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Connect the Bay: Youth Climate Activism is NorCal Public Media's latest ***Connect the Bay*** town hall program airing in August

For immediate release—Rohnert Park, CA, July 24, 2026—



Connect the Bay: Youth Climate Activism introduces three committed young climate activists who address the climate situation as they see it and explain how they have engaged around it. Topics discussed include the hidden advantages young people already may possess in the fight for a climate-friendly world, the vital role that communities of color are playing in activism and the importance of accessible outreach to them, and the key strategies of groups that engage local elected officials around climate policy.



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Youth Climate Activism is the latest installment of NorCal Public Media's **Connect the Bay** series, which features town hall-style panel discussions on current events of particular importance to the community.



The panelists described to the live studio audience how they got involved in this work, and share advice about how other young people can get started in their own communities and with a number of organizations they recommend.

Youth Climate Action Panelists

Ariela Lara is a sophomore at UC Berkeley and student organizer studying the relationship between government and economy in a holistic manner, investigating how systems are embedded in both politics and society. Ariela started organizing at 14 to recruit and coach Latines to become organizing leaders in their communities to stop the climate crisis through training and then was involved in organizing a national campaign called Green New Deal for Schools.

Ariela explained how much her own experiences led her to take on climate change work. "I have family in a pueblo in Oaxaca and they experience intense summer storms which wash out their entire agricultural system on which they survive, and it stays with me how they have to rebuild from the bottom up with no government support."

Ariela experiences asthma symptoms increased by wildfires and smoke pollution, and has family members who developed cancer tied to fossil fuel sites. "As an activist, I'm speaking to my experiences."

Today she's conducting research at her school's Human Rights Center, working to document human rights abuses and turn this information into effective on the ground action for communities. The project uses interdisciplinary teams supporting professional partner organizations through an experiential learning model, acquired skills and using scientific methods. She has also been participating in significant federal court cases holding the EPA to account.



Mani Bekele is a junior in high school and SVYCA's Policy Officer and Co-Lead of the San José team, where he has helped organize dozens of fellow teens in supporting local climate solutions. He also serves on the City of San José's Climate Advisory Commission, where he represents the City's young constituents. He is passionate about public policy solutions to the climate crisis, particularly at the state and local level, where he has advocated for measures to design our cities around people rather than cars, help more people access emissions-free appliances, and make polluting fossil fuel corporations pay for the climate damages they have caused. He believes the voices of young people in the civic process and in decision-making about climate action are absolutely essential.



Mani Bekele mentors Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action participants.

“Young people have a very clear sense of urgency and of direct impact and how we will be affected by the crisis of climate change,” Mani confirms. “We are the ones who will live in the time that’s talked about in climate studies, and we’ll determine whether or not we experience catastrophic effects.”



Padma Balaji on a panel at a Silicon Valley youth climate summit.

Padma Balaji is a senior at Mission San Jose High School, a youth climate organizer, and a student journalist. As the Co-Chair of the Bay Area Youth Climate Summit and leader of Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action's (SVYCA) Tri-City (Fremont) and Transit Team, she's passionate about building a community for young people in the climate space and can speak at length about environmental justice in the Bay Area.

As a student journalist, she's interested in exploring the ways young people experience systemic disparities and create change.

“I always tell people that the best thing you can do is just sit down and talk about climate change. At the



dinner table, with your friends. Find a tangible way to connect this to your life and show that to other people. The beauty of climate action,” Padma says, “is that everyone has something they care about and something they care about advocating in the climate movement.”

The discussion with a live studio audience was hosted by Emmy Award-winning NorCal Public Media producer Hannah Lee, a storyteller of climate change, maker of documentaries, and enthusiast of the outdoors. Her work aims to bring fresh perspectives to the most pressing environmental issues of our time and foster a deeper connection to the natural world, utilizing a strong creative style to engage viewers in an ever-changing media landscape.

She writes *Our Planet, Our Voice*, a monthly newsletter from NorCal Public Media that creates conversations bridging environmental education with justice, art, culture, and community.

Connect the Bay: Youth Climate Activism airs Tuesday August 4th at 9:30pm on KRCB -channel 22 on broadcast and cable.

Connect the Bay: Youth Climate Activism airs Tuesday August 25th at 9pm on KPJK -channel 60 on broadcast and cable.

All NorCal Public Media shows are also available for [live streaming](#), on [the NorCal Public Media YouTube](#) Channel and in the free NorCal App for mobile and television devices.

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Press contact at NorCal Public Media:

Darren LaShelle

707.584.2000

darren_lashelle@norcalpublicmedia.org





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This episode of **Connect the Bay** was produced in partnership with CreaTV San Jose and the Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority.

More information and links:

[Bay Area Youth Climate Summit](#)

[Silicon Valley Youth Climate Action](#)

[Berkeley Human Rights Center](#)

[San Jose State University Environmental Resource Center](#)

[Our Planet, Our Voice monthly newsletter](#)

