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## Grant opens floodgates for trout

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A reprieve is in sight for steelhead trout frustrated by man-made barriers as they try to migrate from San Francisco Bay to suitable spawning grounds in Alameda Creek and its tributaries above Sunol and the Livermore-Amador Valley.

Grants totaling \$1 million from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation have been awarded to the Alameda County Water District, which serves the Fremont area, for two projects that will clear the way for migrating steelhead in lower Alameda Creek.

One project will remove an inflatable rubber diversion dam, which when inflated acts as a barrier to migrating steelhead. A pipeline will then be built to maintain the district's ground-water recharge capacity.

Meanwhile, fish screens will be installed at the district's water supply diversion point at the mouth of Niles Canyon to keep juvenile steelhead from being trapped.

"This is great progress," said Jeff Miller of the Alameda Creek Alliance, which has been promoting the restoration of a steelhead run on the creek. "It's an amazing shift for a water district to voluntarily remove one of its facilities to help with fish migration -- and in a way that doesn't impact its water supply."

Both projects should be completed by fall 2006, according to Paul Piraino of the water district, which is providing a matching \$1 million.

The Fish and Wildlife Foundation money represents the first major grant for removing barriers in the lower creek. Another \$5 million to \$8 million is needed, primarily for fish ladders over a concrete barrier and at least one other inflatable dam.

Several congressional representatives -- including Rep. Pete Stark, D-Fremont -- are endorsing \$1 million in federal funds for additional fish-passage facilities.

According to Stark, "With sufficient funding, we can bring one of the greatest spectacles of nature back to Alameda Creek."

Two small dams within the Sunol Regional Wilderness were demolished in 2001. Two other nonfunctioning dams in Niles Canyon below Sunol will be removed next year by the San Francisco Water Department. Another remaining obstacle is Pacific Gas & Electric Co.'s natural gas crossing in Sunol Valley, which needs the construction of fish ladders over it.

In Livermore-Amador Valley tributaries, as part of a project to realign Arroyo Las Positas and to widen Arroyo Mocho, Zone 7 Water Agency engineered and built two fish passages.

Even when all barriers are removed, however, another issue will be what it will take to improve water flows for steelhead along Alameda Creek and its feeders. The question is whether municipal water supplies would be affected if water agencies, including Zone 7, are required to release water from dams, or to change other operations, to maintain flows for fish.

Miller said he believes enough water can be provided at critical times to keep a steelhead population in good condition "without significant effects on water supply."

From natural runoff, "There's already enough water coming down the creek for steelhead to migrate upstream," he said. "The main flows not being met now are a small amount of cold water releases for summer rearing habitat . . . and periodic flows in late winter and spring to get juvenile fish out to the Bay."