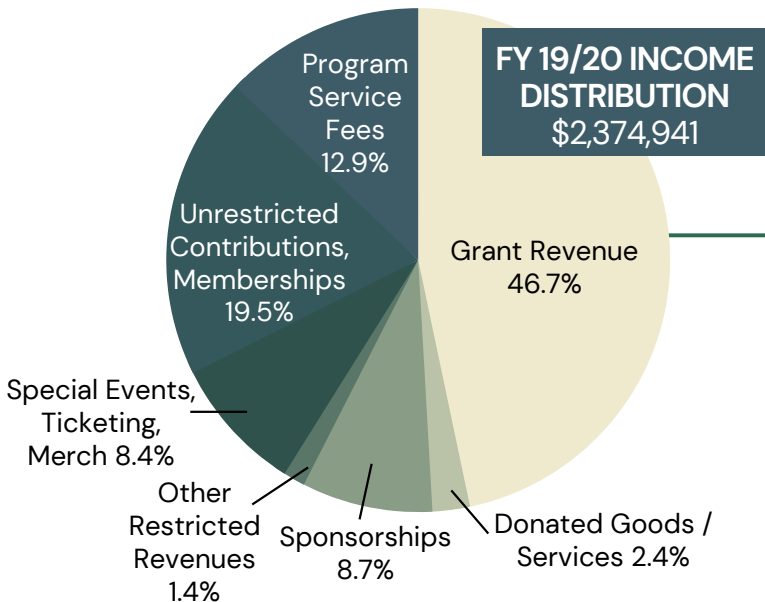


FINANCIALS

SYRCL has a diversified funding stream composed of unrestricted contributions, memberships, program service revenue, sponsorships, special event ticketing, donated goods and services, and grants from foundations, corporations, as well as local, state, and federal agencies.

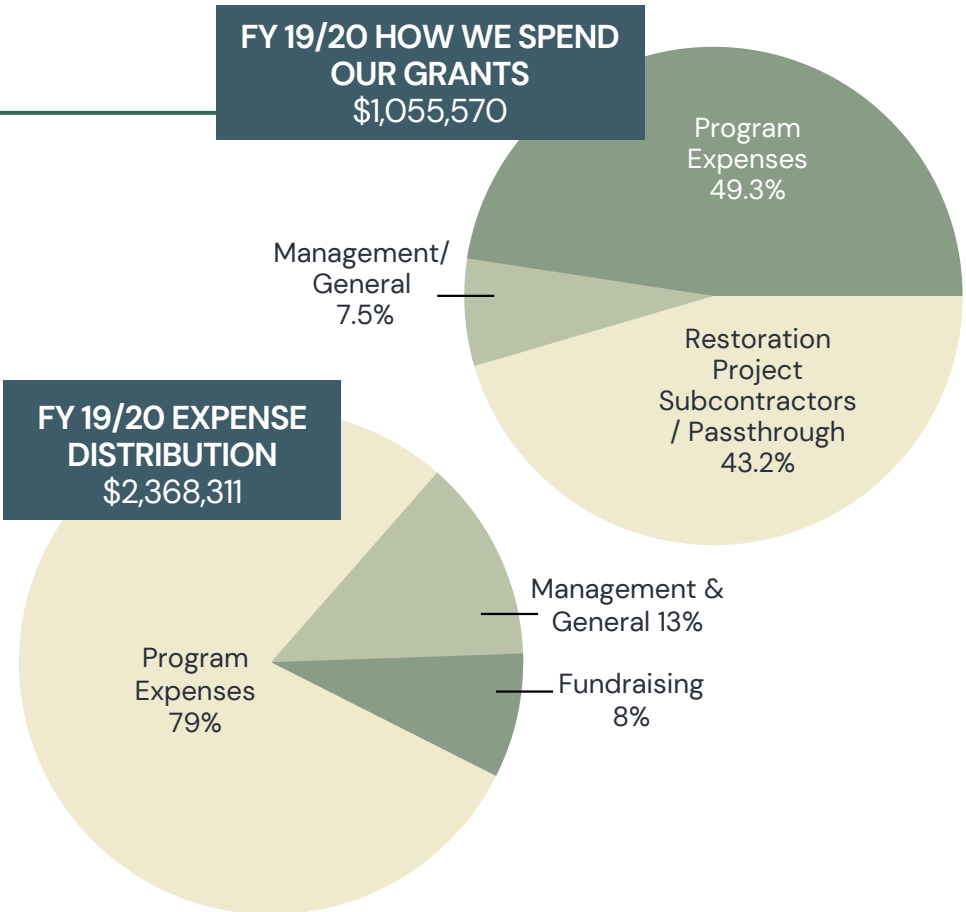
Our impressive record of accomplishments over the years has been made possible through the loyal support of our members. The incredible results detailed in this impact report were achievable because of our community. Gifts at all levels from individuals and local businesses were leveraged into significant wins for our watershed and advanced long-term initiatives that will help this watershed confront climate change and create a sustainable water future.

SYRCL has been very successful in partnering with a variety of agencies to secure grant funding for our large-scale restoration projects, and 2020 was a big implementation year. In addition to supporting our restoration, outreach, education, and advocacy,



this grant funding contributes to the development of a local restoration economy by creating sustainable jobs that help protect our river, meadows, and forests.

Special thanks to California Department of Fish & Wildlife, US Fish & Wildlife Service, California Department of Conservation, Sierra Nevada Conservancy, Resources Legacy Fund, Yuba Water Agency, and US Forest Service for their significant contributions.



PLANNED GIVING

Leave a Wild & Scenic Legacy for the Yuba

A gift to SYRCL through your will or estate plan is a powerful statement of support for the Yuba and a wonderful way to make a lasting difference for the watershed you love.

Legacy gifts are made through wills, trusts, IRAs, retirement plans, and life insurance. These gifts, which often cost you nothing now, sustain SYRCL's work for the long-term.



Depending on your personal situation, a legacy gift may also have tax benefits, so please consult a tax professional.

We know that changing weather patterns and shifting political winds will continue to threaten the Yuba River we love so dearly. A legacy gift is an extremely personal and generous way to safeguard the Yuba now and into the future. Contact Julie Pokrandt, Development Director, at julie@yubariver.org or (530) 265-5961 x 214.



Image: Jerrad Scoggins, Getty Images

GUARDIANS OF THE YUBA:

SYRCL bestows individuals who serve the watershed with the honor of "Guardian of the Yuba." 2020 saw six individuals recognized for their outstanding contributions:

**Allan Eberhardt
Rachel Hutchinson
Shana Maziarz
Janet Peake
Isaac Silverman
Debra Weistar**



South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL)
313 Railroad Ave., Suite 101, Nevada City, California 95959
(530) 265-5961 | www.YubaRiver.org

Yuba River, image: jmoor17, Getty Images