



Strategic Plan Summary 2024-2029

UNITED FOR THE YUBA



Photo by Jonathan Finegold

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Friends,

We have been fighting for the Yuba watershed for more than 40 years, which has only been possible because of the support of our 3,500 members and 1,000 active volunteers. Because of this support, SYRCL has been able to do great things for the Yuba watershed for two generations. This is SYRCL's fourth comprehensive strategic plan which will guide us in our mission to unite and inspire people to protect and restore the waters, forests, and communities of the Yuba River watershed. As we look forward to the next five years, we strive to continue being a leader in this community: a leader as a resource for information and rapid solutions to environmental threats, a leader in restoration of this place, a leader in our advocacy for the Yuba watershed and everywhere its water flows, and a source of inspiration for environmental activism here and across the country.

I am pleased to present SYRCL's new five-year strategic plan which will guide our work from 2024 through 2029. We developed this plan using insight from the past 40 years of organizational growth and success, and where we learned important lessons. We looked to staff at all levels, past and present, and our Board of Directors for input. Much of our work remains closely tied to our beginnings -- river monitoring, the Wild & Scenic Film Festival, the Cleanup, and environmental advocacy all remain at our core.

We also continue to look forward and act with intention in response to the world around us. Through this five-year strategic plan, we are seeking to increase the positive impact we have throughout the Yuba River watershed and everywhere Yuba water flows, confront the threat of global climate change head-on by working to improve the ecologic resilience of the watershed, and intentionally strive to be more considerate and inclusive through our engagement on topics related to justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion (JEDI).

As you read through this plan, read it as a pledge and an invitation to engage personally in the protection and restoration of the environment.

At SYRCL, we understand and appreciate that our strength comes from our supporters. There is strength in numbers and that is why we encourage all Yuba River lovers to get involved with SYRCL through volunteer opportunities, donations, and dues-paying memberships. Our work is not possible without your dedication and support.

Together, we are having a positive impact in the Yuba watershed and everywhere its water flows.

For the Yuba,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Zettler-Mann', written in a cursive, flowing style.

Aaron Zettler-Mann
Executive Director

Mission Statement

SYRCL unites and inspires people to protect and restore the waters, forests, and communities of the Yuba River watershed.

Vision Statements

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

SYRCL envisions continued education and engagement for a sustainable water future celebrating the Yuba River's diverse cultural history. We are committed to promoting the connection between a healthy watershed and human quality of life.

SYRCL envisions continued leadership as a vibrant, science-based organization that serves as a model for environmental stewardship and restoration. We inspire activism in the Yuba River watershed and beyond.

Values Statements

Inspirational -- SYRCL was founded on the premise "People can save a river". SYRCL strives to be the center of collective action and inspiration to fight threats to the Yuba watershed, and anywhere its water flows.

Collaborative -- SYRCL values a professional and personally enriching work environment, which attracts, supports, and retains a dedicated and representative team of staff, Board, and volunteers who work to build integrated partnerships with diverse perspectives.

Data-driven --SYRCL applies the best-available science to inform our work throughout the Yuba watershed and beyond.

Inclusive -- SYRCL values the diversity of experiences and beliefs within the Yuba watershed and pledges to pursue broad cooperation with respect for differences. We value a shared river environment that is safe, accessible, and welcoming.

Executive Summary

INTRODUCTION

More than forty years ago, this community came together to stop proposed dams on the South Yuba River, and we proved that *people can save a river*. Along the way, the South Yuba River Citizens League (SYRCL) was created with the mission to unite the community to protect and restore the Yuba River watershed. Today, SYRCL is a central hub for community engagement, volunteerism, activism, science, education, and information exchange for all things Yuba River. And we remain committed to our mission to **unite and inspire people to protect and restore the waters, forests, and communities of the Yuba River watershed**.

