

A scenic view of a wooden bridge over a river in a mountainous area. The bridge is made of dark wood and has a simple railing. The river is shallow and rocky, with a gravel bar in the middle. The background features steep, forested mountains under a clear blue sky.

SPRING 2020

HEADWATERS

The President Comes to Town, Leaving Rivers in Peril

In times of need, we turn to an old friend: Mother Nature

The Storytelling Project

Friends of the River: The Voice of California's Rivers Since 1973



Friends of the River:
The Voice of California's
Rivers Since 1973

CONTACT:

1418 20th Street, Suite 100
Sacramento, CA 95811
(916)442-3155
info@friendsoftheriver.org
www.friendsoftheriver.org

BOARD OF DIRECTORS:

- **Bob Cushman**, Chair
- **Jeff Depew**, Vice Chair
- **Jann Dorman**, Treasurer
- **Richard Weiss**, Secretary
- **Scott Armstrong**
- **Charlie Center**
- **Garrick Chang**
- **Ravi Kurani**
- **Donelle Morgan**
- **Jonas Minton**
- **Heike Schmitz**
- **John Yost**

STAFF:

- **Eric Wesselman**, Executive Director
- **Ronald Stork**, Senior Policy Advocate
- **Toby Briggs**, Engagement Director
- **Brittney McMahon**, Development Director
- **Kellie Dawson**, Program and Development Assistant
- **Colton Johnson**, On River Program Associate / Wild and Scenic Liaison
- **Arminda Montoya**, Contract Accountant

Headwaters, Volume 34, Issue 1

Designed and produced by: Mystery Machine Creative

Cover Photo: by Markus Spiske, Unsplash

IN THIS ISSUE:

- Update from FOR and Response to COVID-19 Page 2
- A Big win for Rivers Page 3
- In times of need, we turn to an old friend Page 3
- The President Comes to Town, Leaving Rivers in Peril Page 4-5
- The Storytelling Project..... Page 6
- Prop 17: A Pathway to a Life on Rivers Page 6
- Making of an Advocate Page 7

SUMMER EVENT CALENDAR:

The following event dates are tentative and may be subject to cancellation due to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions. Check our website for the most up to date information.

- July 12 – Canoe Adventure, Lower American River
- July 25-26 – Canoe Fundamentals Class, Natoma Reservoir
- Aug 2 – Canoe Adventure, Lower American River
- Aug 29 – Canoe Moving Water Class, Lower American River
- Sept. 19 – Volunteer Appreciation, Camp Lotus

UPDATES FROM FOR AND RESPONSE TO COVID-19

By Eric Wesselman, Executive Director



Friends of the River was born out of innovation, adaptation, and creativity. The founders of FOR had never led a river protection campaign before, but they forged ahead navigating as they went. Our ability to read and run rapids empowered our community to protect rivers as Wild and Scenic and prevent further destruction from dams over the years. We can apply the same ingenuity to the current health situation from COVID-19 as we point positive.

The FOR office is working remotely for the next few weeks to support the health of our staff and community. Our work continues to protect rivers even as we telecommute! FOR staff can

be reached during this time. Visit our website and check out the Staff page to view the best contact information.

In accordance with public health recommendations, to contribute to slowing the transmission and in an abundance of caution for vulnerable communities, we will be cancelling or modifying FOR events for the next 2 months.

The following events are cancelled/on standby:

- May 13 - Point Positive Day at the Capitol and CA Museum (cancelled)
- May 28 - River of Song in Berkeley (on standby)
- Any rafting or canoeing events (cancelled through May 25)

As the situation develops, we will send updates about FOR events being rescheduled or further postponed.

Look for future FOR bonus material to help keep you informed and entertained as you stay safe and sound.

A BIG WIN FOR RIVERS



On February 12, 2020, the House passed the Protecting America's Wilderness Act, which includes the three major public lands bills in California! If adopted by the Senate and signed by the President, the three bills will add more than 500 miles of river to the national wild and scenic system!

The Central Coast Heritage Protection Act includes 150 miles of proposed wild and scenic rivers, as well as 200,000 acres of new wilderness area. The San Gabriel Mountains Foothills and Rivers Act would add 45 miles of designated wild and scenic rivers. It also would expand the current San Gabriel National Monument that was created by President Obama.

The third bill included is the Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act. Introduced by Rep. Huffman, this bill packs an astounding 450 miles of what could become national wild and scenic rivers.

