

## Water district dedicates two projects along Fremont creek

Fremont Bulletin Staff

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by Wes Bowers

Alameda County Water District and the Alameda Creek Alliance were at Niles Community Park Wednesday morning to celebrate the completion of two projects expected to restore the steelhead trout population in Alameda Creek.

One of the projects recognized was the completion of the Bunting Pond Fish Screen, which will be used to divert water from the creek into Bunting Pond as well as keeping steelhead trout out of the pond and in the creek.

The project includes modification of an existing water diversion intake and installation of a fish screen, fencing, control panel and trail modification.

The fish screen system consists of a self-cleaning cylindrical screen with a track system on a concrete pad along the bank of the Alameda Creek Flood Control Channel.

The district dedicated four other fish screens along Vallejo Street two years ago, which were designed to keep juvenile steelhead in the creek and out of the public water system.

The second project dedicated Wednesday was the removal of Rubber Dam No. 2, which consisted of removing an inflatable dam in the creek to help steelhead migrate through the lower section of Alameda Creek. It will also discontinue use of an unscreened diversion, the district said.

Walt Wadlow, general manager for the water district, said the cost for the two projects combined totaled \$2.3 million.

"We believe with the completion of these two projects we've taken a significant step forward to restoring the steelhead population in the creek while at the same time protecting the Alameda Creek Watershed," he said.

The Alameda Creek Watershed is the largest in the Bay Area at 700 square miles, Wadlow said, and provides drinking water to more than 40 percent of Tri-Cities homes.

Marty Koller, president of the water district Board of Directors, said the district has several similar projects planned or underway, including fish ladders at its middle and upper rubber dams in the creek, as well as more fish passages and screens.

"Over the years I've sat in on meetings and it's taken tremendous effort from all the agencies involved (to get here)," he said. "A lot of hard work went into all of these agencies. We've still got a long way to go. It will probably be about 10 years before we see the end of all these projects, but I am proud of where we are today."

Jeff Miller, director of the Alameda Creek Alliance, said today's anglers can't fish for steelhead in the creek, but hopefully their children and grandchildren will.

Steelhead trout were placed on the endangered species list in 1997. That year Miller formed the Alameda Creek Alliance to help repopulate the species.

"It's been a long time coming," he said. "But we're getting to a point where we're going to have results soon and we're looking to get steelhead back into this creek. All the pieces are coming together."

The district's steelhead restoration project began in 1999.

By the late 1950s the California Department of Fish and Game decided the steelhead run was no longer viable, and a series of floods in that decade prompted the channelization of the lower creek by the Army Corps of Engineers.

By the early 1970s the lower 12 miles of the creek was channeled and rip-rapped, with numerous fish passage barriers installed that closed the door on fish runs.

The last steelhead trout and coho salmon runs were seen in the lower creek in 1964.

The water district says there has been an increase in documented sightings of steelhead in the lower creek over the last few years, possibly due to increased streamflows from the wet winter and an increased public awareness of the threatened fishery.