

Up Your Creek!

The electronic newsletter of the Alameda Creek Alliance

Alameda Creek Fish Passage Projects Inch Forward

BART Weir Fish Ladder



The critical fish ladder projects that will allow steelhead and salmon to access the Alameda Creek watershed above the Alameda Creek Flood Control Channel have been delayed for many years now. The Alameda County Water District recently provided an update on these critical fish passage projects. The Water District and the Alameda County Flood Control District continue to work toward finalizing the designs for the two fish ladders, which are now 95% complete. The agencies estimate that the projects will require a four-year construction schedule, from 2017-2020. The agencies will proceed with the BART weir/middle rubber dam fish ladder or the upper rubber dam fish ladder beginning in 2017, depending on which fish ladder receives required permits first. The agencies will revise the environmental review documents for the project and take public comment later this spring. A County Flood Control District project - to create a low-flow channel through the flood control section of lower Alameda Creek and modify grade-control sills to provide fish passage - is being pursued as a separate project. That project is planned for 2017, and will also involve dredging accumulated sediment from the lower channel.

PG&E Crossing



PG&E is moving forward with a project to remove a concrete mat at a pipeline crossing of Alameda Creek in the Sunol Valley. PG&E is coordinating the project with the SFPUC, which recently published a restoration report for the Sunol Valley, and with the Sunol gravel quarry operator, which will install cutoff walls along the quarry pits adjacent to Alameda Creek to prevent

creek inflow of water into the pits, following the removal of the pipeline crossing. The environmental review document for the PG&E mat removal project will also include a project by the SFPUC to provide fish passage at critical shallow riffles in the Sunol Valley. The project will commence in summer of 2017, with the California Department of Fish and Wildlife as the lead agency for environmental review.

Steelhead Trout and Amphibian Assessment for Arroyos



Zone 7 Water Agency has published draft habitat assessments for steelhead trout, native amphibians and riparian habitat along Arroyo del Valle (from the base of Del Valle Dam downstream to the confluence with Arroyo de la Laguna) and along portions of Arroyo de la Laguna near the Verona Street Bridge. Zone 7 is preparing environmental studies and hydrologic analyses to develop and identify measures to preserve sensitive habitats for steelhead trout and native amphibians, in response to an Alameda Creek Alliance water rights protest.

Zone 7 found that the best quality potential steelhead trout spawning habitat in these reaches of the arroyos is in the 2.5 miles of Arroyo Valle below Del Valle Dam. Although this stream reach has good spawning gravels and adequate pools and riffles, it lacks suitable complex cover and has elevated stream temperatures, limiting its value for steelhead summer and winter rearing habitat. Some lower quality potential steelhead habitat can be found in Arroyo Valle from the Bernal Road bridge to the Hopyard Road bridge, and in the Arroyo de la Laguna from its confluence with Arroyo del Valle downstream to its confluence with Alameda Creek. Overall, high water temperatures and lack of cover limit suitable steelhead habitat in these arroyos and support warm water species that prey on juvenile steelhead. Restoration efforts would need to focus on removing fish passage barriers on Arroyo del Valle and Arroyo de la Laguna to allow adult upstream migration, predator control to allow juvenile downstream migration, and habitat enhancement to lower water temperatures and provide instream cover.

These reaches of the arroyos support Sierran treefrogs and western ponds turtles, but do not provide suitable habitat for California red-legged frogs or California tiger salamanders. Unseasonable water releases in the summer (when water would not naturally be present) contributes to the persistence of invasive species such as American bullfrogs, crayfish, bass and carp in the arroyos. Much of the arroyos do provide important habitat for riparian bird species, particularly native migratory songbirds. These reaches of Arroyo Valle and Arroyo de la Laguna are highly modified and managed compared to their historical habitat, and have been impacted by decades of urban development, gravel quarrying and water management. Although not included in these reports, the best trout and amphibian habitat in the northern watershed is in the Arroyo Mocho gorge along Mines Road, southeast of Livermore.

To read the reports, visit the Zone 7 [web page](#) and scroll down to "Watershed Stewardship."

CEMEX Realignment of Arroyo Valle

Chain of Lakes



CEMEX mining company gave a presentation to the Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup in December, outlining the elements of their proposed amendments to the reclamation plan for the Elliot gravel quarry adjacent to Arroyo Valle in Livermore, and the opportunities for restoration of the arroyo to enhance the potential for steelhead trout migration.

Mining began in Elliot quarry at 1906. A reclamation plan for the gravel quarry was completed in 1987. The mining permit, reclamation plan, the 1981 Specific Plan for the area, and a 1988 agreement with Zone 7 Water Agency allowed for Zone 7 water diversion under a water rights permit, and planned for future conversion of the mined-out quarry pits to water storage as part of Zone 7's Chain of Lakes. Environmental review was done for a project that included removal and complete mining of Arroyo Valle at Lake A and Lake B, construction of a 500 cfs diversion structure for Zone 7 to divert water into the Chain of Lakes, and routing of the arroyo through 40-ft tall concrete spillways into and out of Lake A into Lake B, completely capturing the arroyo in the quarry pits and lake.