The Protecting America's Wilderness Act passed with 231 votes. The bill also includes wilderness bills from Washington and Colorado. The next stop is the Senate. Sen. Harris introduced Protecting Unique and Beautiful Landscapes by Investing in CA (PUBLIC) Lands Act, which is the Senate companion bill. Friends of the River has been working with a larger coalition to help build momentum for these bills. Sign up for our e-newsletter, the River Advocate, for updates and action alerts.

IN TIMES OF NEED, WE TURN TO AN OLD FRIEND: MOTHER NATURE

Humans are social creatures, and social isolation can be very stressful. The internet has allowed us to come together in ways that make us feel more connected to one another and remember that we are not alone. We are all in this together. But there is something else that is always there for us, nature.

As humans we are deeply connected to nature. We often forget how much, but studies show that spending a little as 20 minutes in nature can significantly reduce stress and increase our sense of wellbeing. Nature often conjures up idyllic images of the forest or the mountains or wild and scenic rivers, but nature is all around us, even in the city. "Nature" can be any place that is outside (ideally at least 6 feet away from other people) and away from the distractions of technology.

Grounding is a form of stress relief that connects us to nature, more specifically to the earth itself. It is a practice of forming a connection with your body and the earth. It can be as simple as standing barefoot in the grass, in the dirt, or taking a walk on the beach. Many of us feel a deep sense of connection to the earth while being on the river, feeling the water through our fingers, digging our feet into the muddy banks. Focusing on those sensory experiences, even remotely as a form of meditation, is a proven relaxation technique. Grounding reminds us of our profound connection to the natural rhythms of the earth and that we must be better stewards of its care.

The current situation has forced to make changes to our daily lives, but it has also allowed us to slow down and appreciate the things and people most important to us. We hope you can take this time to enjoy some fresh air and find peace in the solitude. We wish you and your loved ones well.

Enjoy nature while social distancing:

- Unplug from social media, cell phones, and email
- Talk a walk outside, alone or with a dog
- Do some gardening – try it without gloves to really get connected to the dirt
- Visit a nearby river or body of water
- Practice grounding - sit quietly directly on the ground or a blanket at a nearby park
- Encourage children to spend time outside – try learning the names of local plants
- Get to know your watershed – explore local hikes you've never been to before

SUPPORT MORE WORK LIKE THIS!

At times the news can be overwhelming, so it's refreshing to get some GOOD NEWS once in a while! The passage by the House of the Protecting America's Wilderness Act gives us a reason to rejoice in the good news coming out of Congress for a change.

Support Friends of the River by making a gift today or setting up a recurring monthly gift to provide the funding required to make good news happen! Changes in water policy can take years, even decades, and Friends of the River has a long history of sticking it out to make change happen. Use the envelope included or log onto www.friendsoftheriver.org to contribute to the future of California rivers.



THE PRESIDENT COMES TO TOWN, LEAVING RIVERS IN PERIL

By Ron Stork, Senior Policy Advocate



The President was in campaign mode when he came to Bakersfield in February. Addressing the adoring crowd, he promised them “a lot of water, a lot of dam, a lot of everything”.

The culmination of the event was the signing of an executive order directing the Secretaries of Commerce and the Interior to make water deliveries “more reliable and bountiful.” The executive order (he called it legislation) directed the Secretaries to create more storage, capture more water, and provide more regulatory certainty to water users.

The speech was delivered with his typical bombast and less-than-accurate retelling of the facts, but the real question would be what it all means and what we, and you, can do about it. That’s what this River Currents will try to reveal.

Whole lot of water

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation) last year reached an agreement with the State of California to reassign the burdens they shared to let enough water free from their dams to keep the San Joaquin/Sacramento River Delta reasonably fresh. And in February, the Regional Director on Reclamation inked the Record of Decision for Reclamation’s new operations plan — a plan that the State of California promptly filed suit against.

Taken together, Reclamation expects to deliver an average of half a million acre-feet more water annually, squeezing more water out of the Delta mostly for San Joaquin Valley west side corporate farms. That’s not chump change for a project that delivers seven million acre-feet annually, half to the San Joaquin Valley.

Some of this squeezed water will come from “the environment,” like water needed to sustain the state’s fisheries. Some will come from Southern California and some coastal cities, the primary beneficiaries of the State Water Project.

The executive order asks Reclamation to come up with even more water, which may mean that some river near you may be asked to give up more water.