This strategic plan is our newly updated five-year plan which will guide us from 2024 through 2029. We plan to build on our successes over the last 40+ years and look to grow in meaningful ways. With this plan, our aim is to increase the positive impact we have throughout the Yuba River watershed and everywhere Yuba water flows, confront the threat of global climate change head-on by working to improve the ecologic resilience of the watershed, and intentionally strive to be more considerate and inclusive through our engagement and collaboration with partners. SYRCL is also the official **Yuba River Waterkeeper** through our membership with the global Waterkeeper Alliance. As the Yuba River Waterkeeper, we are stronger in our advocacy actions and monitoring efforts because we stand with the international Waterkeeper Alliance.

Our work is also informed by, and supportive of, local and state-wide initiatives. These initiatives include:

- California's 30 x 30 Initiative which we can use to find ways to ensure our restoration sites are conserved in perpetuity and advocating for additional protections for the Yuba River watershed.
- The Department of Natural Resources' Nature-Based Solutions where our work to restore meadow, forest, and floodplain health makes more water available throughout the spring and summer.
- The California Environmental Literacy Initiative which is closely aligned with our state standards-based classroom and field-based experiential learning objectives.

We also directly support Nevada County's Recreation and Resilience Masterplan through our River Ambassador program.

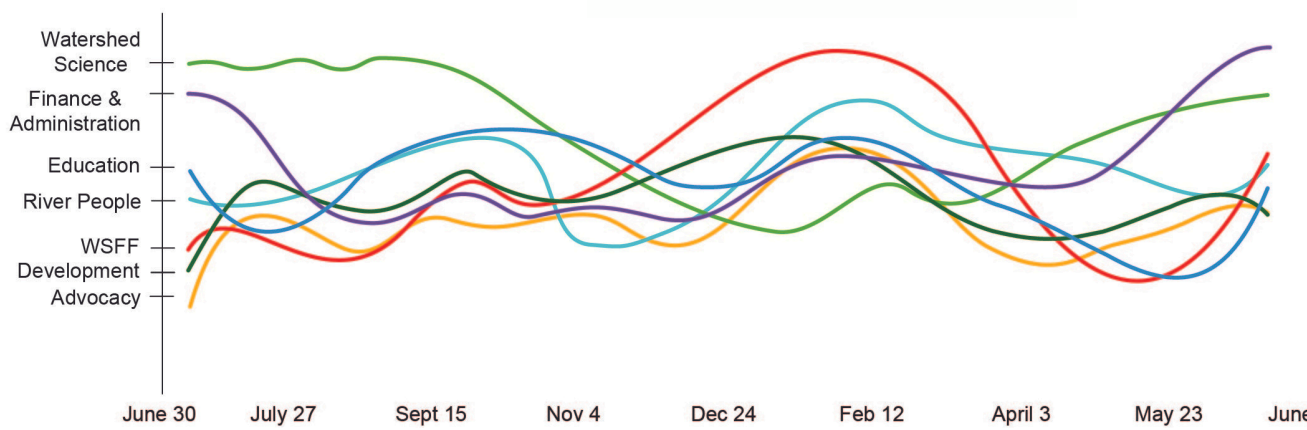
SYRCL stands on five pillars: Advocacy, Watershed Science, River People, Education, and the Wild & Scenic Film Festival. The organizational support which keeps these pillars standing are our Development and Finance and Administration Departments. As a collective organizational team, we all work together to fulfil our mission.



SYRCL's five departments flow together to accomplish our mission

SYRCL operates on a fiscal year beginning July 1 and ending June 30. Each department's busy season varies based on events, school year, snowpack, and advocacy imperatives. Some seasonal workloads are very predictable, such as the slow ramp up which culminates in an event like the Wild & Scenic Film Festival, while others are harder to predict and are driven by the weather or the actions of agencies. This annual rhythm creates SYRCL's Heartbeat.

SYRCL's Heartbeat:



The following pages provide a narrative overview of the priorities for each department over the next five years.



Advocacy

SYRCL's role as an advocacy organization is to take action whenever necessary, to have the skills and capacity to serve as a voice for the river, and to mobilize river lovers to defend against threats to the Yuba River watershed and everywhere its water flows. The core of SYRCL's advocacy work is focused on ensuring that the watershed is protected by enforceable certifications and licenses which will provide enough water for the recovery of salmon.

