

Cleaner, Friendlier Arroyos For Fish

The prospects for cleaner, fish-friendly arroyos in the Valley improved this month, thanks to Zone 7 Water Agency and Friends of the Arroyos.

Friends of the Arroyos, formed in the Valley earlier this year to help nurture habitat both in streams and along their banks, is applying for a grant to redesign an area along the Arroyo Mocho near Granada High School in Livermore. The vision is to plant California native plants on the school-owned property along the arroyo. The land is just west of apartments along Murrieta Boulevard.

There is a litter problem on the Granada property now, said Louann Tung, spokesperson for Friends of the Arroyos. "We'd like to see the area change to a native plants park. The better the environment looks, the more students will respect it," Tung said.

She has met with a Granada vice principal, who is very motivated in favor of the project, she said.

The project would include educational kiosks that would show a map of the arroyo, and the location of the gorge that supports steelhead trout. The kiosks would be made of steel, with a lucite covering over the reading material.

Tung said she is working on a grant application for about \$12,000 to fund the environmental restoration work. The funder would be GE Vallecitos. GE Vallecitos exceeded copper discharge limits in its underground water, and faces a \$12,000 fine from the Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board, said Tung.

The alternative to paying the fine is for the company is to fund an environmental project in the Valley. GE has said it is willing to look at a grant proposal from Friends of the Arroyo. Deadline for the grant application is early January.

ZONE 7 SATISFIES CONCERNS ABOUT SMALL DAM

Zone 7 has done a couple of things to help reassure Friends of the Arroyos and other environmentalists that they care about habitat for steelhead trout. The steelhead are a species of salmon which begin life as rainbow trout in fresh-water ponds. They travel to the ocean and adapt to the salt water, then travel back upstream to spawn.

Friends of the Arroyos and has been concerned about a proposal by Zone 7 plan to install an inflatable rubber dam in the Arroyo Mocho near El Charro Road. The environmentalists said the dam could impede any future fish migration.

The Zone 7 board approved a mitigated negative declaration on the environmental impacts of the project. The vote at the board's meeting Dec. 18 was 6-0, with director Sue Johnston absent. Staff had said that the inflatable nature of the dam gives flexibility to allow fish to

come upstream.

However, Jeff Miller of the regional organization Alameda Creek Alliance, raised concerns that certain design aspects of the dam might interfere with the salmon, said Tung. However, Tung said Miller appeared satisfied that Zone 7 will respect the opinion of the state department of Fish and Game, which will review the design, and either give its approval or not.

When the rubber dam issue first arose, Friends of the Arroyos and Zone 7 were far apart on the issue, said Tung. Following discussions, they reached agreement, she said.

Zone 7 assistant general manager Ed Cummings agreed. Basically, the agency and Friends of the Arroyos were saying the same thing. A lot of the process involved clarification, he said. Zone 7 also made an improvement in the design to help the fish. Instead of relying on a fish ladder next to the main flow, the fish now will climb in the main stream through a series of pools with very low climbing distances, said Cummings.

On another project concerning improvements for flood control where Arroyo Las Positas meets the Arroyo Mocho, Zone 7 pulled back its plans this month in order to change the design to accommodate the environmentalists' concerns.

Environmentalists and representatives of Fish and Game and other agencies met at the site and discussed the situation. The one change that will be made is to add a fish screen now, so that fish don't aren't diverted in to an adjacent gravel quarry. Zone 7 had planned to design the shell for the screen, and add it later if steelhead presence could be documented in the stream, said Cummings.

Friends of the Arroyos believes that there are more steelhead in the Arroyo Mocho and Arroyo Del Valle than Zone 7 staff has declared. Only a few press accounts over the past century and stories from old-timers have talked about steelhead being present. However, these are not reliable sources, said Zone 7 officials. A consultant hired by Zone 7 has found conditions in the Arroyo Mocho capable of harboring the fish. No current signs of its presence has been found.