



UP YOUR CREEK!

ALAMEDA CREEK ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER Issue 24 • 2007

Protecting and restoring the natural ecosystems of the Alameda Creek watershed

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ALAMEDA CREEK 2007 – THE YEAR IN REVIEW



Winter Steelhead Report

It took until the last day of February for steelhead to be spotted in lower Alameda Creek below the BART weir. The Alameda Creek Alliance Fish Rescue Team headed by Pete Alexander of the East Bay Regional Park District sprung into action and successfully rescued a 6¼ pound adult male steelhead which was, in turn, radio tagged and moved to an area above the upper inflatable dam. Other adult steelhead and a pacific lamprey were also seen but managed to evade capture. “Simpson”, as the fish was named, began moving upstream and over the lower Niles Canyon gaging station apron. The flow at the time was estimated in the range of 70-100 cubic feet per second, so it is felt that this facility is not a significant barrier to migration during moderate or higher flows. Apparently not caring for the area or doing an “oops, I made a wrong turn somewhere” Simpson made a U-turn and headed back downstream. Simpson resided in the pools between the inflatable rubber dams for the summer until his radio signal was lost. It is unknown if he eventually made it downstream to the San Francisco Bay and possibly to another tributary.

*****FISH PASSAGE*****

ACWD Fish Screens

At the end of February the Alameda County Water District (ACWD) held a public information meeting at which it outlined its plans for installing fish screens at their water diversions below Mission Boulevard, in lower Alameda Creek in the flood control channel. The purpose of the fish screens is to eliminate the hazard of trapping or entraining fish, most specifically out-migrating steelhead, while diverting water into the chain of recharging ponds from Shinn Pond to the Quarry Lakes. The screens are partly funded by a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF).

Construction of the fish screens began in June and they were nearly completed by year's end. In July ACWD announced it received a \$600,000 grant from Proposition 50 funds for installing an additional fish screen on the diversion at their Bunting Pond – this screen will be installed in 2009.

Fish Passage in Lower Alameda Creek

The Alameda County Flood Control District and ACWD this summer signed an agreement to design a fish ladder that will allow steelhead to bypass a cement barrier known as the BART weir and an adjacent inflatable water supply dam in the lower Alameda Creek flood control channel, the main barriers to fish migration into Alameda Creek. Fish passage at these barriers is the key to restoring steelhead trout to the entire Alameda Creek watershed. In July the agencies signed an agreement to fund preliminary design for the fish ladder and announced their goal to have the fish ladder constructed by 2010.

The ACWD will remove the lowermost rubber inflatable dam from Alameda Creek in 2008 to help facilitate fish migration in the lower section of Alameda Creek, and will discontinue use of an unscreened water diversion at this location. ACWD is investigating whether to notch or remove the concrete sill associated with this rubber dam. This project was also awarded \$500,000 from the NFWF.



Arroyo Mocho Fish Barrier

In September Zone 7 Water Agency and the Livermore Valley School District completed removal of a concrete crossing that was a potential fish passage barrier from Arroyo Mocho, a tributary of Alameda Creek, behind Granada High School in Livermore. The project is intended to improve campus safety and security, enhance the creek's environment by restoring a more natural stream channel, reduce the amount of trash thrown in the arroyo, and help potential steelhead migration through the Arroyo Mocho tributary. Removal of the stream crossing was supported by the Friends of The Arroyos and the Alameda Creek Alliance. Details are available on the Zone 7 website: www.zone7water.com.

*****AGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANNING*****

San Francisco Water Supply Projects

In July the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) released their Draft Program Environmental Impact Report (PEIR) regarding their \$4.3 billion water system improvement program. The report, comprising 3,000+ pages, outlines the potential environmental impacts of their planned 22 regional projects in the SF Bay Area and Central Valley.

Many of the planned projects are within the Alameda Creek watershed, some having a direct impact on our fisheries and wildlife habitat. They include: An expansion of the Sunol Valley Water Treatment Plant in which they plan to construct three new concrete reservoirs, a Habitat Reserve Program as habitat mitigation for SFPUC projects under the Water System Improvement Program, the Calaveras Dam Replacement Project, the Irvington Tunnel Project, the Alameda Siphon Project, and the misleadingly-named Alameda Creek Fishery Enhancement Project.

The SFPUC is dismissing consideration of the impacts of three dams on steelhead trout in Alameda Creek as part of the PEIR, and is proposing water supply projects in the Sunol Valley that could further harm fish and wildlife in Alameda Creek. The SFPUC's failure to include Alameda Creek stream restoration as part of a project to rebuild the seismically vulnerable Calaveras Dam and controversial SFPUC proposals to divert more water from Alameda Creek could unnecessarily jeopardize the schedule for water system upgrades. Comments by the Alameda Creek Alliance and regulatory agencies on the inadequacies of this report are available on the ACA web site.

