

The River Advocate

Friends of the River

The voice of California's Rivers
friendsoftheriver.org



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corrections made from previous version - apologies for duplicate emails

Upcoming Events



Jonas Minton and FOR members celebrate at the 2018 California River Awards.

The [California River Awards](#) will take place on Friday, April 21, 2023 at the City Club of San Francisco. This gala event is FOR's most important fundraiser. Please consider sponsoring the event, donating an auction item, purchasing an auction item on-line, and plan to join us for a wonderful evening with dinner and a live auction.

[Guide Activist Training](#) will take place on the American River, May 27 – June 4. This program is for those who would like to learn whitewater skills and volunteer for FOR. Participants of the 9-day program learn class 3 whitewater paddle boat skills along with river policy and advocacy. The program includes camping, meals and showers.

The Voice of California Rivers for 50 Years

Friends of the River turns 50 this year. Fifty is a great age, old enough to have deep experience, but young enough to attract attention and still raise hell. FOR was born in 1973. The initiative organization for Proposition 17, (the initiative to save the Stanislaus), was given the name Friends of the River. Proposition 17 was tragically defeated in 1974 by a well-funded and deceptive campaign. However, Friends of the River grew into a formidable state-wide river organization and continued to fight for the Stanislaus and many other rivers, mobilizing thousands of people in letter writing, petitions, Water Board hearings, comments, and demonstrations. Throughout the 70s and early 80s, FOR continued the battle for the Stanislaus before the SWRCB and, in 1979, to prevent New Melones from filling, Mark Dubois chained himself to a rock...

Read more [here](#).



River hero Mark Dubois at a press conference, 1979. Photo courtesy of Coni Beeson.

Currents: Victories & Threats

If not now, when?

This week Gov. Newsom issued an executive order (N-3-23) authorizing the State Water Board to ignore environmental laws and store additional water in the State's reservoirs despite the fact that our snowpack is above normal with more storms on the way.

This is a missed leadership opportunity. This year nature has provided historic amounts of rainfall and snow pack. The Governor and the State Water Board have the opportunity to share nature's bounty with both people and the environment...

Read more [here](#).



The Suisun Marsh is a prominent wetland in the Bay-Delta ecosystem. Photo courtesy of Keiko Mertz.



The National Capital, courtesy of Ron Stork.

If at first you don't succeed, try again

Since every Congress is a new Congress, one of the California-related wild & scenic river bills has been reintroduced. On January 31, 2023, Senators Merkley, Wyden, Feinstein, and Padilla reintroduced the [Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act](#), a measure to expand wild & scenic river and NRA coverage of the Smith River into the state of Oregon...

Read more [here](#).

Three proposed bills threatened California Rivers

We Californians are becoming all-too-familiar with the weather whiplash of extreme dry periods followed by torrential rains. This whiplash has caused angst amongst the public, water interests, and legislators, all seeking solutions to solve for drought and flood at the same time. Unfortunately, sustainable solutions are often passed over in favor of dams, which at a simple level may appear to solve the problem. However, adding more dams is not a holistic solution to California's water woes for several key reasons...

Read more [here](#).



The great Sacramento River, which nourishes and enriches much of the state, is deeply strained and grossly over-allocated. Photo courtesy of Steve Evans.

Friends of the River coalition litigation in defense of the Clean Water Act going to the U.S. Supreme Court?



U.S. Supreme Courthouse. Photo courtesy of the Supreme Court of the United States.

Friends of the River (and NGO partners) has been in a long-running legal struggle over federal hydropower licenses and state authority (these cases have national implications) to protect and manage their waters. This previously-undisputed authority under the Federal Clean Water Act Section 401 empowers states to provide oversight to hydropower and other projects to protect water quality in the state...

Read more [here](#).

Proposed Del Puerto Canyon Dam stumbles — at least a little

The Del Puerto Water District aspires to build an 84,000 acre-foot reservoir in the foothills just west of Patterson. However, the project stumbled some when it lost a lawsuit brought by Friends of the River, California Native Plant Society, Center for Biological Diversity, and the Sierra Club over its environmental impact report (EIR). The judgement, finalized last month in Stanislaus County Superior Court, was a narrow loss; the EIR did not examine road relocation alternatives and got a penalty foul as a result...

Read more [here](#).



Del Puerto Canyon "Gateway," framed by two rock outcroppings. Photo courtesy of Elias Funez.

Sites Dam offers an additional water availability analysis

The trouble with trying to squeeze more water out of California's rivers is that the juiciest sites were taken long ago. That fact has kept many of the remaining dam proposals relegated to the "deadbeat dam" category.

Last month, the proposed \$3 billion 1.5 million acre-foot west-side Sacramento Valley reservoir provided the State Water Resources Control Board (Board) another water availability analysis in its quest for state water rights. Some scenarios projected that the reservoir had many years when it would be unable to capture much "excess" flow in the Sacramento River for diversion and subsequent sales to south state urban water districts...

Read more [here](#).



The proposed location for Sites Reservoir is a beautiful valley with abundant natural history and Native American heritage. Photo courtesy of Sue Grau.

Isabella Dam on the Kern River gets ready to receive Sierra snowpack



A parched Kern River bed, as it runs through Bakersfield. Photo courtesy of Bring Back the Kern.

In recent years, the Army Corps of Engineers has been raising the height of its Isabella Dam, adding spillway capacity, and making major seismic safety improvements. The seismic concerns have also prompted interim operating restrictions to prevent filling the 565,000 acre-foot reservoir — something that the drought has taken care of naturally. However, the project has progressed sufficiently for the Corps to seek permission from its headquarters to exceed the dam's interim operating elevations in order to receive all or a portion of this year's generous expected runoff...

Read more [here](#).

FOR asks the U.S. EPA to not bankroll the proposed Pacheco Dam

In a twist of perhaps cruel irony, the Congress saddled the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) with the job of providing low-interest loans to construct dams around the country. The Santa Clara Valley Water District (Valley Water) is among the supplicants for such loans.

That gives citizens, of course, the option of offering advice to the EPA. So noting, among other matters, that Valley Water's \$2-billion-dollar or more Pacheco Dam would inundate a portion of Henry Coe State Park — in evident violation of state law — [we suggested that the EPA decline Valley Water's request](#).

Endangered Plant May Protect Endangered River

Ron Stork, Senior Plant Advocate

It's not common for a conspicuous but new-to-science shrub to be found in California, a well botanized state. But that's what happened in 1992 with the discovery of the highly endemic Shasta snow wreath, *Neviusia cliftonii*, (*Rosaceae*, *Kerrieae*) [growing around the shorelines of Shasta Reservoir](#).

But rare plant discoveries may have consequences...

Read more [here](#).



The endangered Shasta snow wreath. Photo courtesy of Julie Nelson.

Wild and Scenic River Anniversaries

California's original wild & scenic rivers, Act III

February is not a fertile month for wild & scenic river *designation* anniversaries. It's more the season for bill introductions; so for this month, I continue the story of the rivers protected by the original California Wild & Scenic Rivers Act. Act I was the creation of the state designation and their inclusion within it. Act II was their nomination for, and acceptance into, the National Wild & Scenic Rivers System. Act III will describe whether they could withstand the legal challenges surrounding their inclusion in the national system...

Read more [here](#).



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