CEMEX is proposing to amend the reclamation plan to: eliminate the spillways; retain and partially realign the Arroyo Valle adjacent to Lake A and Lake B; provide a low (2-foot) diversion weir on the arroyo for Zone 7 to divert water through an off-stream gravel infiltration bed into Lake A; and add a fish screen and fish ladder to the diversion structure (with bypass flows down the arroyo). The revised plan would retain the current arroyo channel adjacent to Lake A, and realign the arroyo to the south along Lake B to allow for permitted expansion of mining. This reach of the arroyo has been heavily impacted by historical mining and has previously been moved numerous times. Historical mining has created small lakes and ponds in the arroyo, including south of Shadow Cliffs. These ponds make the arroyo impassable to migratory fish due to capture in the ponds. The realignment would make it possible for fish to migrate past Lake Boris and Island Pond, assuming other ponds and fish passage barriers downstream that are not in the project reach (and not part of this project) are modified. The CEMEX proposal would create a more natural stream channel that could be passable to migratory fish, and would include planting and establishment of native vegetation.

The diversion, fish ladder, fish screen and arroyo realignment would be completed over the next five years, but mining at the site is not expected to end until 2056, at which point Zone 7 would then take over operation of the arroyo, former quarry pits and diversion into the Chain of Lakes.

For more information about the proposed reclamation plan, realignment of Arroyo Valle, and diversion structure and fish ladder, visit the [CEMEX web site](#).

Niles Canyon Projects

Caltrans Mitigation, Stewardship for 2011 Tree Cutting in Niles Canyon



The Alameda Creek Alliance met with Caltrans staff in November and December 2015 to survey some of the 143 native trees cut by Caltrans in 2011 as part of the abandoned Niles I Safety Project. Some of the cut trees have healthy re-sprouting, particularly willows that were cut. The most significant impacts were to mature California sycamore trees, which are limited in distribution and important for bank stabilization, shade, and habitat for birds and bats.

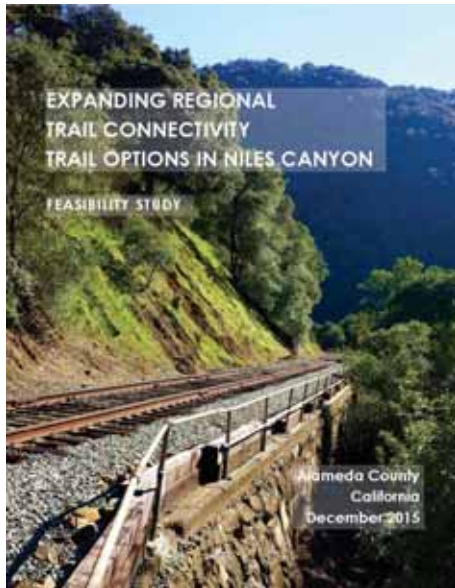
Caltrans has proposed, and regulatory agencies have accepted, mitigation for the tree cutting by replacing a road culvert under Palomares Road at Stonybrook Creek with a free-span bridge. This will provide for future fish passage for steelhead trout into Stonybrook Creek, identified as an important spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead. Caltrans proposes the culvert replacement be completed as part of the upcoming Caltrans Niles Canyon Medium Term Safety Project. The design for the Stonybrook culvert replacement will be done in consultation with regulatory agencies and coordination with the Alameda Creek Alliance, and will avoid as much as possible any further impacts to sycamores, including those re-sprouting at the base of Stonybrook Creek. Any replanting done in conjunction with the culvert replacement will prioritize replanting of native sycamores.

As further stewardship, and to address concerns of the community about the tree cutting impacts, Caltrans has agreed to:

- 1) monitor all of the cut sycamores in the Niles I project reach that have re-sprouted, and manage re-sprouting sycamore trees for healthy re-growth;
- 2) conduct restoration plantings, primarily sycamores, in the areas where trees were cut that are identified as having gaps, either due to stump mortality or the future removal of invasive plants; and
- 3) remove invasive tree-of-heaven and pampas grass in the reaches with cut trees in the Niles I project area where feasible, with stump treatments.

Read the joint Caltrans/Alameda Creek Alliance proposed [stewardship memo](#) with the details of the tree cutting impacts, the extent of re-growth, and Caltrans' commitment to stewardship in this reach.

Feasibility Study Complete for Niles Canyon Regional Trail



The East Bay Regional Park District has completed the [Niles Canyon Regional Trail Connectivity Feasibility Study](#). This study evaluates three route options and discusses constraints for a six-mile Class I pedestrian/bike/equestrian trail connecting Niles to Sunol, from Vallejo Mill Park to the town of Sunol.

