

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 SYRCL'S BOARD PRESIDENT

The South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) is first and foremost about people, about community, and about a healthy, thriving watershed. SYRCL's work to “Unite, Restore, Advocate, Educate, and Inspire” is featured throughout our 2022 Impact Report. This report also is a celebration of SYRCL's 40-year legacy, which is alive throughout the Yuba Watershed from the Sierra Crest to the Lower Yuba's confluence with the Feather River; from the upper reaches of the North Yuba through the forests surrounding Downieville and Camptonville; and we carry our mission with us as we engage in classrooms throughout the watershed and in the board rooms and hallways of County, State, and Federal offices striving for long-lasting and meaningful policy change.

SYRCL was founded by grassroots activists and continues to be a member and volunteer-driven organization. Thanks to hundreds of helping hands, our Wild & Scenic Film Festival, Water Quality Monitoring, Salmon Expeditions, and River Ambassador programs inspire current and future environmental advocates every year. Our membership, at 3,500 strong, sustains these critical, impactful programs.

In this past year, SYRCL united Yuba River visitors to reduce their impacts at popular river recreation sites, restored our local rivers and creeks during our annual Yuba River Cleanup week in September, attended water district and county supervisors' meetings to advocate for a healthy, sustainable watershed, educated K-12 students from Yuba, Nevada, and Sierra County schools about river systems, threatened salmon, and the history of the indigenous peoples who were here before us, and inspired Wild & Scenic Film Festival attendees to get involved in environmental justice issues.

This 2022 Impact Report will highlight the progress of SYRCL's restoration efforts on a stretch of the Lower Yuba which was heavily impacted by hydraulic gold mining 150 years ago. This stretch of the Yuba River below Englebright Dam is part of what was once a huge run of Chinook salmon which fed indigenous peoples for millennia. SYRCL has built partnerships with construction companies, county water agencies, and state and federal agencies in a 25-year effort to reverse degradation and restore fish habitat. This report will also highlight our forest health work collaborations and the impressive results of SYRCL's Meadow Restoration at the Yuba headwaters near Donner Pass.

When it comes to saving salmon, creating new habitat in the Yuba River below Englebright Dam is only part of the solution. At SYRCL, we are working to increase the resiliency of all native ocean-going fish; salmon, steelhead, sturgeon, and lamprey. Through our efforts to improve fish passage and create hundreds of acres of new habitat, we are doing everything we can to remove challenges in our watershed so that when these threatened species leave our watershed for their oceanic life stages they are as numerous and healthy as possible.

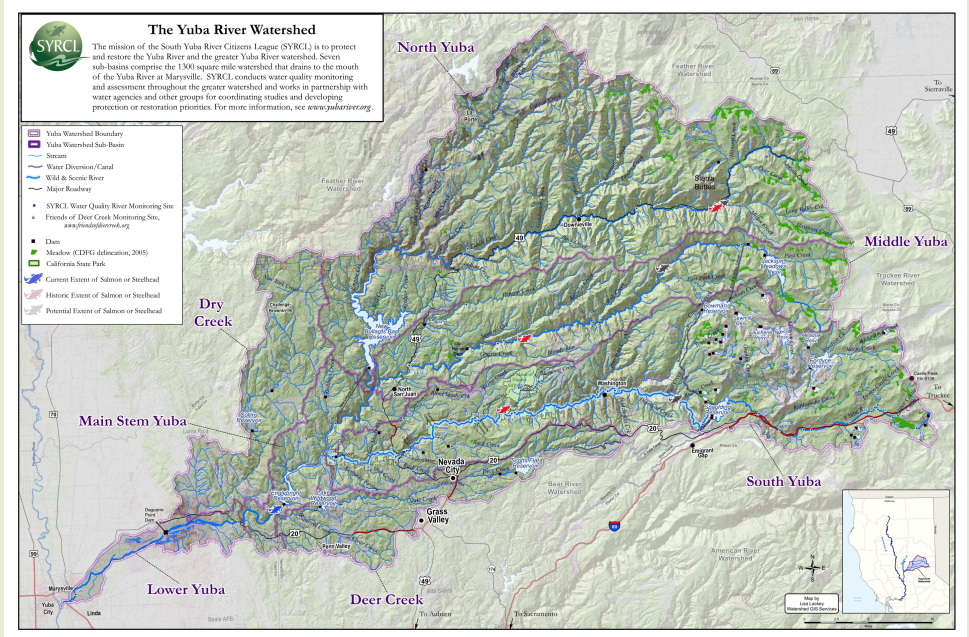
This Impact Report will demonstrate how important people like you are vital to helping SYRCL protect the watershed. Every day, SYRCL's diligent staff puts your grassroots contributions to work to advocate for the Yuba and attract grant support from agencies and foundations for projects which will have landscape-level significance for years to come.