The Alameda Creek Alliance is insisting that water system infrastructure in the Sunol Valley (including Calaveras Dam and Reservoir, Alameda Diversion Dam, and San Antonio Reservoir) be operated to allow steelhead trout to thrive in Alameda Creek. The PEIR failed to address impacts of SFPUC projects on migratory fish in Alameda Creek, dismissing the planned restoration of steelhead trout to Alameda Creek as "speculative." The proposed Calaveras Dam Replacement and Alameda Creek Fishery "Enhancement" projects include provisions that could allow the SFPUC to divert additional stream flow from Alameda Creek, which would impact native fish and other aquatic wildlife in Alameda Creek. The SFPUC already diverts 86 percent of the stream flows of the upper Alameda Creek watershed and operates Calaveras and San Antonio Reservoirs with no minimum bypass flows to keep native fish downstream in good condition. The SFPUC contemplates diverting almost all of the winter and spring stream flows from upper Alameda Creek at the Alameda Diversion Dam.

The SFPUC manages 36,800 acres of public land and operates three dams in the upper Alameda Creek watershed. Calaveras Dam and Reservoir, completed in 1925, captures runoff from 100 square miles of the Calaveras Creek and Arroyo Hondo watersheds. The Alameda Diversion Dam and tunnel also diverts winter flows from upper Alameda Creek into Calaveras Reservoir. Completion of the Calaveras Dam trapped formerly ocean-run steelhead trout above the reservoir and blocked fish migration from S.F. Bay into the best trout spawning and rearing habitat in the watershed. An estimated adult population of 300 or more landlocked steelhead/rainbow trout survives in Calaveras Reservoir and spawns in the Arroyo Hondo tributary. The SFPUC does not release water from either dam to benefit fish and wildlife downstream, and low summer flows and high water temperatures have reduced native trout to remnant populations below the dam.

Because the dam is near an active fault zone and was determined to be vulnerable in a strong earthquake, the state Division of Safety of Dams in 2001 restricted the reservoir storage level to 40 percent of capacity until the dam is rebuilt. The SFPUC has proposed a replacement earthen dam immediately downstream of the existing dam, with a core that could allow future enlargement of the dam. The rebuild is scheduled to be completed by 2012.

In 2005 the Alameda Creek Alliance and 68 other Bay Area conservation groups requested that the SFPUC improve stewardship of local and regional watershed lands and restore water flow in Alameda Creek. The groups asked the SFPUC to abide by state Fish and Game Codes requiring sufficient instream flows to sustain native fish in good condition. The SFPUC signed an agreement in 1997 to release minimal flows from Calaveras Reservoir to restore five miles of Alameda Creek in the Sunol Valley, but to date has not released any of this water.

Zone 7 Stream Management Plans

In April the Zone 7 Water Agency held an informational meeting for stakeholder and public input their Stream Management Master Plan (known as “StreamWise”) that makes fundamental changes in the way they provide flood protection to residents and businesses in the Livermore-Amador Valley. The program is intended to provide flood protection, benefit the environment and improve the quality of life in the Livermore-Amador Valley. The strategy will replace channelization with diversion and detention of storm water so that it is released in a less turbulent, more systematic and more environmentally-friendly ways after storms pass. Additionally the strategy will provide opportunities to improve water quality, arroyos habitat and water supplies with groundwater recharge, increase connections of tri-valley trails and lastly, provide and promote public understanding of how the watershed works. This summer Zone 7 was in the process of defining, prioritizing and sequencing the projects that will constitute their 5, 10, and 30 year Capital Improvement Projects in their StreamWise Program. Details can be found at www.zone7water.com/streamwise.

Stream Flow Study Plan Finalized

In September the Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup published a study plan for the assessment of the stream flows and fish habitat needed for Alameda Creek steelhead trout restoration. The August 2007 Final Study Plan by fisheries consultants McBain & Trush, *Alameda Creek Population Recovery Strategies and Instream Flow Assessment for Steelhead Trout*, is available on the ACA web site. These cooperative studies will provide a road map for restoring stream flows and habitat to allow a self-sustaining population of steelhead in the watershed.

Apperson Quarry Update

The SFPUC entered into exclusive negotiations with Oliver de Silva, Inc., the owner of the mining lease at Apperson Quarry, concerning the lease of a separate sand and gravel mining operation in the Sunol Valley. The Sunol Valley mine is currently being run by CEMEX. The lease is due to expire and it is expected to be offered to de Silva. This may allow the valley operation (SMP-30) to be connected to the ridge operation (SMP-17). The Apperson Ridge quarry site was originally approved by the Alameda County Board of Supervisors in 1984. The SFPUC intends to include some restoration projects for Alameda Creek in the SMP-30 lease: restoring portions of Alameda Creek in the Sunol Valley, installing a cut-off wall in the gravel pit to prevent water inflow from Alameda Creek, and helping to fund a fish passage project at the PG&E gas crossing in the Sunol Valley. The SMP-30 lease may make the Apperson Quarry more financially viable for de Silva; it potentially could allow the SFPUC to impose additional conditions and mitigation measures. Negotiations over the SFPUC lease will probably take some time and the ACA will monitor them to provide the best scenario for the environment and watershed.

