

SOUTH YUBA RIVER CITIZENS LEAGUE

— SYRCL
I M P A C T
R E P O R T —
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***all photos used are credited to SYRCL unless otherwise noted*

A LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

South Yuba River Citizens League was founded 39 years ago as a grassroots movement which believed that people can save a river. As we look to our 40th year as an organization in 2023, we continue to work from that premise, protecting and restoring the Yuba River through advocacy, science, education, outreach, and getting our hands in the mud, literally.

Our commitment remains to protect the river we love. This includes working to preserve and strengthen the threatened species that call it home and the surrounding ecosystems that sustain it.

As with all tasks this large, we cannot do this alone. The help of supporters like you empowers us to do this work. Over 1,000 volunteers have stepped in and stepped up to help us care for the river, educate students and visitors, and inspire us all to become better stewards of our river. The 3,500 individuals who make up SYRCL's membership provide essential support for our teams. With the financial backing of our members, we continue to be able to develop innovative projects to preserve the Yuba, whether that is working to get more salmon back upriver to spawn or to create more resilient meadows and forests.

2021 was not without its additional challenges. Drought conditions, massive wildfires, and, of course, COVID-19 all played a factor in the work we did, impacting our ability to gather in the ways we traditionally have.

Our Wild & Scenic Film Festival was presented as a virtual event this year. While this pivot changed how the festival was run and received, its spirit of inspiration, advocacy, and community remained as strong as ever.

SYRCL scientists continued to practice safety protocols as they engaged in their restoration work. The River Fire in late summer presented unique challenges to our teams as well as new opportunities for study. Our River Education department continued reaching and inspiring students throughout the area with dynamic virtual and in-person offerings.

Likewise, our River Ambassador program was met with new opportunities as a larger than usual influx of visitors to the Yuba River arrived throughout the hot months. Our volunteer Ambassadors were able to navigate the challenges with the grace and positivity that is at the heart of this program.

All of these experiences showed us how even more critical our work is. The threats to our watershed in the form of drought, fires, and human impact have all worsened. We continue to work with local, state, and federal agencies to achieve a sustainable water future that is just and equitable for our diverse communities.

We know we are up to the challenge and are grateful to be part of a community dedicated to increasing our impact through time, generosity, and support. It is our hope that this report highlights the accomplishments we made with your help in 2021 and points to a future that is sustainable for humans and the environment alike.

For the Yuba,



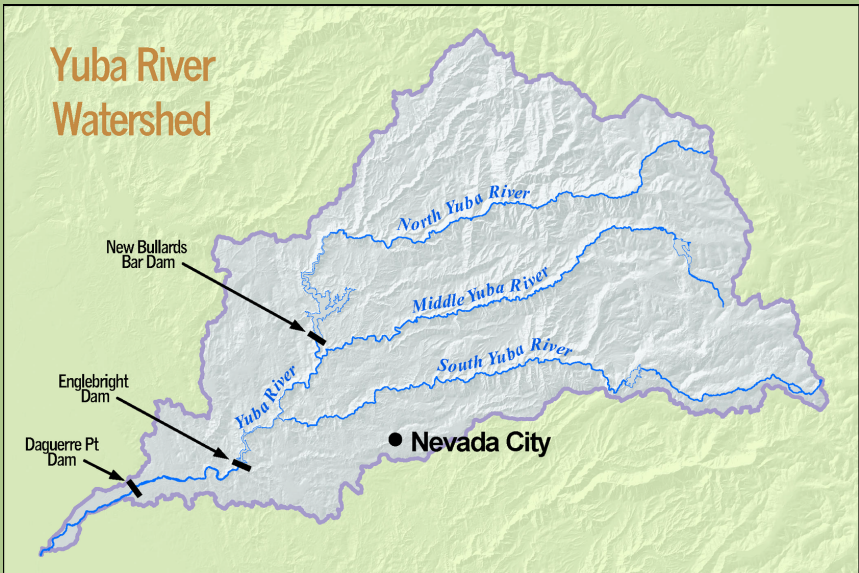
Melinda Booth
Executive Director



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.

