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Words about water: Protecting nature's factory in our backyard

By Supervisor Lori Parlin, EDWA board chair, and Rebecca Guo, EDWA general manager



Did you know that a watershed is nature's very own factory? It runs 24/7 to bring us a host of benefits necessary to our daily lives. A few benefits may immediately come to mind, such as water.

But did you know that our watershed provides over two dozen benefits? Tangible products such as food, timber and energy as well as intangible benefits such as clean air, flood protection and outdoor recreation opportunities are just a few on the list.

Recent years have unfortunately made us all too aware of how fragile our watershed is — from droughts to wildfires to extreme storms. Since we need most, if not all, of these benefits to thrive, the question becomes: how can we make sure that nature's factory (aka our watershed) keeps working?

That's why the El Dorado Water Agency, local land use authorities, resource conservation districts, non-governmental organizations, water purveyors, Tribal governments and state and federal agencies came together to develop a plan for our local watershed on the west slope (this includes the upper American River and a portion of the upper Cosumnes watersheds). This watershed is a huge area that encompasses two national forests and 1.5 million acres of land spanning from the Sierra Nevada divide to Folsom Reservoir. The watershed not only includes lakes and rivers, but also diverse landscapes ranging from expansive forests to fertile agricultural lands. This group of 17 agencies identified the major challenges facing our watershed and how we can come together to address these challenges.

As you can imagine, this will take not only everyone's efforts and support, but also investment. That's why the El Dorado Water Agency led the initiative to quantify the monetary value of the watershed. We did this because you cannot know how much to invest in something if you do not know its value. Just think about your car, for example. You are much more likely to pay for more expensive repairs on a car worth \$100,000 than one worth \$15,000.

Through our research, we found that this watershed provides \$15 billion per year in benefits. And what is more, these benefits are far reaching. To prove this, let's look at outdoor recreation. Our watershed experienced over 7 million visitation days in 2022 alone, with 53% of those being tourists from outside the county (this number does not include Tahoe visitors). People came from as far

away as Australia and South Africa to visit, demonstrating how valuable our watershed is from a global perspective. What's even more important to realize is that our watershed is vital to our local economy. Those 7 million visits supported 2,520 jobs resulting in more than \$118 million in local wages.

This recreational benefit is not unique. Our melted snow and rain support not only water supply for our region, but millions of people throughout the state; power is generated here and serves the greater Sacramento area and the list goes on. This is why protecting our watershed is important not only to those of us who live here, but those in the region, state and beyond.

Investing in our watershed's outdoor spaces is important not just to preserve its natural beauty, but every dollar invested in our watershed supports good health for people of all abilities, ages and socio-economic backgrounds, and stimulates and strengthens our regional economy. El Dorado Water Agency continues to make sure our watershed continues to thrive. We work to protect nature's factory so it can continue providing you with all the benefits that make this place our home.

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https://www.mtdemocrat.com/opinion/a-word-about-water-protecting-nature-s-factory-in-our-backyard/article_dfde2f40-dc2c-11ef-ac60-1bf8f39508c9.html