ODDS AND ENDS

Water For Fish Campaign Launched

A coalition of California sport, commercial and tribal fishing organizations launched a Water for Fish petition campaign to restore and rehabilitate the San Francisco Bay-Delta, the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers, and the Klamath River. This campaign, if successful, should help the Alameda Creek by helping to insure adequate water flows for steelhead habitat. All ACA members are urged to go to the web site at www.water4fish.org and sign the petition. Progress updates and other information is available there.

Fremont Earth Day Celebration

The Alameda Creek Alliance again provided an informational booth at the event in April. The booth was staffed by our volunteers headed by Diana Brumbaugh. It was again an opportunity to tell our story and mission to the public. Volunteers are always needed at these public celebrations to deliver our message about the plight of the creek and watershed.

New Zealand Mud Snail Alert

Much to our dismay the invasive exotic New Zealand mud snails managed to find their way into the Alameda Creek watershed. The New Zealand mud snail has spread explosively throughout the Pacific Northwest. Their presence could have impacts on resident rainbow trout and efforts to restore steelhead to the creek. New Zealand mud snails are invasive exotics that can occur in immense numbers, typically tens to hundreds of thousands per square meter. They have spread widely throughout the western U.S. since first detection in Idaho during the 1980s. They occur in a variety of freshwater and estuarine habitats. They are known to occur at several localities in California and within the nine Bay Area counties. The Alameda Creek specimens represent their first known occurrence in the southern Bay Area. These tiny snails can live on sand, rocks, and mud and survive in fresh and brackish water at many temperatures and in damp conditions out of water for weeks. They destroy habitat, sometimes entirely coating surfaces with hundreds of thousands of snails per square yard. They have the potential to alter stream insect populations and impact the food web for native fish. The snails can pass through fish alive, and a study found that trout fed New Zealand mud snails lost weight.



They were found in November and December in the Alameda Creek flood control channel and in upper Niles Canyon. How they arrived in these two areas is unknown. Their usual method of transfer is hitching rides on the boots and clothing of fishermen or biologists, hitchhiking on wading gear and sampling nets. Another suspected way of moving from one watershed to another is by being ingested by birds then carried internally to other locations. In any event, if you plan to venture near or into the creek first familiarize yourself with what this invasive species looks like and suggested way of decontaminating yourself and your equipment after possible exposure. As of now, there has been no effective method of eradication found – our best hope is to prevent or slow the spread. The Alameda Creek fish rescues will be following strict protocols to prevent the spread of mud snails - be prepared to follow these protocols if you volunteer for fish rescue or participate in any activities in the creek. If you suspect you have found New Zealand mud snails locally, please contact Arleen Feng of the Alameda Countywide Clean Water Program, (510) 670-5575, watersheds@acpwa.org.

*****ORGANIZATIONAL MILESTONES*****



ACA 10th Anniversary Celebration

The Alameda Creek Alliance celebrated ten years of efforts to restore and protect the Alameda Creek watershed on August 24th with a celebration held at the Chouinard Winery along Stonybrook Creek in Niles Canyon. The event was a huge success, with almost 100 people

showing up. Those who did not attend missed a gala evening. A number of newspaper articles appeared acknowledging the decade of works and accomplishments of the ACA.

Alameda Creek Restoration in the News

Bay Area newspapers featured a dozen articles about the restoration of Alameda Creek in 2007, including stories in the Contra Costa Times, East Bay Express, Fremont Argus, Livermore Independent, San Francisco Chronicle, Tri-Valley Herald, and the Pleasanton Weekly. All the articles are posted on the ACA web site.

New Alameda Creek Alliance T-shirt

Congratulations to our t-shirt artwork contest winner Daphne Nanga, who submitted the winning design for the new Alameda Creek Alliance t-shirt, “*Six Reasons to Save and Restore Alameda Creek.*” Our new color shirt features six of the creek’s native fish and aquatic wildlife species: steelhead trout, Pacific lamprey, California red-legged frog, western pond turtle, chinook salmon and foothill yellow-legged frog.

Membership

Thank you to everyone who renewed your Alameda Creek Alliance membership or joined during 2007. By the end of the year we had over 1,500 members! Your membership makes us an effective voice and gives us added clout when talking to management agencies.

Yes, I would like to support the Alameda Creek Alliance. Enclosed is \$20 or more for a one-year membership. Membership of \$30 or more receives a new ACA t-shirt (please specify size). Make checks payable to: Alameda Creek Alliance.

Name _____

\$20 Fry

Address _____

\$30 Parr

City _____ Zip _____

\$50 Smolt

Phone _____

\$100 Spawner

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T-shirt XXL XL L M S

(To receive ACA e-mails only)

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Mail to: Alameda Creek Alliance, P.O. Box 2626, Niles, CA 94536-0626