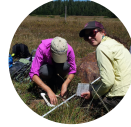
We acknowledge and mourn the painful history of genocide and the devastation of lands and waters irreversibly altered. We are grateful for opportunities to partner with the tribes to create a shared vision and rebalance our relationship to this place.



BECAUSE OF YOUR SUPPORT WE WERE ABLE TO



Conduct restoration on
668 acres of meadow
275,00 acres of forest
171 acres of floodplain
riparian areas



Educate over 1,700
students
from 16 Title 1 schools
in California



Advocate for Chinook
salmon, steelhead trout,
and green sturgeon
through public process
and litigation



Unite over 400
volunteers to remove
more than 12,600
pounds of trash from
70+ miles of river



Inspire 55,000 people
with 130+ environmental
films in dozens of states
across the US



ADVOCACY

Our advocacy team continued to give voice and agency to the river, the watershed, and its inhabitants through the use of hard scientific evidence to fight for their survival.

This work, 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.



ACHIEVEMENTS

- SYRCL formally opposed the re-opening of the Idaho–Maryland Mine and our staff continued working with coalition partners in matters of advocacy, policy, and education
- Created a Cannabis Impact Survey Report containing recommendations on licensing and enforcement based on the data collected
- Collected over 700 signatures for the SYRCL action telling the Army Corps to "Clean the Dam Ladders" at Daguerre Point Dam

OUR INITIATIVES INCLUDE:

Stop Centennial Dam – Using public engagement strategies and comment opportunities, SYRCL, the Foothills Water Network (FWN), and many Dam Watchdogs continued to voice opposition to Centennial Dam. We are keeping a close eye on this project still and are actively participating in the "Plan For Water" by NID which will impact how they manage water over the next 50 years.

Dams and Hydropower Reform – SYRCL and NGO partners filed numerous comments on ongoing hydropower relicensing issues in the Yuba watershed, including study requests for the Yuba Water Agency Narrows 1 Project. SYRCL also participated in a technical workshop for the State Water Resources Control Board regarding the disputed Water Quality Certification for the Yuba River Development Project. SYRCL persists in our legal challenge of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's waiver of the Clean Water Act in the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

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, launched a community survey to gauge the current "state of cannabis" in the Yuba watershed, submitted a letter of support for County enforcement efforts on egregious cultivation sites, finalized Water Quality and Soil Testing Protocol to quantify cannabis impacts in the Yuba Watershed, and educated the community on our Growing Green program, recent work, and Best Management Practices for winter months.

Yuba Salmon Now – We worked closely with NGO and agency partners to advance our ambitious vision of a healthy salmon population that can swim freely from summit to sea. We also collected signatures on a petition to the Army Corps of Engineers to "Clean the Dam Ladders" at Daguerre Point Dam.

MEADOW RESTORATION

Meadows are key to a healthy watershed because they provide critical habitat for many species of mammals, birds, fish, and amphibians, have high carbon storage capacity, and contribute to downstream water quality and late season flows. Unfortunately, of the 200,000 acres of meadows in the Sierra Nevada, approximately 70% are in a degraded state. SYRCL works to restore headwater meadows to enhance the potential ecosystem services they provide.



Van Norden Meadow – Watershed scientists continued to collect baseline data in the 485-acre meadow and developed restoration designs through a collaborative stakeholder process to facilitate implementation of this project in the coming years.

Haskell Peak Three Meadow Complex – SYRCL and partners made progress on restoration designs and the environmental review process to restore three meadows in the North Yuba watershed using low-impact, process-based restoration techniques such as beaver dam analogs.