For the Yuba,



George Olive  
SYRCL Board President





# 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



## EDUCATE

over 4,000 students  
from 25 Title I schools  
in California



## UNITE

over 400 volunteers to  
remove more than 10,000  
pounds of trash from 70+  
miles of river



## RESTORE

668 acres of meadow, a  
planned 275,000 acres of  
forest, and 171 acres of  
floodplain riparian areas



## ADVOCATE

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



## INSPIRE

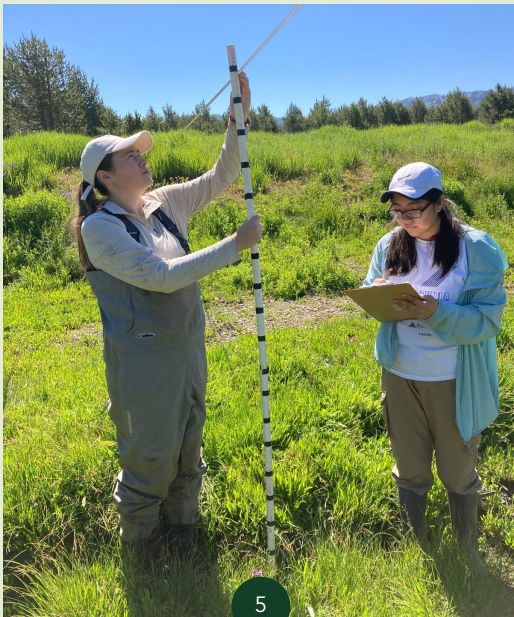
55,000 people with over  
130+ environmental and  
adventure films in dozens  
of states across the US

# Justice, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion

In support of SYRCL's mission "to unite the community to protect and restore the Yuba River watershed" we envision justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI) as core values and key principles influencing SYRCL's entire operation and community going forward.

SYRCL recognizes the inherent link between racial and environmental justice and strives to work toward both. We commit to learn and grow in our understanding of the systemic nature of white supremacy culture so that we may advocate for systemic changes to discover, honor and incorporate the diverse perspectives and knowledge of all people, especially BIPOC, LGBTQ+ and differently-abled communities within the Yuba watershed.

Through this lens and our work, we seek to strengthen SYRCL's vision of "a vibrant, science-based community organization that serves as a leader for environmental stewardship and activism in the Yuba River watershed."





## Milestones for 2022

- Secured grant funding for the new River Gear Loaner Program (river shoes and clothing) to lower the barrier to entry for under-resourced schools to join SYRCL's Student Salmon Expeditions
- Initiated staff-wide introductory training on JEDI concepts.
- Initiated SYRCL's monthly ongoing contributions to the California Heritage Indigenous Research Project (CHIRP's) Reciprocity Program
- Engaged with CHIRP to include their statement on the proposed reopening of the Idaho-Maryland Mine in SYRCL's talking points to spread awareness on tribal impacts.
- Launched a Volunteer Time Off program to enable staff to volunteer with other nonprofits during the workday, helping our mission to unite the community.
- Participated in Hospitality House's Cleanup
- Provided Spanish language outreach material and recruited Spanish-speaking River Captains and volunteer River Ambassadors to staff summer outreach booths.
- Through the Wild & Scenic Film Festival, continued to amplify voices often marginalized by traditional media. This included curating film programming that highlighted stories from a diverse array of locations and cultures from around the globe, as well as non-film programming including an Earth Day discussion panel about indigenous knowledge featuring Nisenan tribal spokesperson Shelly Covert, Washoe Tribal Historic Preservation Officer, Darrel Cruz, and ethnohistorian Dr. Tanis C. Thorne.
- Ran the Girls in Science summer field program.
- Continued engaging in Tribal consultation for meadow projects.
- Secured funding for a crew from United Auburn Indian Community (UAIC) to learn beaver dam analogs (BDAs) & Post-Assisted Log Structures (PALS) construction as part of our meadow restoration effort.
- Collaborated with United Auburn Indian Community (UAIC) to include Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and culturally significant plantings for the lower Yuba River.

