

Wild trout found in Alameda Creek

By Kristin Butler



FREMENT — A fisherally protected steelhead trout was found trying to swim up Alameda Creek on Thursday. The fisher, who was in a growing area between water needs and fish rights in the creek, said he had caught a steelhead trout on a 1 1/2-year-old stream by fished the 22-inch long struggling to swim upstream in the flood control tunnel near Decoto Road.

It comes with the Alameda district, he says the discovery of a wild steelhead trout in a local water district is a big deal. He said he had been looking for a steelhead trout in the creek to see if he had reached spawning grounds upstream.

It is the first wild steelhead trout in the area since the fish disappeared from the creek during the 1980s.

Water districts have done a lot of work to improve the creek's physical ground and this is a good thing, he said, adding a word to activists.

There is a big, big, big through the creek and it is listed as a steelhead trout. He said he had been looking for a steelhead trout in the creek to see if he had reached spawning grounds upstream.

But the National Marine Fisheries Service — which listed the fish as threatened in August and is responsible for its protection — has been slow to decide what actions, if any, districts must take to protect the fish.

Usually the agency has 60

An Alameda County Water District employee drags a dead king salmon out of Alameda Creek. The fish was stranded when the district inflated three dams there Nov. 28.

days to set rules on newly listed species, but experts estimate the rules will not happen until February 1998.

Water district officials say the fish's needs must be balanced against the community's need for water and contend that more research must be done to prove that the fish could survive upstream if they made it that far.

The trout, which is being weighed and studied by officials at the East Bay Regional Parks

supplies. Environmentalists say they want the water district to build fish ladders, install fish screens, and release extra water to help the fish travel back to the Bay.

That would cost too much money and cause a water shortage for local residents, said Paul Praino, assistant general manager for the Alameda County Water District.

San Francisco residents — served by the San Francisco Water District channel that flows through Alameda Creek — and future residents in the Tri-Valley area also may be affected, he said.

Before they are willing to make changes, officials at the districts insist that studies be done to prove the fish would survive if they made it upstream.

Scientists must make sure the water is cold enough, that the flow is fast enough, that there is suitable habitat for them to lay eggs in, and that the wild salmon would not ruin residential and hatchery fish populations already living in the creek.

The California Department of Fish and Game is too busy with other projects to do such studies, Miller said.

An environmental consulting firm has recently offered to do some of the studies and develop a fish ladder design and is applying for state grants this month.

In the meantime, environmentalists are asking the East Bay Regional Parks District to develop a short-term program to help move fish over the dam when they are found struggling, Miller said.

The Alliance will hold its next meeting at 7 p.m. Jan. 6, at the Centerville Public Library, 3101 Nicolette Ave., in Fremont. For information, call 376-0518.

The salmon is not endangered but its presence shows that wild fish are trying to swim up the creek, a fact that used to be disputed, Miller said.

Both fish swam from the Bay, less than five miles away, and seemed to be trying to reach an old spawning grounds upstream.

They were blocked by a concrete weir and three inflatable dams operated by the Alameda County Water District. The dams are inflated during low flow periods to raise water level to replenish ground water

District, is the second wild spawning fish to be found in the lower end of the creek in four months.

On the day after Thanksgiving, Ken Elliot, 45, photographed a 25-pound king salmon trying to scale a concrete weir near the BART tracks in Alameda Creek before water district crews inflated, stranded, and killed it.

It was really obvious watching that fish that it wouldn't take much to help it," Elliot said.