FOREST CONSERVATION

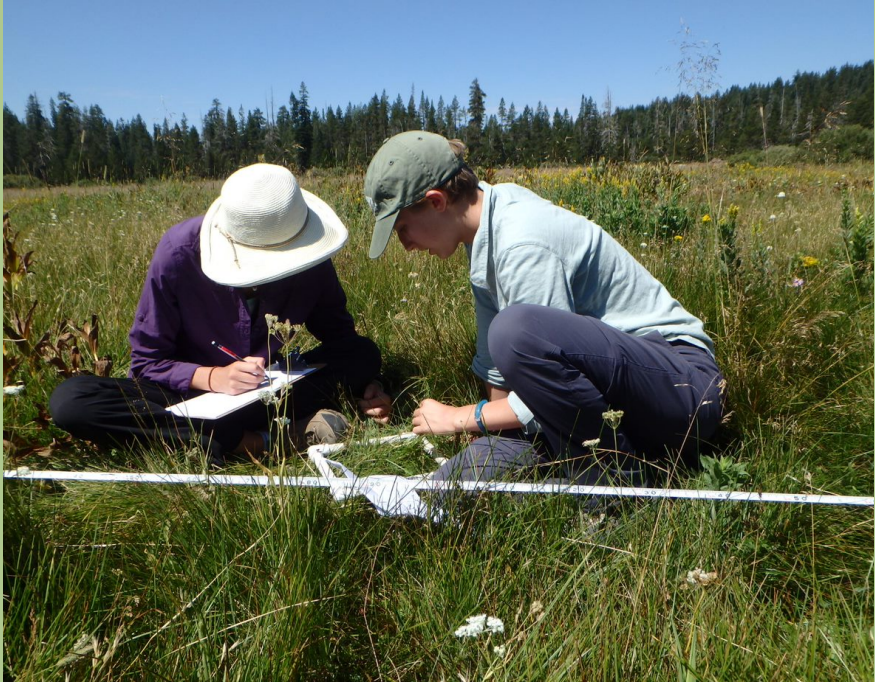
The forests of the Yuba watershed are in the spotlight for collaborative forest resiliency management, with both public and private forestlands in urgent need of forest health treatments to prepare for high-severity fire disturbances, drought impacts, and a changing climate. SYRCL's Forest Health initiatives tackle these issues on all fronts, partnering with community members and local organizations to restore Yuba forests to healthy, dynamic ecologies that will be sustainable years to come.

North Yuba Forest Partnership – SYRCL staff acted as a key partner and facilitator of this nine entity collaboration in advancing crucial forest resilience and restoration efforts across a 275,000-acre project area. The partnership completed a Proposed Action outlining restoration activities and expected environmental impacts. SYRCL has been vital to keeping this work on track to begin treatment implementation on the Tahoe National Forest as soon as possible.

Invasive Weeds – SYRCL led a seasonal field crew focused on eliminating non-native invasive plants on the Tahoe National Forest. The crew targeted the highly invasive Scotch broom, a fuel hazard species and high priority for removal in areas of fire risk. In total, the crew treated 94,450 plants over 115 acres.

Yuba Forest Network – SYRCL convened dozens of diverse stakeholders from across the Yuba River watershed to share state-wide resources, regional project updates, and networking via quarterly meetings. SYRCL facilitated over fifteen Strategy Development Subgroup meetings leading to the release of *A Resilience Strategy for Yuba Forests*, a formal document for forest planners and practitioners to align projects with a unified, shared, and regionally specific approach to forest restoration.

Aspen – In the first season of the *Yuba River Headwaters Aspen Restoration Planning Project*, SYRCL staff mapped over 500 acres and assessed more than 350 acres of aspen habitat within the Yuba River watershed. The baseline data established via field assessments in 2021 and 2022 will be used to inform restoration prioritization of the most critically threatened aspen habitat within the watershed.



RIVER MONITORING

2021 marked twenty-one years of continuous river monitoring and volunteer-based citizen science.

