

UNITED FOR THE YUBA



Strategic Plan Summary
2019 - 2023

SOUTH YUBA RIVER CITIZENS LEAGUE

Dear Friends,

With over 36 years of achievements, 3,500 members, and 1,000 active volunteers, SYRCL is doing great things for the Yuba watershed. In 2012 and again in 2015, the SYRCL Board adopted a comprehensive strategic plan to guide us in fulfilling our mission to unite the community to protect and restore the Yuba River watershed. We are proud to report that we made significant progress in every priority area of that plan.

Now we are pleased to present this revised and updated five-year plan, which will guide our work from 2019 through 2023. This plan was compiled with insight from those 36 years of organizational growth, learning, and success; from staff at all levels, our committee members, and board of directors. Some areas of our work remain similar to their beginnings—river monitoring, Wild & Scenic Film Festival, the Cleanup—while others are more holistic and forward-looking, aiming to address local impacts of emergent issues such as climate change and a sustainable water future.

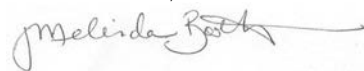
Taking on these large issues in the context of a healthy watershed could feel daunting. However, our strong base of support and thriving, diverse partnerships inspire confidence in tackling these issues. More important is our commitment to this place, the Yuba River Watershed. SYRCL asks you to join us in this commitment.

This plan is an open invitation to Yuba River lovers to engage personally in the protection and restoration of the watershed. No matter who you are and how you love the river, this plan provides opportunities for you to volunteer and get involved.

SYRCL understands that there is strength in numbers. That is why we encourage all Yuba River lovers to volunteer, donate, and join as dues-paying members so your voice can be counted on behalf of the river. With your active support, SYRCL intends to remain as the central hub for community activism to protect, restore, and celebrate this watershed we love.

Together, we are extending our powerful coalition from the summit to the sea.

For the Yuba,



Melinda Booth
Executive Director



MISSION, VISION, AND VALUES

Mission Statement

SYRCL unites the community to protect and restore the Yuba River watershed.

Vision Statement

We envision a future in which the Yuba River watershed thrives and is resilient in the face of climate change. We envision a free-flowing Yuba and healthy ecosystems that support wildlife and people—from the ridges to the canyons and the summit to the sea.

We envision a community that reflects the relationship between a healthy watershed and human quality of life; one that values a sustainable water future; one that celebrates the Yuba River's natural and cultural heritage.

We envision a vibrant, science-based community organization that serves as a leader for environmental stewardship and activism in the Yuba River watershed—and that inspires others to make a difference in their communities.



Values Statements

The natural environment is essential to human harmony and livelihood.

As all rivers connect communities, we know that our work here inspires people beyond our watershed. We pledge to conduct ourselves with the utmost integrity and respect for the diversity of opinion and life experiences of others.

“People Can Save a River.” This founding premise inspires, empowers, and emboldens us to take collective action against threats to the Yuba’s waters and ecosystems.

A shared river environment that is safe, accessible, and welcoming requires the community’s attention to maintain the health of the river and its watershed.

SYRCL cultivates a professional and personally enriching work environment, which supports our dedicated team of staff, Board, and volunteers. Recognizing ourselves as a true “citizens league,” our work is inspired by the Yuba and driven by the community.



STRATEGIC GOALS

2019-2023 Strategic Goals

SYRCL works on behalf of the Yuba River watershed on a range of issues related to ecosystem health and the watershed as a whole. However, the scope of our work is not unequivocally defined by the watershed’s physical boundaries but rather is determined by the potential impacts and threats to the watershed. SYRCL’s diverse programs and work therefore mirror the interconnected nature of water and ecosystems, both natural and human-made.

The below three strategic goals guide our decision-making and are reflected across programs in our five-year plan.

Yuba River Community Engagement Goal: SYRCL is recognized as an accessible and responsive leader in community engagement, activism, and information exchange concerning watershed issues.

Landscape Level Conservation and Restoration Goal: SYRCL engages in work that fits within a larger context and has a positive impact at a landscape level. This highly collaborative practice leverages our effectiveness by strengthening strategic partnerships to accomplish our goals.

Climate Change Resilience Goal: SYRCL’s advocacy, science, restoration, and outreach work contributes to ecosystem and community resilience to climate change including progress toward a secure and sustainable water future.