SYRCL's advocacy efforts are driven by science. We aim to help our communities and the elected officials who represent them to understand all the ways that climate change will affect us. We rely on a healthy environment to thrive, as much as it relies on our sustained advocacy efforts.

Sustainable Water Future

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. We will continue to switch between extended dry periods punctuated by extreme wet years. Within each year, more extreme weather events will become more common. Highly variable flows arising from climate variability could have an enormous impact on safety, agricultural stability, and ecosystem processes.

The Yuba River watershed is also part of multiple larger systems. We contribute to ecosystems (like the Bay-Delta) and places (those served by the Central Valley Project and State Water Project canals) which rely on Yuba water. A sustainable water future includes ensuring we plan for the future of water management and water demand within the Yuba River watershed and everywhere Yuba water flows. We are engaging locally and state-wide to ensure water management is sustainable for a healthy environment and people.



Hydropower

Central to SYRCL's work protecting the Yuba River watershed is our role in dam licensing. The majority of FERC dam relicensing in the Yuba watershed is supposedly completed; however, delays, lawsuits, and pending certifications mean our work is far from done. We continue to collaborate with our partners to ensure water quality and ecosystem health are protected as part of relicensing.

Watershed Science

The Watershed Science Department is where our work to create a watershed which is resilient to global climate change happens through our restoration and monitoring projects. The Watershed Science Department is leading on-the-ground restoration projects throughout the watershed focused on restoring natural processes in meadows and forests across the watershed and salmon habitat in the anadromous reach of the lower Yuba River. The pre- and post-project data we collect, paired with our long-term water quality monitoring data, are used to inform and strengthen our advocacy work, enhance our education programs with real-world projects, and prioritize future restoration projects.

Watershed Restoration

Throughout the watershed, SYRCL will continue to identify project locations and secure funding to implement on-the-ground restoration projects. A guiding principle of our restoration work will be the restoration of natural processes (process-based restoration) rather than attempting to repair a location to an unknowable historic condition which reflected a climate which no longer exists. By repairing the environmental damage of the last 200+ years and restarting natural processes, we work to ensure that as the climate continues to change, the ecosystems we rely on are better positioned to adapt naturally. In the upper portion of the watershed, our restoration work will emphasize coordination across the different habitat types: meadows, aspen, and coniferous forest. More intentional coordination will make for more resilient projects which better address the interconnected nature of the Sierra Nevada.

In the lower Yuba River, our native anadromous fish are limited to approximately 24 miles of river. For salmon, this represents a loss of approximately 90% of their historic range. Our lower Yuba River restoration work will continue to reconfigure and reconnect floodplains. To date, SYRCL has led or partnered in the restoration of 200 acres of floodplain. We have funding to create an additional five acres of spawning habitat in one of the last viable spawning locations in the lower Yuba, and we are seeking funding to finish designs and construction of additional floodplain habitat. Our restoration work in the lower Yuba is also focused on ensuring that fish passage projects in the lower Yuba are guided by the best available science to benefit all native anadromous fish.

Forest Health

Our forest health work is closely related to our other restoration work. However, the nature of the partnerships we work within, and the scale of the work, are different than our other restoration projects. We will continue in our role as a founding member of the North Yuba Forest Partnership (NYFP) working to restore forest health across 275,000 acres of the North Yuba. Beyond our work in the NYFP, we see the need for easier identification and implementation of projects on private lands and within the wildland-urban interface surrounding the communities of the watershed to help increase community resilience to the threat of fire.

River Monitoring

Guided by a 2020 River Monitoring Plan, SYRCL's community-science water quality program assesses conditions across the Yuba River watershed. SYRCL science staff and volunteer scientists conduct in-depth sampling efforts to document threats to the watershed. In addition, our river monitoring program will be responsive to the emerging threat of recently identified pollutants like PFAS and a rubber preservative found in vehicle tires, both of which are a threat to the health of the environment and people.



