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Canyon celebration soars

By: Michelle Miller, Journal Staff Writer

The 15th annual American River Confluence Festival Sunday was a day to marvel at mountain lions, paint a ceramic salmon and enjoy a breathtaking view of the American River Canyon from the Overlook Park.

Tom Roush, 50, of Loomis, and his sons William, 6, and Michael, 3, were carving scales and fins into clay fish for an art project.

"We left the house at 8 a.m. not knowing where we were going to go," said Roush, a first-time visitor to the festival. "We saw the sign at Highway 49 and this has just been fantastic."

Several educational and arts and crafts booths had plenty for little hands to do Sunday.

The Placer Nature Center had a microscope for children to get an up-close glimpse at bugs.

"If we can ignite their passion for the Earth and to recognize that they are one with the Earth, then they'll become natural advocates for protection of the environment," said Leslie Warren, executive director of the Placer Nature Center, now in its 15th year.

Five-year-old Nathan Riffie, of Roseville, was quite proud of his accomplishment on the rock-climbing wall.

"I went all the way up. Twice!" he said. "When you're all the way up it's like being on top of a mountain."

But river enthusiasts couldn't help but think of the "politics" and revived discussion on constructing an Auburn dam that would put the river and the canyon under water.

Several anti-dam groups passed out information to educate visitors on the recreational, historical and spiritual uses for the canyon. Dam proponents say it is necessary for flood protection.

Even the morning river blessing that kicked off the festival had an undercurrent of concern about the canyon's future.

"As you know, we cannot take for granted the politics. We thought we settled this once already, twice and three times. I ask us all, 'What are we going to do about that?'" said Auburn artist Stan Padilla, who led the prayer. "We must see ourselves as the stewards and the hearts and minds for nature because she cannot speak in times like this."

Local flute group Loping Wolf played a Zuni morning song before the prayer. Then Tibet-born monk Lobsang Tsultrim gave a blessing to the river, chanting and throwing rice into the canyon.

"There's got to be other ways to protect flood zones without taking away this sacred place," said Simone Julian, of Lake of the Pines, who is also part of Loping Wolf. "Where else are we going to commune with nature?"



Kathy Dusart of Doves of White releases several feathered friends after the river blessing ceremony at the Confluence Festival Sunday. The doves return home to Colfax. Photo by AKIM AGINSKY/Auburn Journal

Wildlife was also well represented with the Wild Things animal show.

Children got a chance to meet Phyllis the porcupine, Hooter the barn owl and Canyon the mountain lion, animals that cannot be rehabilitated back into the wild.

Canyon was a lion kept as a pet in Missouri - an idea that Wild Things owner Gabe Kerschner points out is always bad. Now Canyon can never go back into the wild.

"It kills me to see this animal in captivity," Kerschner said. "He looks cute but I don't want you to get the wrong idea. He's wild."

Six-year-old Nolan Oitzman, of Penn Valley, picked up a tip from the Wild Things show to avoid being mistaken for a deer in the wild.

"Whenever you see a mountain lion, be really super loud, that way he goes, 'Boy, you're really not a deer!'" he said.

The festival also had the hottest looks for summer at the Haute Trash fashion show.

For more than 20 years, designers have been Dumpster diving to come up with fashions made from recycled materials that spread the message of conservation.

Sunday's fashions included a girl's dress made from discarded birthday party supplies, cargo shorts made from a hanging vinyl shoe organizer, a wedding dress made from knitted plastic shopping bags and a belt made from Sunmaid raisin boxes.

"This is the high point of the day for me," said Mary Hansen, of Auburn. "The knitted outfits were amazing."

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