# 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 engage meaningfully in community issues, call the community to action, coordinate with coalition partners to broaden and enhance impact, track policy, attend hearings and meetings, and urge local, state, and federal officials to do what's best for our community and our watershed.

## OUR INITIATIVES INCLUDE:

**Stop Centennial Dam** – Using public engagement and comment opportunities, SYRCL, the Foothills Water Network (FWN), and community driven Dam Watchdogs continued to voice opposition to the proposed Centennial Dam and engaged in NID's "Plan for Water" process which will impact how NID manages water over the next 50 years. SYRCL continued to advocate for a sustainable water future and lent technical expertise to NID and partners during this critical process. Through our Dam Watchdog listserv, we provided timely updates to inform the public on the Plan for Water developments and called the community to action when needed.

**Dams and Hydropower Reform** – SYRCL and non-governmental organization (NGO) partners filed numerous comments on ongoing hydropower relicensing issues in the Yuba watershed, including comments on an annual pulse flow variance request by Yuba Water Agency for the Yuba River Development Project (YRDP), as well as Yuba Water Agency's Notice of Intent, in relation to the California Environmental Quality Act, for the YRDP relicensing. Further, SYRCL persisted in our legal challenge of FERC's waiver of the Clean Water Act on NID's Bear-Yuba Project license, and, on August 4, 2022, a panel of judges from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit overruled FERC, re-establishing California's right to protect water quality in the Yuba, Bear, and Merced River Watersheds for the next 40 years. Additionally, SYRCL and coalition partners met with State Water Board members and staff to discuss potential remedies and processes for issuing 401 water quality certifications for California hydropower project licensing/relicensing and developed a working group to begin developing solutions in 2023.

**Growing Green for the Yuba** - SYRCL engaged in policy discussions surrounding Nevada County's cannabis cultivation ordinance including providing written and public comments at Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors meetings. SYRCL also continued to advance education and outreach through facilitation of in-person workshops and participation in educational events hosted by Nevada County Cannabis Alliance, Nevada County, and UC Berkely Cannabis Research Center. We also actively sought new funding opportunities to support and expand our work, particularly in support of our cannabis water quality study protocol and our work on best management practices for sustainable cannabis cultivation in Nevada County.

**Yuba Salmon Now** – SYRCL worked closely with NGO and agency partners to advance our ambitious vision of a healthy salmon population which can swim freely from summit to sea. We monitored happenings at the local, state, and federal level for direct impact to Yuba salmon. Whether it be calling attention to potential impacts of a proposed local project or advancing efforts that increase available habitat or improve fish passage on the lower Yuba River, SYRCL continued to use its voice to advocate for Yuba Salmon.



## ADVOCACY ACHIEVEMENTS

- SYRCL released a call to the public for signatures on a letter to the Army Corps of Engineers asking them to clean and maintain the fish ladders at Daguerre Point Dam. During the 20 days the letter was open, we collected 700 signatures from 28 different states.
- SYRCL was victorious in its legal challenge of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's (FERC) waiver of the Clean Water Act on Nevada Irrigation District's (NID) Bear-Yuba Project license, re-establishing California's right to protect water quality in the Yuba, Bear, and Merced River Watersheds for the next 40 years.
- SYRCL and UC Santa Cruz launched a survey to receive community input on issues surrounding river health, fisheries, and fish passage at Daguerre Point Dam. The results of this survey will provide essential context for future public meetings and will help shape the course of restoration and fish passage improvement over the coming years.
- SYRCL put a spotlight on our Growing Green program by holding two events at the in-person Earth Day Wild and Scenic Film Festival mini-fest.
- SYRCL continued to formally oppose the re-opening of the Idaho-Maryland Mine by submitting comments on the project's Draft Environmental Impact Report and Economic Impact Report and continued working with coalition partners in matters of advocacy, policy, and education.