Shasta Dam

The Shasta Dam raise project was very much on the mind of Congressman Devin Nunes (R-Fresno) and Secretary of the Interior, David Bernhardt during the Presidential Visit.

Devin called it the most important project, and Secretary Bernhardt said that Reclamation was making progress on the pre-construction efforts every day, and that would become visible soon.

In early February, using some discretionary funds under his control, the Secretary rescued the Shasta Dam preconstruction and design effort that the new Democrat-controlled House of Representatives had not directly funded for two years.

And apparently the Secretary means business. In late February, Reclamation reacted to the state’s efforts to deny Reclamation a Clean Water Act water quality permit for a preconstruction test by saying, in effect, we don’t need your stinking permits.

We suspect that his next step will be to reverse the blindingly obvious finding the Reclamation’s final feasibility report that the project is in conflict with state law. Our concerns are serious enough that we’ve filed a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit to plumb the murky depths of the Department of the Interior to see what they are up to.

California, of course, can’t assist Reclamation in planning and construction of the dam raise because the expanded reservoir would flood more of the storied McCloud River, a river protected by the state’s Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, something that we began to demonstrate in our litigation in state court last year.

With the Trump Administration apparently proceeding to commit unlawful acts, this could get ugly, very ugly. It would not surprise us if more lawsuits will be needed.



Subsidizing it

Presidents Carter and Reagan put a stop to the federal water project pork barrel by requiring the water and power beneficiaries of these projects to pay the federal treasury back for the money they borrowed. Uneconomic projects dropped like flies.

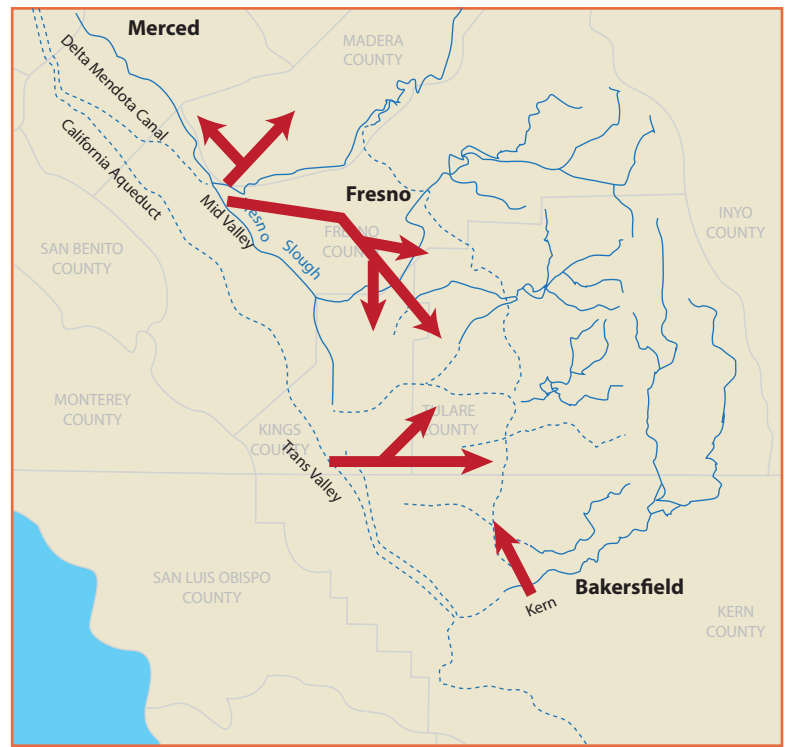
But the water lobby is strong and persistent, and it's been clawing its way back to the federal trough ever since. In 2016 they pulled off a brilliant stroke. They passed a "Drought" bill that offers them 25% or 50% federal subsidies for dam projects. And for federal water project water contractors who have elected to pay off their remaining capital debt to the U.S. Treasury, they get permanent water contracts with the federal government. This replaces the term contracts they currently have that might be reduced if the federal government ever realizes that they have more water contracts than they have water.

But it gets worse. The money they pay into the federal treasury goes into a special fund for the Secretary of the Interior to use to finance and build more storage dams. In effect, they keep the money in the family.

Needless to say, every Central Valley Project water contractor is electing to pay off their capital debt, creating a \$600 million "Water Storage Account" to be used by the Secretary as he or she sees fit.