RIVER ADVOCACY

GOAL: *Lead the community to defend and restore the Yuba River watershed.*

SYRCL’s role as an advocacy organization is to take action whenever necessary; to have the skills and capacity to serve as the voice for the river; and to mobilize river lovers to defend against threats to the Yuba River watershed. While the core of SYRCL’s advocacy work is focused on salmon restoration and dam relicensing, we remain vigilant and prepared for unexpected threats in the watershed—such as the fight against Centennial Dam. Whenever proposals like these come to light, we engage and act as needed.

SUSTAINABLE WATER FUTURE

GOAL: *Advocate for long-term solutions for sustainable water management in the Yuba River watershed.*

Water distribution and management is a hotly contested topic in California. While SYRCL is fortunate to be located in a water-rich region, our water future is still uncertain in the face of climate change and population growth. For our region, precipitation will show extreme variability both over longer time frames as we switch between very wet and very dry periods, and within each year as more extreme weather events become more common. These variable flows could have an enormous impact on safety (like the spillway damage in 2016-17 at Oroville Dam nearby), agricultural stability (such as adequate irrigation in dry years), and ecosystem processes (like damage to riparian restoration sites from both high and low flows).

That said, **SYRCL has a role as a community stakeholder and as the Yuba River Waterkeeper to unite and prepare the community and the Yuba River watershed to achieve climate resiliency.** SYRCL’s advocacy efforts are informed by science and aim to help our communities prepare and understand how climate change will affect our surface and groundwater resources.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

More than thirty-five years ago, this community came together to stop dams on the South Yuba River and proved that people can save a river. Along the way, the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) was created with a mission to unite the community to protect and restore the Yuba River. Today, SYRCL serves as the central hub for community engagement, volunteerism, activism, science, outreach, education, and information exchange for the Yuba River.

SYRCL's strategic plan is our newly updated 5-year plan, which will guide us from 2019 through 2023. No matter who you are and how you love the river, this action plan provides multiple opportunities for you to get involved.

Strategic Plan's Highlights

In 2018, SYRCL's Board and staff embarked on a five-year Strategic Plan, building on past successes and introducing new and expanded initiatives.

SYRCL's programmatic work is organized into several coordinated departments including River Advocacy, River People, River Education, River Science, and the Wild & Scenic Film Festival. This document identifies the goals, strategies, and objectives that we hope to accomplish over the next five years with the community's active support.



YUBA SALMON NOW

GOAL: Advocate for a healthier watershed by restoring self-sustaining populations of wild salmon and steelhead trout to diverse habitats.

SYRCL recognizes that salmon are indicators of watershed health. SYRCL's salmon restoration goals permeate nearly every aspect of SYRCL's strategic plan including dam relicensing, habitat restoration, and public education efforts. Even though both the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) have identified the Yuba River as the best opportunity in the Sierra to restore wild salmon, Yuba River salmon and steelhead numbers are at all-time lows. **SYRCL's work is focused on protecting the river corridor, implementing large-scale restoration projects, and improving flows.** We hope short-term gains can be made while we work to develop a supportive constituency that will provide creative solutions for volitional fish passage at Daguerre Point and Englebright dams.

HYDROPOWER

GOAL: Advocate for watershed health including improved river flows, fish passage, rearing habitat, spawning habitat, barriers to outmigration, and recreational opportunities in hydropower dam licenses.

Over the last decade, SYRCL has participated in a once-in-a-generation opportunity to advocate for improved flows, water quality, fish passage, restored habitat and ecosystems, and recreational opportunities through dam relicensing for the hydroelectric dams in the Yuba River watershed.

Under the umbrella of the Foothills Water Network (FWN), SYRCL partners with other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and federal and state agencies to advocate for improved conditions at relicensing meetings. **SYRCL is committed to taking a leadership role when the federal government renews licenses for Yuba dams.**



RIVER SCIENCE

GOAL: Ensure that SYRCL conducts and disseminates the best available science.

The purpose of SYRCL's River Science program is to collect scientific data about the Yuba River watershed and to ensure that our policy, water quality monitoring, restoration, and education work is informed by the best available science. Our River Science department continuously reassesses itself as new information about the Yuba River becomes available; this is especially important within the context of climate change.

RIVER RESTORATION

GOAL: Improve the resiliency of the Yuba River watershed by implementing habitat restoration projects that protect the river, wildlife, forests, and meadows especially in the face of climate change.

SYRCL's science-based restoration work is informed by the best available science and adds to the greater body of knowledge about how the ecosystem and target species benefit from habitat restoration. **Our projects focus on creating fish spawning and rearing habitat, restoring forest resiliency, and promoting meadow health.** SYRCL focuses on restoring ecosystem function and monitoring critical watershed features in the face of historic habitat degradation and climate change. SYRCL's restoration program now boasts a handful of large-scale, multi-year restoration efforts which require multi-agency partnerships, contractors, large equipment, and long-term monitoring.