## 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** – Phase one restoration implementation actions were completed on this 485-acre meadow in 2022. Restoration actions in this large-scale meadow restoration project were targeted at floodplain reconnection and include the following actions:

- Full channel fill in 2.75 miles of channel in the South Yuba and Lytton Creeks
- Installed over 25 Beaver Dam Analog and Post Assisted Log Structures
- Removed 2 acres of Invasive Reed Canary Grass
- Removed 14 acres of encroaching conifers
- Completed road improvements and realigned the Meadow Bisect Road
- Installed a new 120' bridge, along the Meadow Bisect Road
- Revegetated approximately 30 acres with the following tools: native seed mix dispersal, sod/sedge plugs, willow stakes, willow fascines

**Haskell Peak Three Meadow Complex** – SYRCL and partners expanded the project to include restoration of five meadows in the North Yuba watershed using low-impact, process-based restoration techniques such as beaver dam analogs. The project made progress on restoration designs and the environmental review process for all five meadows and is on track for implementation in summer of 2023



# 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 USFS Tahoe National Forest completed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. SYRCL submitted comments in collaboration with numerous partners supporting the project, and providing important critical feedback where appropriate.

**Invasive Weeds** – SYRCL led a seasonal field crew focused on eliminating non-native invasive plants on the Tahoe National Forest. The crew primarily 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 268 infestations and removed over 294,000 plants, clearing 323 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 has utilized YFN resources such as the *Resilience Strategy for Yuba Forests*, developed in February 2022, and the Stakeholder Mapping Tool. These resources are used by stakeholders to write grants and plan projects to align projects with a unified and regionally specific approach to forest restoration.

**Aspen** – To conclude the final field assessment season of the *Yuba River Headwaters Aspen Restoration Planning Project*, SYRCL staff mapped in total over 600 acres of Aspen habitat within the Yuba River watershed, with 132 individual Aspen stands identified. 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

2022 marked twenty-two years of continuous river monitoring and volunteer-based citizen science.

**PFAS Sampling** – PFAS chemicals, also known as “forever chemicals”, possess the quality of remaining in organisms indefinitely without breaking down. Although PFAS chemicals have been found nationwide in drinking water, streams, lakes, and rivers, there are no binding, enforceable regulatory standards in place to protect either the public or wildlife. In the summer, SYRCL sampled for PFAS chemicals in the South Yuba and results showed PFAS levels below detectable limits. SYRCL plans to further sample for PFAS to ensure our rivers remain healthy and safe for recreation



In 2022, we presented/shared SYRCL’s River Monitoring citizen science water quality program at the international Waterkeeper conference focused on water resource issues and grassroot efforts to steward and protect waterways for health and recreation.

## ACHIEVEMENTS

- 402 total citizen scientists trained since 2000.
- Approximately 103,500 recorded water quality measurements.
- Over 29,800 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 ongoing 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 successfully completed construction in Fall of 2022 with the invaluable help from project partners cbec, Cramer Fish Sciences, SRI, and Paterson Taber Construction. This project created 42 acres of floodplain, side-channel, and backwater habitat for juvenile Chinook salmon and steelhead trout. In total, over 350,000 cubic yards of hydraulic mining debris were removed, returning the floodplain to where the water is to allow more space for the river.

**Upper Long Bar** – SYRCL is working with project partners to design restoration plans and enhance an additional 100 acres of juvenile salmonid habitat on the upper portion of Long Bar. Planning, design, and pre-project monitoring are well underway.

**Hallwood** – As a vital project partner, SYRCL assisted in Phase 3 of the restoration project where 800,000 cubic yards of material removed from the Middle Training Wall- a levee like structure made in the gold mining era that acts to channelize the river. SYRCL helped plant over 700 hundred native riparian plants to help jumpstart revegetation. To date, more than 2,000,000 cubic yards of gravel have been removed and more than 8,000 individual native riparian species have been planted.