Worse yet, there are various bills in Congress to set aside additional money for storage projects. For example Rep. Josh Harder (D-Modesto) has a bill to add \$100 million to a new storage fund every year from 2030 through 2060 (H.R. 2473). The latest version of S. 1932, a bill to make the 2016 legislation permanent, would authorize an additional \$750 million to be used for water storage projects.

Fortunately, there are some internal contradictions in the 2016 law that could stop or slow down the process of contract conversions. As a courtesy, our attorneys have sent a blunt letter to Interior informing them of these issues.



Grand Plans

Already the beneficiaries of nearly every drop of rain and snowflake that comes off the west side of the Sierra Nevada, water districts on the east side of the southern San Joaquin Valley have a grand plan called the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint to bring two million acre-feet of water from the beleaguered Sacramento River/Delta to their fields.

Their plan would construct a tunnel under the Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta, enlarge the federal Delta-Mendota Canal (DMC) and build the Mid-Valley Canal to take DMC water to lands from Madera to Visalia. It would also construct a Trans-Valley Canal from the California Aqueduct to the White and Tule River drainages. It would also build a large canal from the Kern River above Bakersfield to route the water north. They would also like to have a big new dam on the San Joaquin River and an expansion of the big San Luis Reservoir near Los Banos.

Jason Phillips, the executive officer of the Friant Water Authority, is organizing the Southern San Joaquin Valley to lobby state and federal officials for the project. He and Congressman Devin Nunes (R-Fresno) hosted Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt in a "Water Forum" leading up to the President's visit, where Mr. Phillips was able to "puff" his project, a project that has been renamed a "Blueprint for Extinction" by others.

THE STORYTELLING PROJECT

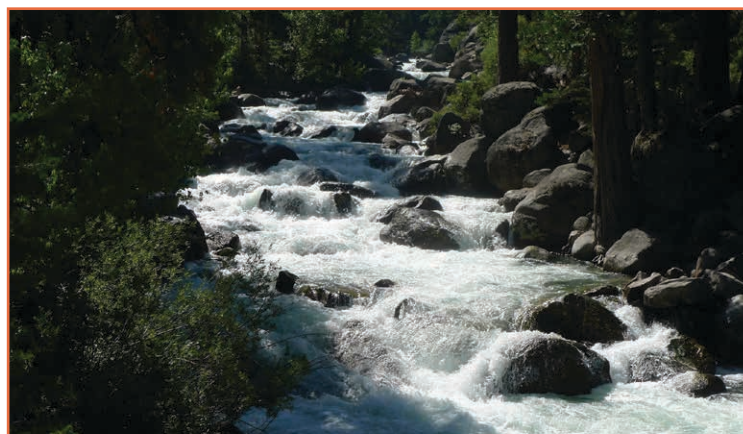


Tell us about a time in Friends of the River's history. FOR's successes may be marked by laws passed, legal decisions made, or policies changed, but they were created by people with people. So many of you have been part of FOR and have contributed to it with your time and talents.

As we approach our 50th year anniversary in 2023, we want to delve into the opportunity to remember how far we have traveled since 1973, even as we look where we need to go for the next 50 years.

We invited a handful of folks to start us off with one of their stories from our collective history. This Headwaters kicks off a series of storytelling that you will see in print, our website, and on social media.

If you would like to learn more about how to contribute a story, email Toby at tobybriggs@friendsoftheriver.org or visit our website at friendsoftheriver.org/get-involved/the-storytelling-project. Enjoy the two stories below—and send us more!



PROP 17: A PATHWAY TO A LIFE ON RIVERS

By Ann Cassidy



Photo provided by Ann Cassidy

In the early 70's I had energy and time on my hands, with the dawning of the environmental movement across America, I decided to get politically involved. Through the Sierra Club I learned about saving a river I had never heard of. Having enjoyed fishing and playing in creeks as a kid and backpacking in the Sierra this seemed like a worthy cause. I soon found myself appointed Marin County chairman for Prop 17 to Save the Stanislaus.

As county chairman, I, of course, had to see the Stanislaus! For my first river trip I joined a Friends of the River (FOR) fundraiser down the Stan run by OARS. I was immediately hooked by the scenery, the inner peace channeled by flowing water, and the contagious high spirits of my fellow river adventurers and our river guides.