Jones Fire Analysis Project – SYRCL finished its sampling efforts along Rush Creek and the South Yuba River with the goal of understanding how the Jones Fire may have impacted basic water quality parameters. Our sampling efforts, thankfully, did not detect any abnormalities in our basic water quality parameters, E. coli, or the chemical constituents that make up fire retardant.

eDNA Sampling – During the first large rainstorms each fall, pollution buildup in the watershed gets ‘flushed’ out. SYRCL has been monitoring bacterial concentrations to determine the nature of sources of bacteria. eDNA testing helps to distinguish between the types of animal sources of DNA and their relative abundance. Sampling began in fall 2021 and will continue along the stretch of river from Langs Crossing to Bridgeport.



Storm Drain Marker Installation – The majority of storm drains throughout Nevada City drain to Deer Creek. SYRCL installed or replaced almost 300 storm drain markers to educate residents and help prevent illegal dumping. SYRCL created a map and GIS layer for the City of all of their storm drains. These markers are built to last! They are stainless steel, weather-resistant, and fastened into the concrete.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- 390 total citizen scientists trained since 2000
- Approximately 102,000 recorded water quality measurements
- Nearly 29,000 volunteer hours donated
- 98% of all data passed precision and accuracy standards



RIVER RESTORATION

The Yuba River once supported a thriving ecosystem with an abundant fish population and habitat for wildlife, but the on-going 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.

Lower 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.

Upper Long Bar – SYRCL scientists secured grant funding, initiated restoration planning, developed restoration plans, and started monitoring for an additional 100 acres of salmonid-focused project on the upper portion of Long Bar.



Hallwood – As a vital project partner, we assisted in Phase 2 of the restoration project, restoring nearly 92 acres of side channel and floodplain habitat, removing 800,000 cubic yards of hydraulic-mining sediment that had buried the floodplain for a century, and planting more than 16,000 native riparian plants. In just a few short months, we witnessed beavers building dams, trees sprouting, and Chinook salmon building redds. To date, we have helped restore 123 acres by removing two million cubic yards of mining debris.

Rose Bar – Pre-project monitoring for Chinook salmon redds was completed and applications for funding to construct this crucial restoration project are in the works.

RIVER EDUCATION

Our River Education program creates lifelong stewards of the Yuba River watershed through opportunities for kindergartners through adults. Thanks to the support of foundations and donors, thousands of students and community members join us each year to learn about our watershed and the wonders it contains.



Field Science – In 2021, we hosted three high school field science expeditions in mountain meadows near the headwaters of the Yuba River. 17 high school students from the Los Angeles region participated in two 12-day expeditions. Six local high school students participated in our 5-day Youth Outdoor Leadership Opportunity expedition. Students worked along SYRCL scientists and educators to install cattle exclusion fencing around declining aspen stands, monitored stream channel depths and vegetation, and conducted baseline vegetation surveys.

Wild & Scenic Film Festival School Programs – All festival components were held virtually in 2021. Our education programming reached 450 students and community members, engaging them in contemporary environmental issues.

Salmon Expeditions – Students were back on the river in 2021! 1,300 students, teachers, and community members floated down the lower Yuba River to witness spawning salmon and to learn about SYRCL’s restoration work and the lasting impacts of the gold rush on the ecosystem and Nisenan tribe.

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Awarded the Environmentalist of the Year Scholarship to Skyler Meinholz from Nevada Union High School
- Reached over 1,700 students
- Connected with 16 Title I Schools
- Resumed in-person programming

RIVER VOLUNTEERS

2021 continued to be challenging because of COVID restrictions, fires, and a surge in new visitors to the Yuba River. At the end of the summer, SYRCL surveyed locals to create a *Visitor Impact Study* which informed our planning for our 2022 River Ambassador and Yuba River Cleanup.



River Ambassadors – The 2021 River Ambassador season ran from Memorial Day to Labor Day and we saw an enormous influx of visitors. During this time period, River Ambassadors counted 13,174 weekend visitors to Bridgeport, Highway 49, and Purdon Crossings.

