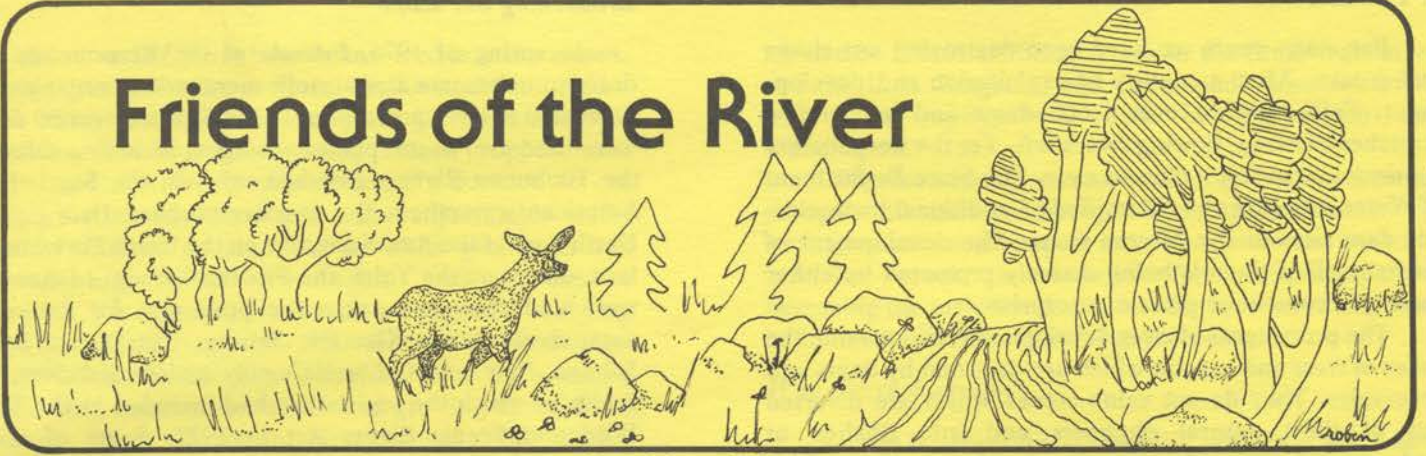


# Friends of the River



*Stanislaus River*



*photo by Bob Krips*

*The people who make up Friends of the River love rivers and creeks. We believe that the last stretches of free-flowing streams have too much life, and are too beautiful, to be destroyed.*

*There are many ambitious and greedy exploiters with no respect for rivers. Friends of the River has learned that rivers and creeks which do not have dedicated defenders will be lost forever to development. We have also learned that if people do not strictly conserve water and energy, rivers will be the victims. So we are organizing, educating, lobbying and fighting for the lives of our flowing waters.*

*FOR is California's only organization dedicated solely to river and creek protection. We'd like your help.*

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# "A river is more than an amenity, it is a

## *It's no secret*

For many years we have been destroying our rivers and creeks. After a century of exploitation and development, California has over 1,000 dams and only a few stretches of living, flowing rivers left. Yet the despoilation continues at as fast a pace as ever. The State Department of Water Resources has identified 57 additional hydroelectric dam sites in the Sierras alone. The development of virtually all of them is being actively promoted by either local government or private enterprise.

The proponents of river development do not value the miles of river and canyon which are drowned by dams and reservoirs. They do not value creeks which are diverted out of their natural channels and into ditches or underground pipes. They do not value the creatures which lose their homes and their lives. They are not concerned with people who treasure a stream and their relationship with it. While the destroyers of rivers want us to believe that their projects are beneficial to society as a whole, in truth they most often bring financial profit to a very few. Not surprisingly, taxpayers end up footing the bill for these projects with their dollars as well as with their rivers.

Since it began in 1973, **Friends of the River** has been a grass-roots organization. We have a shared feeling for rivers, and a belief that persistent citizen pressure will influence the public policies and decisions which control the fate of rivers.

## *The Stanislaus battle and the birth of Friends of the River*

**FOR** was originally formed to protect a much-loved nine mile stretch of the Stanislaus River. Its magnificent canyon in the Sierra Nevada foothills is the outdoor home of a large and loyal community and is visited and appreciated by thousands of people each year including rafters and kayakers, hikers, anglers, gold miners, picnickers and just plain admirers. The threat was, and is, flooding by an Army Corps of Engineers dam. The Stanislaus already has 13 major dams in the watershed.