Prop 17 was narrowly defeated, perhaps the result of ballot language deliberately meant to confuse the voters. One had to vote "No" to save the river from being buried beneath the reservoir rising behind the now even taller New Melones dam. Prop 17 began and ended my political career, but launched me on a continuing journey with rivers. Next came the Tuolumne River and then the Grand Canyon — first as an OARS passenger and then a trainee boatman. I guided on rivers for 20 years mostly in the Grand Canyon and the Southwest, made many lifetime friends, and learned so much about the values that free-flowing rivers offer to the environment and people.

Every trip was a remarkable adventure with its unique twists and highlights. Today, while not on rivers, I reflect on the everyday life lessons and inspirations from the Stanislaus and other rivers. Who can forget the wonder of wandering in the maze of branches under the giant fig tree at Duck Bar, soaking in the gurgle of Rose Creek, or belly crawling under stalactites? I realize that natural landscapes and ecosystem functions all around the world must be treasured and advocated for, even if one hasn't had the chance to experience them. I owe this awareness to the Stanislaus and my impulsive decision to join FOR and support Prop 17. I am very proud to have been a charter member of FOR and to have been able to support it for all these years.

MAKING OF AN ADVOCATE

By Charlie Center



Photo provided by Charlie Center

I sat at the table with my legs crossed while adult voices rose and fell around me. Earlier I had been following the conversation, but now my mind drifted to swimming in the river and my latest science fiction novel. My parents had dragged me to these meetings for as long as I could remember. The adults gathered and talked about conservation and other environmental issues, the importance of which were, in my mind, a few rungs below the 49ers recently trading Joe-Freakin'-Montana.

Once I reached my teenage years, I began to talk more openly with my parents about local, state, and national conservation causes. By that time, I had been deeply impacted by the things I witnessed growing up. But, on a fundamental level, I would still default to my disbelief that something could forever take away or alter the rivers, mountains, and open spaces that I loved.

As a young adult, I ventured out into the world. I was fortunate enough to travel to other countries and kayak down rivers flowing through wild and pristine canyons. Vibrant healthy communities would be nestled along their banks. At the same time, I began to see vast hydro-projects both fill and threaten to fill these same canyons that I had navigated. I thought back to my parents, whose way of life was fundamentally altered by the damming of the Stanislaus River. The people in these communities and countries I had visited, like my parents decades ago, had lived, played, and laughed on the banks of the rivers only to watch the water rise and drown what they had always known and thought immutable. I began to realize that nothing is guaranteed for the natural world around us. There is no invisible hand that will protect the places we love. The closest we have to that invisible hand, is us. The river and open spaces in our backyards are not guaranteed; their continued existence is not a right. We must be the stewards, the watchers, the protectors of the wild places.

The meetings my parents brought me to as a child were for Friends of the River (FOR). I am 38 years old now. For as long as I can remember, FOR has been rising up to defend places we cherish. Recently, I joined FOR at the table as a board member with young kids of my own sitting and listening. My hands now join the many that

help watch, steward, and defend the rivers and canyons of our great state. Now more than ever, we need these invisible hands, watchers, and protectors for each river canyon — from the far north to the southern tip. Join this amazing community in protecting California rivers from their headwaters that tumble down the high mountains, through the great valley and cities, until freshwater hits salt of the Pacific Ocean.

KEEP THE RIVERS FLOWING BECOME A SUSTAINING MEMBER

As a Sustainer, your monthly contribution will provide a predictable revenue source, allowing FOR to plan and execute successful coalition campaigns throughout the year while helping us cut down on overhead expenses and staff time.

It's a no-fuss way to keep the rivers flowing!

Use the enclosed envelope and check the Sustainer box, or give online at FriendsOfTheRiver.org.

Contributions to Friends of the River are tax deductible to the full extent of the law. Tax ID 94-2400210

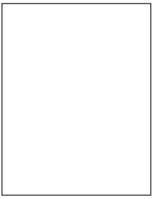


GET THE LATEST NEWS

The best way to stay up to date on our work is to subscribe to our monthly e-newsletter the River Advocate. Sign up on the homepage at FriendsOfTheRiver.org, or send back the enclosed envelope with your email address.



1418 20th Street, Suite 100
Sacramento, CA 95811
RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



SUMMER VOLUNTEERS —NEEDED—



Interested in helping FOR grow?

FOR is looking for volunteers to help in the following capacities:

- Digital Image Curator
- Photography
- Data Entry as needed
- Phone banking
- Political Cartoonist
- Social Media Maven

If you have the time and ability to help out, we would love to hear from you.

Contact Kellie at
kellie@friendsoftheriver.org
or 916-442-3155 x202
for more information.