**Rose Bar** – This project will enhance two already existing riffles below Englebright dam to create needed spawning habitat for adult Chinook salmon and steelhead. Pre-project monitoring was completed, design plans finalized, and permits are in place. We are now shovel ready and anticipate restoration beginning June of 2023.



# RIVER EDUCATION

**Our River Education program creates lifelong stewards of the Yuba River watershed by providing educational opportunities for kindergarteners through adults. Thanks to the support of foundations, grantors, and donors, thousands of students and community members join us each year to learn about our watershed and its wonders.**

**Field Science** – In 2022, we hosted 2 high school field science expeditions in the mountain meadows near the headwaters of the Yuba River. 8 high school students from the Los Angeles region participated in an 8-day expedition. 10 local high school students participated in our 5-day Youth Outdoor Leadership Opportunity (YOLO) expedition. Students worked along SYRCL scientists and educators to install cattle exclusion fencing around declining Aspen stands and collected monitoring data in the stands in Loney Meadow. In Van Norden Meadow, students assisted with monitoring stream channel depths and vegetation and conducted baseline vegetation surveys.

**Wild & Scenic Film Festival School Programs** – Teachers had 2 options to engage students in the WSFF School Programs – either virtually or having SYRCL educators host a school assembly to view the films. Our education programming reached 2,144 students and teachers from 13 schools in contemporary environmental issues through films and accompanying curriculum.

**Salmon Expeditions** – The 2022 Salmon Expedition season was our largest season yet! Programming was expanded to include pre- and post-expedition classroom lessons for all 3rd–5th grade classes from participating schools. 1,867 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.

**High School Water Quality Project** – SYRCL launched a pilot program to engage high school students through river monitoring. 40 students learned how to collect water quality samples to assess the health of local streams.

- **Awarded the Environmentalist of the Year Scholarship to Vanessa Richards from Ghidotti Early College High school**
- **Reached over 4,000 students with our programs**
- **Connected with 25 Title I Schools**
- **Piloted a new program to engage high school students**

# RIVER VOLUNTEERS

**River Ambassadors** – The 2022 River Ambassador season ran from May 27 to September 4. River Ambassadors counted 54,632 visitors at Bridgeport, Highway 49, and Purdon Crossings while engaging in meaningful conversations about river safety and etiquette with 12,022 visitors. The addition of a bilingual River Captain increased the programs outreach opportunities. In 2022, River Ambassadors removed more than 6,101 pieces of garbage and 519 pieces of recycling, along with 478 pieces of glass, 393 piles of dog waste, and 299 cigarette butts. In addition, they dismantled 8 fire rings and responded to 9 incidents.



**Yuba River Cleanup** – This year's Yuba River Cleanup presented some unique challenges, from record breaking heat to hazardous AQI as a result of the Mosquito Fire. While the combination of these factors made navigating the cleanup difficult -- SYRCL had to cancel its Volunteer Appreciation Party at Bridgeport due to unhealthy smoke conditions – it also provided a stark reminder of the effects of climate change and human activity to our area. Still, over 400 volunteers donated more than 1,220 hours to remove over 10,600 pounds of trash and recycling from 23 sites in the Yuba River watershed over the course of 10 days.



# SYRCL's WILD & SCENIC<sup>®</sup> FILM FESTIVAL

where activism gets inspired

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's also SYRCL's largest annual fundraiser, drawing thousands of attendees, filmmakers, activists, athletes, and artists to the Sierra Nevada foothills annually.



