

Canyon Keepers Launch 2010 Season of Service

Do you enjoy exploring beautiful outdoor natural areas? Do you enjoy hiking, mountain biking, equestrian riding, fishing, white water rafting? Would you like to learn more about the history, ecology and hydrology of our own spectacular American River Canyon? Canyon Keepers has launched its 2010 activities program and would like to help you reach those goals.

Now in its twelfth year, Canyon Keepers continues to protect, interpret and celebrate the rich natural resources of the Auburn State Recreation Area (ASRA), which covers 38,000 acres and 40 miles of the North and Middle Forks of the American River. Canyon Keepers is a totally volunteer organization that assists California State Parks in its management and interpretation of ASRA.

New Members and Volunteers Welcome

Canyon Keepers is now seeking new members and volunteers to participate in any of the organization's 2010 programs. They include docent support for State Parks, monthly hikes, trail maintenance, the Junior Rangers program, and hosting guest speakers and educational programs on a wide range of topics related to natural and cultural history. Since 2005 Canyon Keepers has published and distributed its popular 'little yellow book' entitled "American River Canyon Hikes".

The general public is always invited to attend monthly meetings, programs and hikes. If you would like to be placed on our e-mail announcements distribution list or if you would be interested to look into getting more involved with Canyon Keepers as a volunteer, contact Shelly Reimers, New Members Support Coordinator, at 916-663-2669, or castle_cat1@att.net.

Importance of Canyon Keepers

ASRA's park rangers and support crews are stretched thin. They need to provide law enforcement, fire protection, river safety, maintenance and oversight for 38,000 acres. With today's State and Federal budget constraints, State Parks is facing increasing challenges to provide basic services and is relying increasingly more on volunteer support. In peak summer visitation times Canyon Keepers maintains a visible presence at key public gathering areas, like the North Fork-Middle Fork Confluence area. There they assist the public with useful information on trails, river safety, ASRA regulations as well as nature interpretation and the general history and resources of ASRA.

In 2009 Canyon Keepers logged more than one thousand hours of volunteer service to ASRA. That level of support, in addition to all the increased public participation and support for the river canyon and recreation area, is becoming more and more important as an argument against defunding and limiting public access for State parks and recreation areas. Canyon Keepers increases its scope and positive impact further by coordinating its activities with many other state and local organizations with overlapping interests,

such as: Protect American River Canyons (PARC), American River Conservancy, State Parks Foundation, Placer Nature Center, and the Auburn Recreation District. Many of these groups will be sharing duties in the upcoming Earth Day volunteer cleanup of the American River Canyon.

Issues/Threats/Opportunities for 2010

In 2009 there was debate and turmoil over the threatened closure and real cutbacks to hundreds of State parks in California. Even though the Auburn State Recreation Area is primarily Federally funded, by the Bureau of Reclamation, it was not left untouched by California's fiscal troubles. ASRA staff had to take State furlough days the same as all other State employees and the cutbacks to State Parks Department's overall budget has also hindered the local crews' operations. In the meantime, a ballot measure for November now proposes to stabilize State funding for all State parks and ASRA would also stand to benefit.

The Federal Government is facing its own fiscal problems and continued Federal funding for ASRA has recently been questioned. In 2009 there was particular concern about the Federal Army Corps of Engineers' continued funding in support of Lake Clementine and the lake's closure was even proposed. The City of Auburn and other local agencies have also questioned the lack of an annual contract between the Bureau of Reclamation and the California Department of Forestry regarding American River Canyon wildfire suppression and brush control.

It appears that adequate funding for all of these areas is in place for 2010, but more budget cuts are in the pipeline. As a result, the role of volunteer organizations like Canyon Keepers becomes more and more important.

One physical change anticipated in the canyon in 2010 is the beginning construction of a seismic retrofit and upgrade for the Foresthill Bridge. Most of the work will be occurring at the top of the bridge and canyon trails are not expected to be closed for any extended periods of time.

In 2009 Placer County approved the funding and installation for a major trail extension along the North Fork between the Foresthill Bridge and Ponderosa Bridge. However, that action was challenged by a legal lawsuit and the project remains stalled.

Contact Us

But locals and visitors all continue to use and cherish our natural canyons. Our volunteers continue to hike, maintain and interpret the hundreds of miles of existing trails, riverbanks and vistas. If you want more information about Canyon Keepers, contact Shelly at 916-663-2669 or visit the website at www.canyonkeepers.org.