Photo by Spruce Tone Films

River People

The River People program is the heart of SYRCL's mission to unite and inspire people. It is the central hub of SYRCL's communication across platforms and 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 River watershed—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. We engage across media platforms (social media, bi-monthly e-newsletter, important op-eds, letters to the editor, and press releases) and in-person through year-round events.

Communication

We strive to have our communication efforts across all platforms educate, inspire, and showcase all that we do. We do this by positioning SYRCL as a leading source for information, activism, restoration, inspiration, and engagement for members, volunteers, decision-makers, partners, and funders. We will strive to illustrate the effectiveness of SYRCL's programs to a wide and diverse audience. Additionally, we will expand our reach and ability to share SYRCL's cross departmental successes, issues, and events through greater efficiencies and more targeted opportunities for communication.



Volunteer Program

Our goal is to position SYRCL as a leader in environmental stewardship and collective action by empowering and uniting the Yuba River watershed and beyond through impactful volunteer engagement, strategic outreach, and innovative events. After a significant decline in volunteer engagement and events during Covid, we are focused on rebuilding the excellence of our volunteer corps and striving to improve their experience with our projects, programs, and events. We are seeking to build a more diverse, vibrant, and skilled community of volunteers through a number of smaller social events while maintaining the cornerstone events of volunteer engagement and river stewardship: the Yuba River Cleanup, SYRCL's River Ambassadors program, and our State of the Yuba event.

Education

Education is SYRCL's newest department. This is a reflection of its growth over the last number of years and the independent nature in which it operates. SYRCL provides education which aims to create life-long stewards of the Yuba River watershed and our planet. 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 for students of all levels. To accomplish our goals and objectives, we use high quality curricula in accordance with local, state, and national standards; we empower, engage, and collaborate with local teachers and administrators; and we create linkages between the Education Department and other areas of SYRCL's work to enhance the value of the educational experience through real-world applications.

Student Education

What students see around them every day reflects the human and natural history of this place and the cumulative impact of decisions made; from the historic hunt for gold, to recent fire suppression, to the degree to which we see ourselves as part of the natural world. Our student education programs aim to create informed and passionate stewards of the Yuba watershed and natural world by reaching TK-12th grade students in all communities. Through expanded staffing and targeting specific educational grade bands, we will continue highly successful programs like our Salmon Expeditions, environmentalist scholarship, and field science program, and we will expand our impact so SYRCL is a source of education and student inspiration at every grade level.



Wild & Scenic Film Festival

The Wild & Scenic Film Festival is more than 20 years old. Having successfully navigated through the Covid-19 pandemic, the festival is regrowing in a rapidly changing events and technological space. The festival continues to be a multi-day, multi-venue event which attracts thousands of people from near and far. Thousands of local students also participate in our school programming in the week leading up to the festival. The film fest is a place where people get inspired to take environmental action locally, wherever they call home. We will continue to highlight a diverse range of stories and voices from around the globe. As we look toward the future, it is clear that adaptability and creativity are central to the success of WSFF. Innovative new offerings like the popular *Dinner & a Movie* event will continue along with testing new concepts like a live-music score event featuring local musicians accompanying film screenings.