In the lower canyon, between Vallejo Mill Park and Brightside, the only feasible trail option would be along the south side of the canyon. At Brightside, the trail could cross to the north of Alameda Creek and terminate in the town of Sunol, or continue on the south side of the canyon and terminate near the Sunol Water Temple and the new Alameda Creek watershed center. A third option would be for the trail to share the existing Alameda County right of way with the Niles Canyon Railway. However, the railway option would require a major adjustment to the existing tracks, which could affect Niles Canyon Railway's operations as well as create potential environmental impacts. The south trail option from Brightside would require tree removal and grading in undisturbed areas, as well as construction of three major bridges. The North Canyon Trail from Brightside is the preferred option due to lesser environmental impacts and required construction of only one major bridge.

The study also evaluates a railroad crossing near Vallejo Mill Park to allow for a connection to the future Bay Area Ridge Trail; and a connection to the Vargas Plateau, via a non-paved trail from the Sunol Water Temple to the future Vargas Plateau Regional Park currently under development by East Bay Regional Parks. The study has a preliminary discussion of potential impacts to the environment and historical resources, and provides preliminary cost estimates for the three trail segments. The cost estimates for the trail options range from \$57 to \$69 million.

Several public meetings were held in 2014 and 2015 to collect comments and concerns about the components of the study. There is currently no identified funding to finalize the design and complete environmental review, but the study summarizes the required approvals and environmental review process, and outlines potential next steps to advance development of these new trail segments.

Download the [Niles Canyon Regional Trail Connectivity Feasibility Study](#)

Read the Fremont Bulletin article: [Feasibility Study Complete for Proposed Niles Canyon Trail](#)

Upcoming Events

Volunteer Restoration Day in Niles – January 17

We're using this season's wet weather as an opportunity to enhance wildlife habitat at our adopted restoration site along Alameda Creek. Join us for an upcoming workday this Sunday, January 17th, from 10 am to noon. We'll plant more native trees and shrubs, weed and maintain areas that have been planted by previous volunteers, and pick up trash along the creek. Our restoration work at this site will help stabilize soils and stream banks, provide cooling shade, filter pollutants, and improve food and shelter for wildlife. Come learn about the creek and the natural community it supports!

We'll meet at the [Niles Staging Area parking lot](#) and walk a few hundred yards upstream to our adopted site. Wear work clothes, including long pants and sturdy shoes that can get dirty. A long-sleeve shirt and hat are recommended. We'll provide gloves, waste bags, litter grabbers, water, and a snack. Please bring your own re-usable water bottle to fill. Heavy rain cancels. RSVP to Ralph Boniello, ralph@alamedacreek.org.

Alameda County Watershed Forum – January 26

The Alameda County Watershed Forum will hold a session on attracting grant money for Alameda Creek watershed restoration projects. The forum will be held on Tuesday, January 26 at the Castro Valley Library, located at 3600 Norbridge Avenue in Castro Valley. The event opens at 8:40 am for coffee and networking, and the program runs from 9:00 am to noon. Register for the forum on [Eventbrite](#). Download a [flyer](#) about the event.

Alameda Creek Natural History Walk – January 30

Join the Alameda Creek Alliance and the California Center for Natural History for an interpretive walk along Alameda Creek in Fremont, on Saturday, January 30th, from 1 to 4 pm. We'll discuss the history of water management in Alameda Creek, look at some of the barriers to fish migration that we're working to remove, and discuss some fish-friendly improvements that have already been accomplished. As we approach Niles Canyon, we'll see the creek abruptly change from an engineered flood control channel to a creek with natural banks and native vegetation. We're likely to see waterfowl in Alameda Creek, and if we're really lucky we may even see some migrating steelhead trout!

We'll meet at 1 pm at the [Isherwood Staging Area](#) of Quarry Lakes and walk upstream to the western outlet of Niles Canyon. We'll walk along the mostly-level Alameda Creek Trail for a round-trip of approximately 7 miles. Bring a water bottle and layers for potentially changing weather. Parking is available at the Isherwood Staging Area, which is also a 10-minute bicycle ride from the Union City Bart Station. Heavy rain cancels. RSVP to Ralph Boniello, Ralph@alamedacreek.org.

Dublin Developer Busted for Fraudulent Endangered Species Protections

Read the CA Department of Fish and Wildlife press release: [East Bay Developer Pleads No Contest to Felony Charges](#)

Read the Pleasanton Weekly article: [James Tong, Ex-Pleasanton Campaign Contributor, Oak Grove Housing Backer Guilty of Fraud](#)

Regional Salmon Restoration News

[*Demise of Klamath River Deal Could Rekindle Old Water-Use Battles*](#)

Los Angeles Times – January 10, 2016

[*Better Rules for Santa Cruz County Pot Grows On Horizon*](#)

Santa Cruz Sentinel - December 30, 2015

[*American River Steelhead Numbers Rebound*](#)

Red Green & Blue – December 28, 2015

[*Key Salinas River Stakeholder: Steelhead Trout*](#)

Salinas Californian – October 23, 2015

[*Steelhead Trout Barriers Being Removed at Leo Carrillo*](#)

Malibu Times - September 4, 2015

The Alameda Creek Alliance is a non-profit community watershed protection group. Please support our efforts by [becoming a member](#)