

Highlights of 2011

Victory on Calaveras Dam Rebuild Project: The final Environmental Impact Report for the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission project to replace Calaveras Dam in the upper Alameda Creek watershed was released in January 2011. As a result of our public pressure and influence from permitting agencies, the SFPUC revised the project and agreed to flow releases and changes in dam operations that will dramatically improve habitat for steelhead trout when the dam is rebuilt.

The SFPUC has committed to providing year-round water releases into Alameda Creek from Calaveras Reservoir when the dam is rebuilt, ranging from 5 to 12 cubic feet per second, depending on the time of year and water-year type. Particularly important will be cold-water flow releases during summer to improve water quality and rearing conditions for trout. The SFPUC will modify operation of the 32-foot diversion dam in upper Alameda Creek, reducing its diversion capacity by more than 40 percent, closing diversion gates for more of the year to allow unimpaired natural flow to continue downstream, and ensuring minimum flows of 30 cubic feet per second past the dam during winter and spring.

The SFPUC will construct a fish ladder around the diversion dam and investigate fish passage improvements downstream to help adult steelhead migrate into the headwaters of Alameda Creek, the best trout habitat in the watershed below major dams. The SFPUC will install a fish screen on the diversion dam and improve screens in the reservoir to prevent small juvenile trout from being diverted or trapped during water operations. The SFPUC announced a management plan to monitor stream flows and improve habitat conditions, with the goal of restoring a self-sustaining steelhead population in the watershed. Construction on the new dam began this fall and is expected to be completed in 2015.

Saving Niles Canyon: The Alameda Creek Alliance is taking on a destructive and unnecessary road widening project by CalTrans in Niles Canyon along Alameda Creek. CalTrans cut and destroyed over 100 mature native trees this spring and damaged trout habitat in the lower canyon as part of phase one of this project. The controversial "safety" project to widen Highway 84 through Niles Canyon will actually make the canyon more dangerous for drivers and cyclists, waste \$76 million in public funds, degrade important trout habitat in Alameda Creek, jeopardize a decade of restoration efforts, blight a designated scenic highway, and ruin the natural beauty of Niles Canyon.

We helped organize massive opposition to the project and protests in the canyon over the tree-cutting. The City of Fremont even requested that Governor Brown intervene to stop the project. In June we filed a lawsuit challenging the inadequate environmental review for the first phase. An Alameda County judge issued an injunction barring Caltrans from further construction on phase one, stopping planned fill of portions of the creek and floodplain with concrete retaining walls and rip-rap boulders. The judge lambasted CalTrans' clandestine project approval and obstruction of the public process. We expect to prevail in the lawsuit, terminate the project approval, and force Caltrans to re-start over with environmental review if they want to pursue the project.

We are also preparing to challenge the second phase of the project in the middle of the canyon, which would take out nearly 500 more trees and damage more irreplaceable trout habitat by adding nearly two additional miles of retaining walls and armoring along the creek.

Fish Passage: The Alameda County Water District was recently awarded \$1.45 million in grants to improve steelhead migration in lower Alameda Creek. Funding from the Department of Fish and Game will aid construction of a fish ladder over ACWD's rubber dam and the adjacent BART weir to help adult steelhead on their way to spawning grounds further upstream. Construction is scheduled for 2012-2013 and another fish ladder will be built past ACWD's upper rubber dam the following year. ACWD plans to initiate environmental review and permitting for the ladders by the end of the year. These projects will help make nearly 15 miles of stream habitat in the watershed available once again to migrating and spawning steelhead. The funding will also help install fish screens on ACWD's water supply diversions to prevent juvenile steelhead from being carried into and trapped in these groundwater recharge ponds.

Promoting Sensible Energy Development: Alameda County is considering large-scale industrial solar energy facilities in rural eastern Alameda County, with impacts to endangered species, important breeding and foraging areas for raptors, and prime agricultural lands. The Alameda Creek Alliance has joined the coalition SOLAR (Saving Our Lands Agriculture and Raptors) to promote energy development in urban areas and degraded lands, rather than sacrificing open space and wildlife habitat.