Yuba River Cleanup – From September 11 to the 18th, we had another successful cleanup in our watershed!

ACHIEVEMENTS

- River Ambassadors spoke one-on-one with 3,212 visitors about river health and safety at Bridgeport, Purdon, & Highway 49 Crossings and dismantled 5 fire rings and responded to 9 emergency incidences
- River Ambassadors donated a total of 540 hours of service.
- A total of 422 Cleanup volunteers participated in removing litter from 19 cleanup sites, dedicating 1,491 volunteer hours
- Cleanup volunteers removed 489 bags of trash and recycling that amounted to 12,609 pounds



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.

Even though the pandemic has impacted the film festival industry as a whole, the Wild & Scenic team found creative ways to continue providing a platform for bold artists and inspiring environmental activists worldwide by holding the festival virtually.



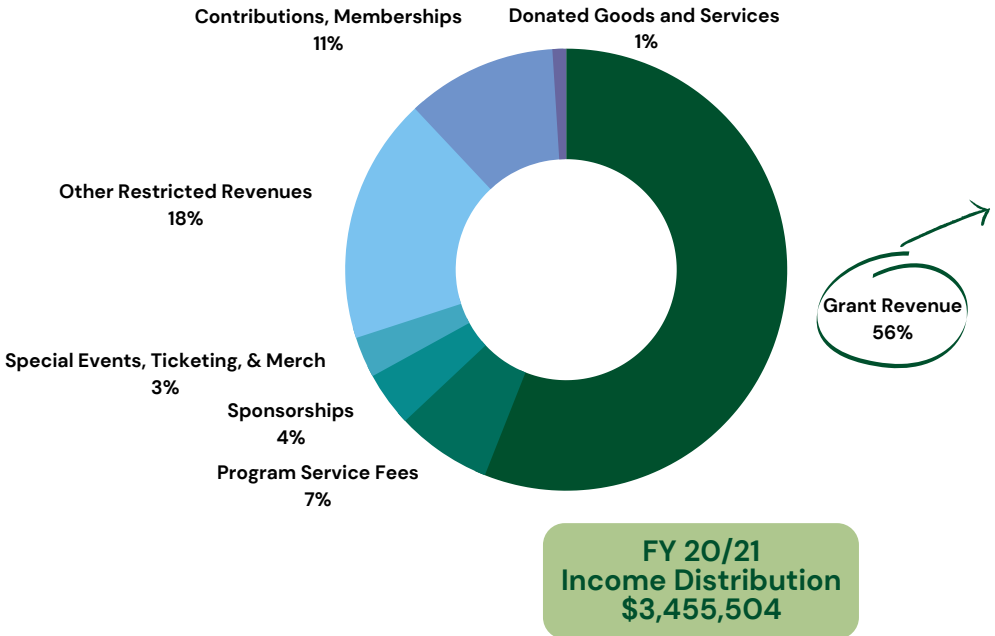
Image: Josh Miller Photography

ACHIEVEMENTS

- 137 films, curated into 40 sessions, presented online
- 62 visual artists presented at the virtual gallery
- 5 live events
- 23 organizations featured online at the EnviroFair
- 5,000 attendees, including 2,144 K-12 students and educators participating in the School Program
- 50,000+ attendees reached during over 125 year-round On Tour events