LOWER YUBA RESTORATION

Restoration in the Lower Yuba will protect habitat and create riparian and floodplain habitat connectivity, fish spawning and rearing habitat, and ensure that fish can swim freely within the 24-mile stretch of river.

SYRCL is funded to partner with the Hallwood Restoration Team to restore 170 acres of Lower Yuba habitat and to lead the Long Bar Restoration Project on an additional 50 acres of habitat restoration.



RIVER MONITORING

GOAL: Collect and interpret water quality data to assess the health of the Yuba River and its tributaries to identify threats, impacts, and ensure regulatory compliance.

Guided by a 2014 River Monitoring Plan, SYRCL's citizen-science water quality program assesses conditions across the Yuba River watershed. **SYRCL science staff and citizen scientists have identified seven priority issues and are conducting in-depth sampling efforts to document threats to the watershed.**

FOREST HEALTH

Forest health in the Yuba River watershed will become a key focus of our work over the next five years. **SYRCL will partner with the United States Forest Service (USFS) and private land owners, and other nonprofits to plan and implement forest health projects across the Yuba watershed.** Removal of invasive plants will reduce fire risk and improve biodiversity. Remediating abandoned mine lands will protect the watershed from legacy mining impacts like mercury and sediment contamination. Promoting sustainable farming practices and remediating illegal grow sites will protect the Yuba watershed from the cumulative impact of cannabis farms as the industry grows. Restoring forest health through thinning and prescribed fire will improve forest habitat, protect water supply, and decrease the risk of high severity fire.

MEADOW RESTORATION

Meadow restoration is focused on protecting headwater environments to improve groundwater storage, maintain summer stream flows, improve water quality, increase carbon sequestration, and bolster species diversity within the watershed. Today, SYRCL is working on restoring over 1,000 acres of meadows in the Yuba watershed. SYRCL is partnering with the USFS, local land trusts, universities, the Sierra Meadow Partnership, and others to complete this work.

CANNABIS CULTIVATION IMPACTS

SYRCL leads the “Growing Green for the Yuba” program to address the negative impacts of cannabis cultivation such as water diversions, overuse of fertilizers, pesticides and other chemicals, and clear cutting. We will continue to host informative workshops for growers about the best management practices in sustainable and ecologically sound cannabis cultivation in the Yuba watershed and work with public lands managers to remediate and monitor large, illegal grow sites.



RIVER PEOPLE

GOAL: Strive to be the leader in the Yuba River watershed for community engagement, outreach, activism, and information exchange concerning watershed issues.

The River People program is at the heart of SYRCL’s mission to unite the community. It is where our members and volunteers come together to take action, exchange information, engage with our diverse neighbors and visitors, and volunteer on projects large and small to protect the Yuba and Bear River watersheds— all with an aim to create a culture of river stewardship. **SYRCL strives to keep our members, volunteers and the general public well-informed and engaged.** That’s why we publish an e-newsletter every two weeks and host an annual “State of the Yuba” forum in April.

SYRCL’S VOLUNTEER PROGRAM

This strategic plan calls for growing the number of volunteers in all aspects of SYRCL’s work to encourage increased stewardship. **We will focus on sustaining the excellence of our volunteer corps and strive to improve their experience with our projects, programs, and events.** In the next five years, we hope our volunteer team will have significant representation from the Bear River, all three forks of the Yuba, and even from localities in the Bay Area.

