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LOCAL NEWS

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Study spurs plans to remove steelhead trout barriers

By Matt Carter
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Plans to remove barriers that prevent steelhead trout from spawning in Alameda Creek and its tributaries are gaining momentum in the wake of a study that concluded the threatened fish may be able to stage a comeback.

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission has announced plans to modify or remove two dams in Niles Canyon identified as barriers in a February report to a work group of local government agencies and environmentalists.

The report identified 18 barriers that prevent steelhead from reaching their historic breeding grounds in Alameda Creek, Arroyo del Valle and Ar-

royo Mochio. Three of the barriers are dams the utilities commission owns as part of its water-supply operations in the Alameda Creek watershed.

On Monday, commission officials announced plans to remove or modify Sunol and Niles dams, turn-of-the-century projects inherited from the old Spring Valley Water Co. Both dams were built with fish ladders that no longer function.

Getting steelhead around the 12-foot Sunol Dam, built in 1901, was one of the top priorities identified in the report to the Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup.

A radio-tagged steelhead released at the mouth of Niles



Ned MacKay, a spokesman for the East Bay Regional Park District, stands near a small dam on Alameda Creek in the Sunol Regional Wilderness. The dam, identified as a barrier to steelhead trout, soon will be removed.

JAY SOLLIMONSON
— Staff

Please see **Trout**, LOCAL-2

Trout: One option being looked at is fish ladders

Continued from LOCAL-1

Canyon was able to leap the smaller Niles Dam in February 1999. But the report also recommended that the 4-foot-high dam, built in 1886, be modified or removed.

It is yet to be decided whether the dams will be taken out or if fish ladders will be built to help steelhead past the barriers.

"The fish would be happy to pass over those dams if we built a fish ladder, and taking the dams out may have its own environmental consequences," said Joe Naras, land and resources manager for San Francisco's water and treatment division.

Another barrier to steelhead migration further upstream is a utilities commission diversion dam near the Sunol-Ohlone Regional Wilderness. The dam, which has no provision for fish passage, routes water from Alameda Creek into a tunnel for storage in Calaveras Reservoir.

"There're plans to look at it, but it's part of our active system right now, whereas these two dams in Niles Canyon are not active," Naras said.

Laura Kilgour, a water resources biologist with the Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, welcomed the commission's announcement that it intends to help steelhead around Sunol and Niles dams.