Alameda County to help fund trout study

Some wonder if the study results aren't encouraging in December. Even without additional water flows or other habitat work, Miller said, fish ladders would at least give steelhead access to suitable spawning areas in Stonybrook Creek, a tributary to Alameda Creek that runs along Pacifica Road.

The prime habitat is way up in the Sunol Regional Wilderness, but this is the first step in getting fish past the last barriers in the lower channel," Miller said.

Counties flood control official Richard Wetzig said the cost of building a fish ladder at the most troublesome migration barrier, a concrete weir near three inflatable dams operated by the Alameda County Water District in Fremont, has been estimated at $3 million. If the study shows the fish ladder project is feasible, the county would apply to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for 75 percent of the needed funding, and the Coastal Conservancy has expressed interest in helping the county pay its 25 percent share. County funds would come from the budget of the Zone 5 Flood Control District, which serves northern Fremont, Newark and Union City.

The ladder would be built in ascending small pools, allowing the fish to jump easily from one to the next. A total of three ladders would be built, the largest would be built at the weir, which is near the middle of three inflatable dams. Ladders at the two other inflatable dams would be smaller and less expensive.

Steelhead trout have been listed by the federal government as a threatened species, a designation that could lead to special protections including required changes in the management of creeks where they are found. The study will be performed by Applied Marine Sciences Inc.