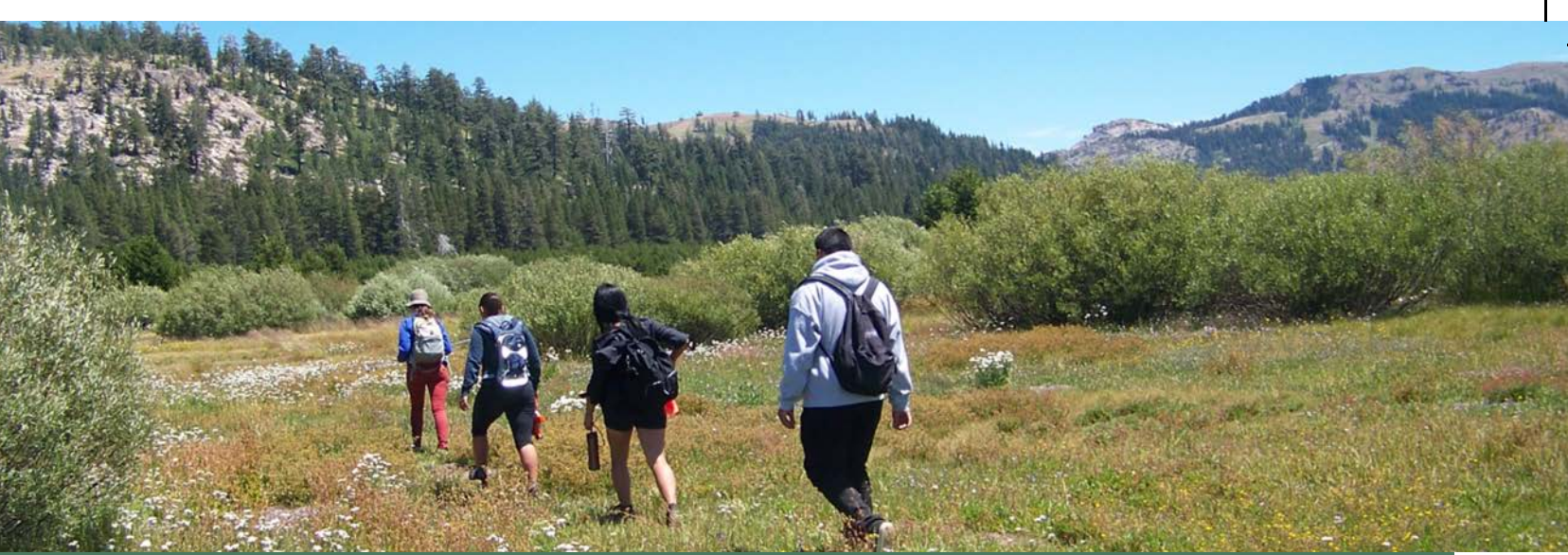
YUBA RIVER CLEANUP

SYRCL’s River People program engages the community annually in the Yuba River Cleanup the 3rd Saturday of September. Over the past 21 cleanups (1998-2018), our volunteers have removed more than 190,483 pounds of trash and 43,154 pounds of recyclables (greater than 100 tons) from 80-90 miles of rivers and creeks. Our vision is that more and more families, from Marysville to Placerville, from Camptonville to Truckee and beyond, will join the annual fall Cleanup.

RIVER AMBASSADORS

Thanks to our long-term partnership with California State Parks, SYRCL’s River Ambassador program, launched in 2012, recruits and trains volunteers to speak one-on-one with visitors at the four major crossings within the South Yuba River State Park. **Using a friendly, non-confrontational approach, River Ambassadors educate folks about the polluting impacts of trash and dog waste, the dangers of broken glass, and the catastrophic potential of wildfire.** As of 2018, River Ambassadors logged 6,057 hours on the river and spoke with 48,757 people about Yuba stewardship. Our goal is to continue to engage South Yuba River State Park visitors while searching for opportunities to replicate our own model on other areas of public land within our watershed.





RIVER EDUCATION

GOAL: Educate people of all ages and backgrounds representative of the communities within the watershed to be informed and passionate stewards of the Yuba watershed and effective, lifelong advocates for its protection.

SYRCL provides education that aims to create life-long stewards of the Yuba River watershed. We do this through programs and curriculum that incorporate lessons about watershed health, Yuba salmon, climate change, water conservation, outdoor experiential learning, and scientific monitoring to students of all levels. To accomplish our goals and objectives, we strive to utilize high quality curricula that are in accordance with local, state, and national standards; empower, engage, and collaborate with local teachers and administrators; and create linkages between the River Education program and other areas of SYRCL's work.



YUBA SALMON EXPEDITIONS

Many Yuba watershed residents are unaware that 300,000 salmon once returned to the Yuba every year before the major dams were built; now as few as 3,000 return annually. **We offer rafting and walking Salmon Expeditions for school groups and the public to learn about the salmon life cycle first-hand.** Between 500 and 700 students participate in our Salmon Tours each fall – and we hope to see that number grow each year.

SCHOOL ASSEMBLIES

Our program reaches students within their schools aiming to make watershed stewardship an annual topic. **We do this by offering two interactive assembly programs, “The Great Water Mystery” and “Journey of the Salmon.”** Having

reached over 20,000 students from 2015–2018, our goal is to continue to offer these popular programs to youth region-wide. And, SYRCL's water audit program allows students to take action to conserve water at their very own schools.

