

STEELHEAD RULING LEAVES ALAMEDA CREEK TROUT WITHOUT PROTECTION



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Sunol, CA – The National Marine Fisheries Service today announced final Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing decisions for 10 populations of west coast steelhead trout, including Alameda Creek steelhead, which are part of the Central California Coast (CCC) population. NMFS' decision reaffirms the threatened status of CCC steelhead, which were originally listed under the ESA in August 1997, but excludes resident rainbow trout and landlocked steelhead trout above dams. NMFS had proposed in June of 2005 to include resident trout and some landlocked steelhead, including those in Alameda Creek, as part of the CCC steelhead trout population based on genetic evidence that Alameda Creek's resident fish are similar to adult ocean-run steelhead.

Under a controversial new listing policy for steelhead, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will retain jurisdiction over resident trout populations. The USFWS has made no listing proposal for CCC or any other populations of resident trout and is unlikely to voluntarily list these fish under the Bush administration, which has consistently opposed protections for endangered species. Today's decision is biologically unjustified since it arbitrarily divides steelhead populations, listing only adult anadromous fish yet excluding trout below dams that can interbreed with migratory steelhead and even juvenile trout that are the offspring of steelhead.

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) lobbied against listing Alameda Creek trout, including landlocked populations of steelhead/rainbow trout in Calaveras and San Antonio Dams which they operate, despite compelling genetic evidence that these fish are descendants of wild steelhead. The decision today also excludes Alameda Creek from designated Critical Habitat for CCC steelhead.

"All life forms of steelhead in the Bay Area and the central coast should be protected since many streams have only remnant populations of ocean-run fish," said Jeff Miller, Director of the Alameda Creek Alliance (ACA). "San Francisco should be ashamed for opposing protection for imperiled Alameda Creek trout, particularly when fish in the stream are diminished due to their water diversions and the reservoir trout are threatened by their project to rebuild Calaveras Dam and inappropriate cattle grazing in their spawning habitat," added Miller.

The ACA joined other conservation and fishing groups in submitting extensive comments on why the new NMFS policy is scientifically unjustified, arbitrary, and unlawful. The Environmental Defense Center, Center for Biological Diversity and California Trout advocated listing resident trout below dams in the three southernmost listed steelhead populations (from the Bay Area south), where anadromous fish are exceedingly rare due to the impacts of dams, water diversions and urban development. Landlocked steelhead above dams should also be listed on a case-by-case basis where there is evidence showing a close genetic relationship to adjacent below-manmade barrier steelhead populations or where landlocked trout exhibit continued "steelhead" behavior, as is the case with Alameda Creek fish.

Alameda Creek trout were originally singled out for additional protection due to studies published by the U.S. Geological Survey in 1999 and 2003 demonstrating that native Alameda Creek rainbow trout and reservoir fish are genetically related to wild steelhead in the CCC population. The studies analyzed fin clips from adult steelhead captured at the Fremont BART weir in recent years by ACA volunteers, rainbow trout populations in upper Alameda Creek and its tributaries collected by Alameda County in 1999, and landlocked reservoir trout from surveys conducted by the SFPUC. Landlocked trout behind the two SFPUC reservoirs are thought to be the descendants of the original migratory steelhead run in Alameda Creek and represent the best native gene pool for restoring steelhead below the dams. Rainbow and steelhead trout are different life forms of the same species, *Oncorhynchus mykiss*. Rainbow trout stay in the stream environment as resident fish whereas steelhead migrate to the ocean and return to the stream to spawn and rear.

The restoration of Alameda Creek has become a regional priority since the ACA formed and began advocating for steelhead restoration in 1997. The only other viable steelhead populations in San Francisco Bay tributaries are in Coyote Creek and the Guadalupe River in the South Bay, and San Francisquito Creek on the Peninsula. There are currently twelve local, state, and federal agencies cooperating on a number of migratory fish restoration projects in Alameda Creek, including dam removals and construction of fish ladders and fish screens. The restoration projects are aimed at allowing adult steelhead, which have been blocked by barriers in lower Alameda Creek, to reach spawning and rearing habitat 25 miles upstream in Sunol Regional Wilderness.

The Alameda Creek Alliance is a community restoration group with over 740 members dedicated to protecting and restoring Alameda Creek and its tributaries.