

Our Wetlands: The Beating Heart of American Canyon

By Maia Medalle

The “heart” of American Canyon doesn’t lie within the body of any individual. The beating organ that holds the soul of American Canyon’s community – my community – can be found in nature.

I have called American Canyon home my entire life. This small city within Napa County has been my comfort, with familiar faces and places. My childhood home sits a short walk away from a beautiful trail and a 10-minute bike ride from my best friend’s house. This long trail runs alongside Wetlands Edge, leading to Wetland’s Edge Park. My friends and I share core memories of walking with our families to Glass Beach, biking with our friends to watch the sheep nibble on grass, and having long walks during sunset. This park holds a special place in my heart, and I think, has slowly become the strong beating heart of the residents of American Canyon and beyond.

As a teenager, I can attest to the value that this nature park has held in my personal life. It isn’t a secret that teenagers face a multitude of challenges every day. The combination of social media, pressing matters about our world, and the inevitable stress about our future wellbeing is more than enough to send any teenager into a spiral of anxiety and depression. I have frequently found myself overwhelmed by these stressors.

Wetlands Edge offers American Canyon residents a place where they can escape from these pressures. Some may jokingly say that you just need to “touch grass” when you are stressed, but I take that comment literally. When I feel overwhelmed, I find myself going on a run along the wetlands or biking to Glass Beach to watch a beautiful sunset with my closest friends. “Touching grass” also means surrounding oneself with the beauty of nature. Wetlands Edge is the “grass” I run to when I’m in need of peace.

Many residents of my community can attest to the beauty, value, and comfort that this park and its trails hold. As I have realized the importance of Wetlands Edge within my life, I have also realized the urgency that is required to understand and protect these ecosystems. Through many recent experiences, I have had opportunities to learn much more about the significance of this Bay Area landmark.

As a student in AP Environmental Science, I learned the multitude of environmental services that wetlands offer to our community. This water-blanketed soil plays a significant role in acting as a “liver” for the groundwater in our community, filtering out many toxins. It protects our neighborhoods from flooding as well, and helps to sequester carbon from our atmosphere. It teams with all kinds of life forms that are thoroughly dependent on each other for survival.

After learning about these ecosystem services, I was able to share my knowledge with my community as a Sierra Club Student Intern. This opportunity came in the form of a booth that the Napa Sierra Club hosted at American Canyon's "Meet Me in The Street" event in August. This annual event happens three times a year during the summer. People from across the town gather for food, fun, and community engagement. I, alongside Kate Bit (a fellow Sierra Club Intern) and other Sierra Club members shared information about sea level rise, climate change, and the importance of our local wetlands. I was able to share my concern, recruit similarly-minded community members to our cause, and connect with others who value our wetlands as much as I do.

My love and appreciation for the pockets of nature within my community has motivated me to pursue opportunities to protect and advocate for them. Not only have I personally benefited through connection and engagement with my community, but I have also been able to share and nurture my love for Mother Nature. Wetlands Edge Park is part of the foundation that drives the community and connection among American Canyon residents.

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Photo credit: Joshua De Leon

Caption for photo: The author at the American Canyon Wetlands.