FIELD SCIENCE

Our Field Science Program engages high school students to experience first-hand what it means to work as a field scientist. We take groups of students on multi-day field trips to learn about the Yuba River watershed and become citizen scientists by assisting with monitoring our restoration projects and water quality across the watershed and participating in restoration work. This experiential, outdoor learning opportunity allows them to participate in SYRCL's work and exposes them to field work

YOUTH ENVIRONMENTALIST OF THE YEAR SCHOLARSHIP

High school graduates with a commitment to the environment are encouraged to apply for SYRCL's “Youth Environmentalist of the Year” scholarship. **Since 2002, SYRCL has awarded a \$4,000 college scholarship each year.**

WILD & SCENIC FILM FESTIVAL

GOAL: Produce a world-class, sustainable, and financially successful Wild & Scenic Film Festival that educates and inspires activism in our watershed and communities around the globe.

The Wild & Scenic Film Festival enters its 18th year with a strong foundation and a proven track record of success. What began as a two-day festival with one venue has grown to a five-day festival with more than ten film venues in both Nevada City and Grass Valley. In 2019, we screened 150 films and brought 100 filmmakers and guests to present at the festival. 5,600 people attended from near and far. An additional 2,400 K-12 students participated in our School Program. **The film festival aims to inspire environmental action through the powerful medium of film**, while raising funds for our year-round work.



FILM FESTIVAL ON TOUR

Wild & Scenic Film Festival On Tour partners to produce nearly 250 events annually, bringing the best and brightest environmental and adventure films worldwide. **On Tour is designed to provide partner organizations with a turn-key event that increases their membership, raises funds, and inspires activism in their community.**



BOARD GOVERNANCE & ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERSHIP

GOAL: Support exceptional Board governance and diverse organizational leadership which advance SYRCL's mission and long-term sustainability.

SYRCL is governed by a dedicated volunteer Board of Directors. Board Members serve on a variety of formal and ad hoc committees and engage in partnerships with staff and volunteers on SYRCL's programs and initiatives.

SYRCL's leadership is provided by the Executive Director as directed by the Board of Directors. The Executive Director works closely with a leadership team to promote cross collaboration among the departments and manage day-to-day operations. Regular staff meetings are designed to coordinate collaboration and share information.

DEVELOPMENT & MEMBERSHIP

GOAL: Meet SYRCL's financial needs through diversified income sources and build a sustainable funding base, which includes individuals, businesses, and organizations who are committed to SYRCL's long term vision and sustainability.

SYRCL's members are the lifeblood of SYRCL. Our large, active grassroots membership not only financially sustains the organization, but also has influence on how decisions are made in the watershed.

SYRCL aims to have diverse and stable funding sources in order to support the strategic growth of core program areas, staffing, and administrative needs. Our Development work seeks to engage watershed residents, local and regional business owners, and downstream beneficiaries whose support lends credibility to our advocacy and funds our programs.

COMMUNICATIONS

GOAL: Position SYRCL as a leader to funders, partners, members, volunteers, and decision-makers by telling compelling stories about our work that (a) showcase programs, partnerships, and impacts and (b) inspire people to take meaningful action within the Yuba watershed and beyond.

SYRCL's communications processes historically have been managed in the River People department. By building our communication capacity, we can maximize overall program growth and impact. Moving forward, we aim to centralize communications. This is especially critical as SYRCL expands its reach, building ecosystem resilience in the Sierra Nevada and preparing our watershed to face climate change. Moreover, as the Wild & Scenic Film Festival continues to build its On Tour program, we must recognize SYRCL's national and international reach and support this success year-round.

Our vision at the end of five years is to have a fully functioning communications department that provides leadership in showcasing our impact and evolving our brand in conservation, community engagement, and fundraising.



FINANCE & OPERATIONS

GOAL: Utilize best practices to ensure sound fiscal management with strong internal controls and oversight, and create an organizational culture that supports staff in fulfilling SYRCL's mission.

SYRCL's staff is passionate about the Yuba River and carrying out our mission to unite the community. As an organization, we are committed to creating a healthy, happy, and sustainable work environment.

We treasure every dollar that comes in the door and account for every penny. The Board approves the annual operating budget based on detailed financial plans for each of SYRCL's projects, programs, and events. The Board and Finance Committee provide monthly oversight, and independent auditors provide annual reviews or audits. These rigorous measures provide the financial oversight to maintain SYRCL's fiscal health and stability.



SOUTH YUBA RIVER CITIZENS LEAGUE
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