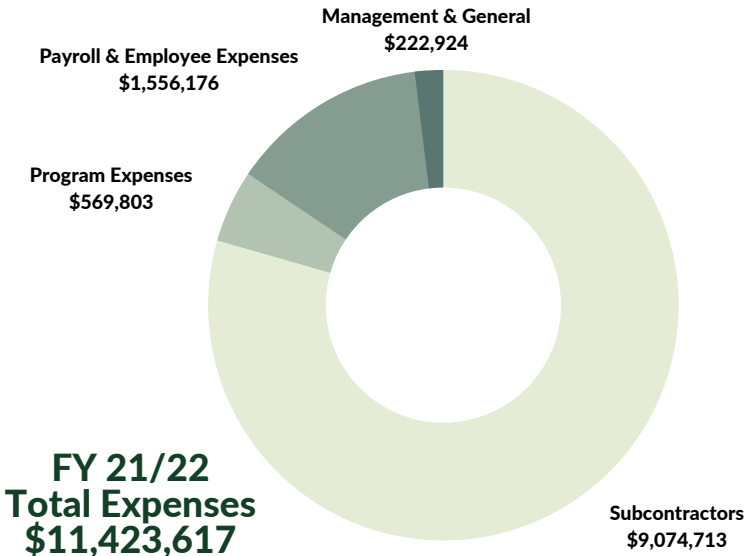
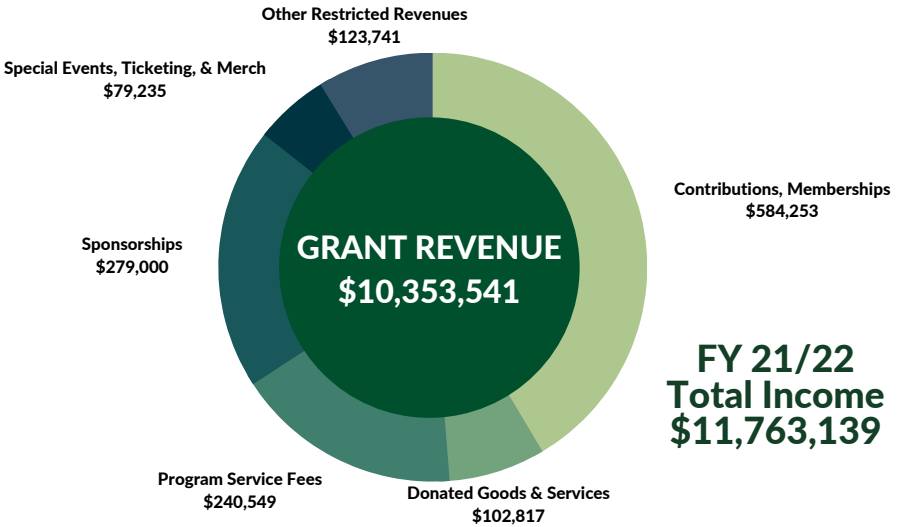
In 2022, Wild & Scenic Film Festival was once again virtual due to the dual impacts of COVID and extensive winter storm impacts. The eleven-day online experience attracted thousands of filmmakers, film enthusiasts, and students from around the world. It showcased 134 films that continued the fest's commitment to diverse programming which amplifies the voices of often marginalized populations. It raised funds, created opportunities to engage the community during a challenging time, and, most importantly, raised awareness and inspired activism for environmental causes and SYRCL's campaigns.



Following the flagship event, Wild & Scenic takes the festival on tour, bringing a selection of films to hundreds of organizations around the country and helping these like-minded groups to raise support and awareness of their mission while inspiring activism in their community and increasing the environmental groundswell near and far.

# 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 which 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 restorations projects and 2022 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 which help protect our river, meadows, and forests.









Image: Spruce Tone Films

## Looking Toward The Future

At the time of writing this, we have just said good-bye to Melinda Booth, who served as our Executive Director since 2017 and our Film Festival Director since 2011. Melinda has been a truly effective and productive advocate for the Yuba watershed. In her final weeks, the Supervisor for the Tahoe National Forest, the General Manager for Yuba Water Agency, the County Board of Supervisors and administrative staff, and SYRCL staff, board members, and friends joined in the expression of gratitude for Melinda's leadership, vision and dedication. As SYRCL's Board President, I look forward to the promise and continued advocacy which are the legacy of SYRCL's 40 years of environmental leadership. Thanks to the ongoing enthusiasm and determination of staff, members, donors, partners, and volunteers, we can look forward to another 40 years of protecting and restoring our beautiful Yuba River watershed.

I invite you to join and support SYRCL's future work in any way you can.

George Olive  
SYRCL Board President



# 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**  
**National Environmental  
Education Foundation**  
**National Fish and Wildlife  
Foundation**  
**National Forest Foundation**  
**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**  
**Tahoe Truckee Community  
Foundation**  
**US Bureau of Reclamation**  
**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](mailto: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](http://www.YubaRiver.org)

