

SPAWNING STEELHEAD TRAPPED IN LOWER ALAMEDA CREEK



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
MARCH 14, 2003

CONTACT:

Jeff Miller (510) 845-2233
Alameda Creek Alliance

Fremont, CA – A pair of steelhead trout attempting to ascend Alameda Creek is trapped below barriers in the flood control channel and the fish are apparently trying to spawn there, according to local fisheries biologists. A five-pound male steelhead and a female fish half that size were spotted Thursday in an isolated pool below the BART weir and an Alameda County Water District rubber dam, barriers that prevent migratory fish from accessing suitable habitat upstream in Alameda Creek. Adult steelhead trout, which were listed as a federally threatened species in 1997, have been documented in this location in lower Alameda Creek 5 of the past 6 winters.

In past years, community volunteers have moved a few stranded fish upstream out of the flood control channel, where stream temperatures are hostile to fish eggs and young, water flows are often cut off by operation of the rubber dams, and eggs and young fish face a gauntlet of avian and introduced fish predators. More stringent permit requirements by federal and state regulatory agencies, NOAA Fisheries and the CA Department of Fish and Game, make it difficult to get permits to move the fish, even when they are trapped in unsuitable habitat. “These fish need access to trout habitat upstream in Sunol Regional Park” said Jeff Miller, Director of the Alameda Creek Alliance. “We can’t continue to have endangered fish dying here without successful spawning year after year.”

“We have been advocating for fish passage projects for six years now, and although there is an ongoing planning process, steelhead and salmon continue to be illegally blocked by these barriers,” added Miller. The continuing annual appearance of adult ocean-run fish blocked in the lower channel underscores the importance of an interim program to move these fish upstream to suitable spawning and rearing areas. In the absence of an approved project or program for permanent fish passage, the failure to implement a program to move these fish exposes the agencies with barriers in the lower creek to liability for illegal “take” of a listed species and ongoing violations of Sections 5901 and 5937 of the CA Fish and Game Code.

A consortium of 12 local, state, and federal agencies has been planning for steelhead trout restoration projects in the Alameda Creek watershed since 1999. Proposed projects include: constructing fish ladders at the BART weir and ACWD rubber dams; removing Niles and Sunol Dams in Niles Canyon; making a PG&E gas pipeline crossing in the Sunol Valley passable to fish; and as part of the proposed replacement and expansion of San Francisco’s Calaveras Reservoir, removing or altering the Alameda Diversion Dam from upper Alameda Creek, providing additional water flows from the reservoir for fish habitat downstream, and potentially moving landlocked trout from above the reservoir

(thought to be descendants of the Creek's original steelhead run) to the lower creek to "jump-start" an ocean-run population.

Biologists from the East Bay Regional Park District may attempt to move the steelhead upstream to more suitable habitat today. Call Pete Alexander of the EBRPD at (510) 812-4633 for more information.

The Alameda Creek Alliance is a community restoration group formed in 1997 that is working to protect and restore Alameda Creek and its tributaries, with over 1200 members and supporters in the East Bay. Contact the ACA at (510) 845-2233, alamedacreek@hotmail.com, or www.alamedacreek.org.