

2-year fishing ban to save Alameda Creek trout

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By Peter Fimrite, Chronicle Staff Writer

The steelhead trout have pretty much vanished from Alameda Creek, so state officials decided it was time to ban fishing.

Sport fishing will be closed for at least two years starting March 1 downstream from the San Antonio, Calaveras and Del Valle reservoirs, which typically supply about 15 percent of San Francisco's water supply.

The decision, approved in December by the California Fish and Game Commission, is an attempt to protect threatened steelhead trout and remnant populations of native rainbow trout in San Francisco Bay's third largest tributary behind the Sacramento and San Joaquin rivers.

Huge numbers of steelhead and coho salmon once swam up Alameda Creek, which runs for 45 miles through Niles Canyon and the Sunol Valley, bisecting both Santa Clara and Alameda counties before emptying out along the eastern shore of San Francisco Bay in Hayward.

Dams and various blockages and diversions cut off the migratory route of the fish. Coho have not been seen in the East Bay waterway since the 1960s and it has been 45 years since any significant number of steelhead have spawned in the creek, according to watershed biologists.

"We've depleted our local population so much that we can't fish," said Jeff Miller, director of the Alameda Creek Alliance and a conservation advocate for the Center for Biological Diversity. "We've had exactly three steelhead spawn in the creek in the past 12 years. Before that the last documented spawning was in 1964. We've got to bring these runs back."

Alameda Creek has, in fact, been the focus of intensive restoration efforts since 1997 when Central Coast steelhead were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act. The watershed is so compromised that officials stopped bothering to plant hatchery trout nine years ago.

Fifteen federal, state and local agencies, including the Alameda County Water District, are working within the watershed, which essentially drains the southern two-thirds of the East Bay, including the southern slopes of Mount Diablo.

Eleven fish passage projects have been completed below the dams since 2001. Several fish ladders are expected to be built and numerous blockages

removed by 2012 in an attempt to clear a pathway for migratory fish to make it from the bay to spawning habitat in the upper reaches of the creek.