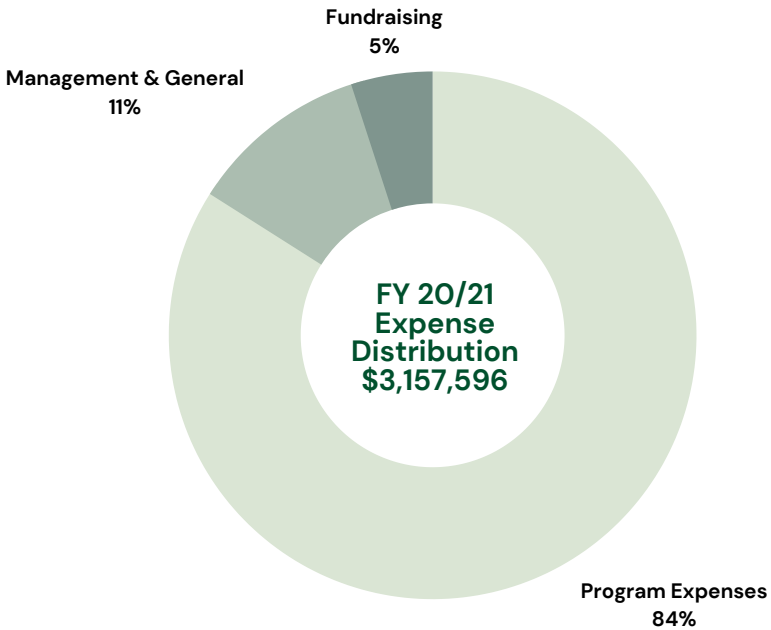
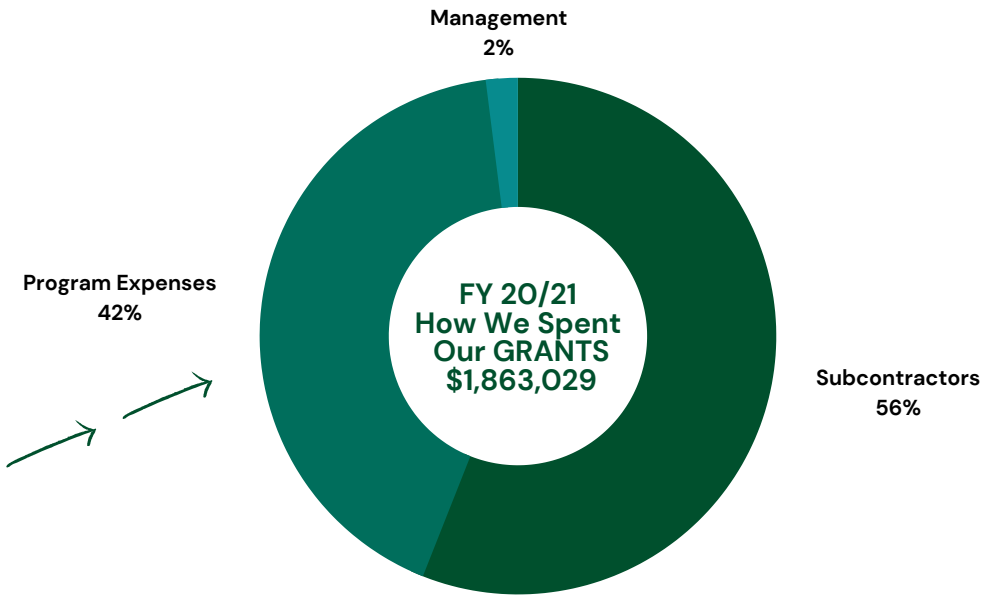
FINANCIALS

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



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 us 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 2021 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.



THANK YOU

FOUNDATIONS

Ann and Gordon Getty
Foundation
Bella Vista Foundation
California State Parks
Foundation
California Hydropower
Reform Coalition
The Keith Campbell
Foundation for the
Environment
The Latrobe Fund
Marin Community
Foundation
Martis Fund
Resources Legacy Fund
William and Marian
Ghidotti Foundation

**And all our
sponsors,
members,
and donors**

AGENCIES

California Department of
Conservation
California Department of
Fish and Wildlife
Nevada County
Placer County
Sierra Nevada
Conservancy
US Fish and Wildlife
Service
US Forest Service
Wildlife Conservation
Board
Yuba Water Agency



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 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:
julie@yubariver.org
or (530) 265-5961 x214





South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL)

313 Railroad Avenue, Suite 101

Nevada City, CA 95959

(530) 265-5961 | www.YubaRiver.org

Image: Anna Schwyter