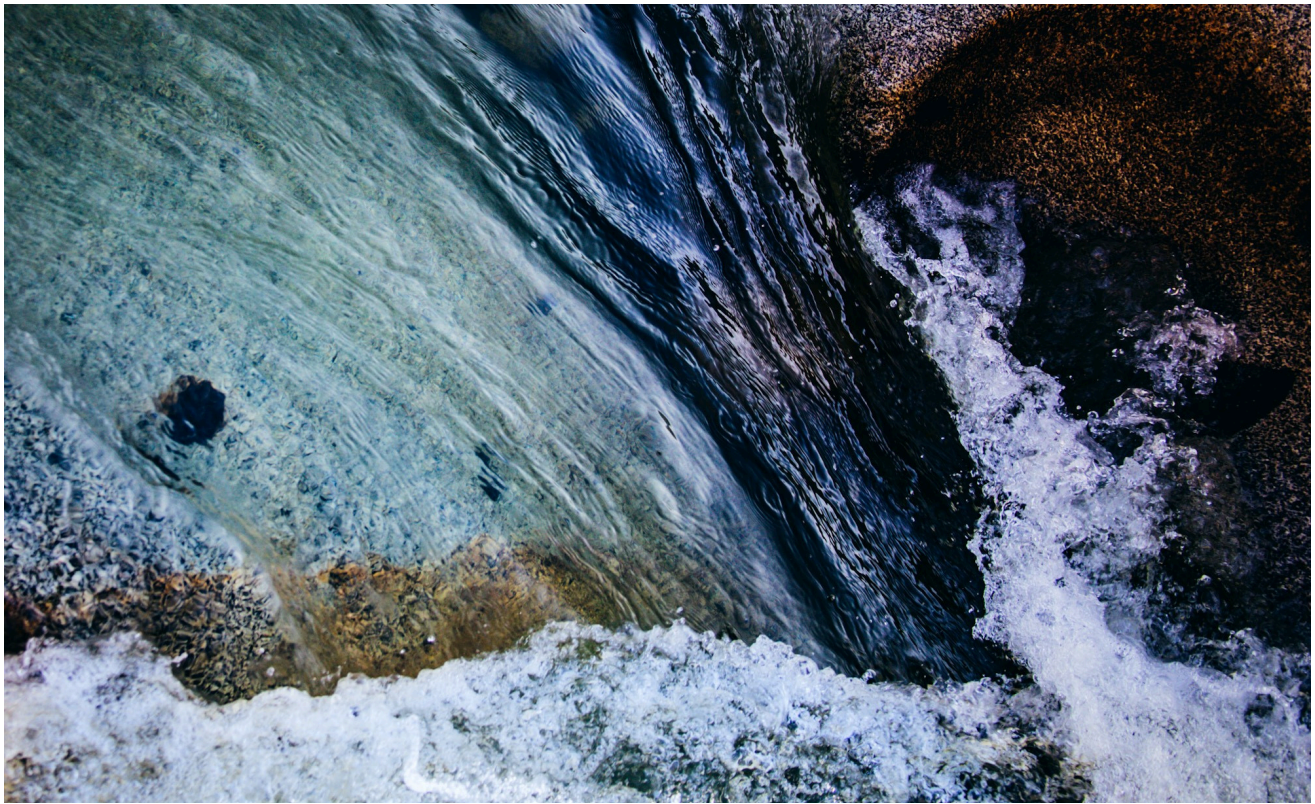


Film Festival On-Tour

Wild & Scenic Film Festival On-Tour brings the best and brightest environmental and adventure films to 100s of communities across the country each year. On-Tour is designed to provide other national and international organizations with a turn-key event which increases their membership, raises funds, and inspires activism in their community. The Wild & Scenic Film Festival helped our On-Tour partners raise more than \$800,000 in 2023. Over the next five years we will continue building on our success helping organizations inspire their communities and support their mission to create meaningful local change.

Development

As much as ever, SYRCL relies on community support to carry out our mission on every level. Donations and grant funding are critical to organizing the Yuba River Cleanup, holding a world-class film festival, monitoring water quality, restoring meadows, forests, and floodplains, and taking action to safeguard the Yuba. Over the next five years, we will strive to offer more avenues for individuals, businesses, and philanthropists to engage with and invest in the organization. And we will continue to demonstrate to them how they positively impact the work we do every day to protect, restore, and inspire.



Finance & Administration

SYRCL's growth over the last five years has been tremendous, with a full-time staff size which has nearly doubled since the previous strategic plan was written. Every person and dollar which comes through SYRCL's doors goes through Finance and Administration. We will continue to follow best practices in maintaining financial security, ensuring that we remain positioned as an environmental leader in the community. We continue to seek new opportunities in how we support our growing team. As we look to the future, we want to see our employees thriving here, enjoying regionally competitive compensation, excellent benefits, retirement perks, and an inclusive and diverse staff culture which promotes personal and professional growth.



Photo by Jonathan Finegold



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