In 1974, over half a million voters signed petitions, circulated by 30,000 river friends, to place Proposition 17 on the ballot. This citizens' initiative, to protect the Stanislaus by putting it in the State Wild and Scenic Rivers System, brought the conflict between rivers and dams before the electorate for the first time. The high-energy grass-roots volunteer effort for the Stanislaus was barely defeated (47% to 52%) after a purposely confusing, big-money media campaign against it. But Prop 17 made many many people aware of the costs of dam projects and of the selfish financial interests that are rarely mentioned by politicians, developers and dam-building agencies.

The Stanislaus fight has gone through several more chapters and is not over yet. The dam will be built, but the State of California still contends that the canyon is "a unique asset to the state and nation" and should not be flooded since there are no delivery systems for the reservoir's water at this time. **FOR** intends to make sure that the state and federal officials don't forget that position, and don't forget that 2.4 million Californians voted to "deliver the river."

## *Broadening our scope*

In spring of 1976, **Friends of the River** made the decision to become a non-profit membership organization dedicated to river protection. In the Sierras, over 50 dams were (and are) in the planning stages, including three in the Tuolumne River watershed, nine in the South Fork American watershed, the massive Auburn Dam on the North Fork of the American, five on the North Fork Stanislaus, others on the Yuba, the Pit, the Carson. Maneuvers were underway to weaken the protection for the north coast rivers — the Klamath, Trinity, Van Duzen, Scott, Salmon, New, and California's only undammed river, the Smith — which the legislature had included in the State Wild and Scenic Rivers Act in 1972. Some of these threatened streams had defenders, but none had a strong defense. **FOR** regrouped to build and coordinate that defense.



# is a treasure." Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes

Since then, FOR has become involved in many issues. We organized and led a powerful coalition which forced a public utility to drop its ruinous plans for the North Fork Stanislaus. We organized strong citizen support and experts to testify for President Carter's decision to cut funding for Auburn Dam and other unjustifiable water projects. (Auburn is now held up while geologists and engineers argue whether its safety problems can be resolved.) We mobilized a letter writing and lobbying campaign against Senate Bill 345, which would abolish the State Wild and Scenic Rivers System. (The bill's author quit pushing the measure because of growing opposition.) FOR put on a successful first annual Wild Rivers conference where water experts, politicians and river lovers shared ideas on conservation, water management, river and creek values and political strategies. And we

lobbied on issues affecting rivers in the State legislature and the U.S. Congress, and developed communications with many sympathetic ears in Sacramento and Washington.

FOR also assisted a number of individuals in forming groups and building campaigns for the protection of their local streams. Local support for a river, or for an urban or suburban creek, is essential for its preservation. Becoming the expert and advocate for your favorite stream is the most effective friendship you can give it.

## *Why rivers & creeks?*

A river is a treasure. A river is a bringer of joy. I have felt this joy, and seen others receive it, as people have through the ages.

Each river, and each mile of river, is a place unique in the world and irreplaceable, if enough of its natural character remains. A river is an adventure to be rediscovered season by season and year after year. It can be experienced from different perspectives: sleeping by its water or walking high above it; floating along its surface or swimming in and with its currents. Magical unexpected transformations may occur: a shaft of sunlight causing the river to glow and dazzle; a wind shift revealing new and different voices from the water; the sudden arrival of bats diving and gliding in the evening air. Worlds of life can be glimpsed which were there before we noticed, and will continue after we turn away. Waves break and rise, and break again, performing complex exercises, each one remaining in its place in the rapids.

Each is unique, yet all rivers share a presence, a "riverness", be they singing creeks or powerful, rolling currents. The streams shape the land and the life around them. Like the bulk of a great mountain, the motion of a river exerts a strong force on those who observe or live with it, molding their thoughts and actions. A river has dignity. In its presence, one stands straighter. Its beauty and strength exhilarate the mind and body and spirit. Its untiring journeying and sense of purpose convey a mystery, but also a sense of calmness, a feeling of peace. We gain humility from knowing that rivers are flowing through their ceaseless cycles, swelling and ebbing and returning again and again.

Like ourselves, a river is a life and a process. To those who treasure it, it has no price.

## *We'd like your help*

Friends of the River wants to continue our work. We'd like your help and involvement: to have more rivers and creeks protected by law; to stand in the way of illegitimate attempts to harm rivers; and to educate more people about their values.

We hope you'll take a moment to consider your own favorite stream, and then join Friends of the River.

