NEXT ACA MEETING
Tuesday, February 27, 7 - 9 PM
Sunol Glen School, Sunol
Note that we will be meeting in a new location,
more centrally located in the watershed.
See page 5 for directions to Sunol Glen School.

AGENCIES MOVE FORWARD WITH RESTORATION PLANS
Plans for four fish passage restoration projects in Alameda Creek are moving forward. Fish ladder
collection and dam removal projects in the flood
control channel and Niles Canyon are scheduled to
be completed by 2003/2004, allowing ocean-run
steelhead trout to access the upper creek in Sunol
Wilderness for the first time since the 1950's.

FLOOD CONTROL CHANNEL
The Alameda County Flood Control District
(ACFC) and the Alameda County Water District
(ACWD) have submitted a restoration proposal to
the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) for fish
passage improvements in the lower 12 miles of
creek comprising the flood control channel.

The Corps is currently preparing a Preliminary
Restoration Plan for the project. The proposed
project includes construction of one fish ladder
bypassing the BART weir (owned by ACFC) and
the middle ACWD inflatable rubber dam; another
fish ladder at the upper ACWD rubber dam; and
installation of fish screens at several major ACWD
water diversions (where water is diverted out of the
flood control channel into the Fremont Quarry
Lakes for groundwater recharge).

If approved, the Corps will provide 75% funding
for the project, which will be completed by fall of
2003 at the earliest. ACWD will pursue separate
funding for improving fish passage at the lower
rubber dam and for screening their smaller
diversions.

The lower ACWD dam is not considered a
permanent migration barrier, and is operated at a
lower height than the middle or upper rubber dams.
Salmon and steelhead have been able to move past
this dam during storm events while it was dropped
flat in the channel. The proposed design is one
ladder which would operate at higher flows, and an
adjacent “false weir Alaska Steeppass” ladder at
low flows which would trap fish for hauling around
the dams.

- Protecting and restoring the natural ecosystems of the Alameda Creek watershed -
The consulting firm CH2M Hill has prepared a report on the conceptual designs and cost estimates for the ladders and screens, which will be available shortly on-line at www.amarine.com/information/acwpa/acfisheries.html. The fish ladder design for the BART weir and middle rubber dam is proposed to include a public viewing area and the ability to trap fish for future monitoring.

NILES CANYON DAMS

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) is moving forward with plans to remove the Niles and Sunol Dams in Niles Canyon. Niles Dam has a non-functional fish ladder, and the fish ladder on Sunol Dam was blown out long ago. Neither dam is currently used for water supply. SFPUC has completed a feasibility study and analysis of the impacts of dam removal. The major issues studied for removing these dams were what to do with sediment accumulated behind the dams, whether riparian vegetation would be harmed by hydrologic changes after dam removal, and the historic significance of the dams.

The effects of removing Niles Dam on riparian vegetation and sediment transport are expected to be minor. It is tentatively proposed to excavate and truck out the majority of sediment accumulated behind Sunol Dam, rather than to let it flush out of the system after dam removal. The Sunol Dam removal is expected to lower the groundwater table in the area adjacent to the dam, but to not significantly impact the mature riparian vegetation along the east bank.

Both dams qualify as historic structures. The lower stone portion of Niles Dam was built in 1841 to supply water to the Vallejo Flour Mill at the bottom of Niles Canyon. It was capped with concrete in 1887 by the Spring Valley Water Company to supply water to San Francisco. Sunol Dam was constructed in 1900.

Both dams are considered “attractive nuisances” by the SFPUC. The SFPUC has tentatively proposed restoring the Vallejo Mill site as remediation for the removal of these historic structures. Removal of these structures will allow the much more historic runs of steelhead to once again ascend Niles Canyon.
Come Celebrate the First Alameda Creek Dam Removal!
Friday, August 17, 10 AM
Sunol Swim Dams
Sunol Regional Wilderness
Contact the ACA for more info.
Wear your ACA T-shirt

SUNOL SWIM DAMS

The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) will begin the first Alameda Creek dam removal project on August 17, 2001, at 10 AM in Sunol Regional Wilderness. EBRPD will begin removing two low swim dams in Alameda Creek which are barriers to fish movement at lower flows. The 3 foot high dams will be removed and the streambanks restored and re-vegetated by the end of summer 2001. The Alameda Creek Alliance contributed $200 toward the dam removal.

STONYBROOK CREEK CULVERTS

ACFCD is finishing up a fish passage study for 11 County-owned culverts in Stonybrook Creek, a tributary to Alameda Creek in Niles Canyon. A radio tagged steelhead went up this creek in 1998, and there is a healthy population of native trout. All of the road crossing culverts are potential barriers to fish migration. The ACFCD and CalTrans will be looking into modifying these culverts, which could open up 2 miles of trout spawning and rearing habitat in Stonybrook Creek.

RESTORING THE CREEK MOUTH

ACFCD is investigating Corps funding for a restoration project at the mouth of Alameda Creek. ACFCD is interested in removing or setting back the levees which contain the mouth of the creek, to facilitate sediment transport into the Bay. This project could alleviate the need for ACFCD to dredge the lower creek channel, while re-creating wetlands and providing nursery and smolt habitat at the creek mouth for steelhead.

JUMP-STARTING THE RUN

The Alameda Creek Fisheries Workgroup has recommended jump-starting the steelhead run before barriers are removed in the creek. The idea is to restock native steelhead smolts (young steelhead moving downstream in preparation for the ocean phase of their life-cycle) in the lower creek for several years. It would take 1-3 years for the smolts to return from the ocean as steelhead, at which time these fish would be able to migrate upstream into the newly-opened spawning habitat.

Landlocked trout behind Calaveras and San Antonio Dams still exhibit the migratory behavior of steelhead. These fish are thought to be the purest strain of Alameda Creek-adapted fish, and most likely to respond to restoration efforts. The SFPUC will conduct a genetic study of rainbow/steelhead trout behind these dams and in upper Arroyo Mecho to determine a population suitable for jump-starting a run in the lower creek.
SFPU C RUBBER DAM
The SFPU C is still pursuing plans to construct an inflatable rubber recapture dam in Alameda Creek in the upper Sunol Valley. As part of a settlement of a water rights complaint filed by CalTrout in 1989, SFPU C has agreed to release from 7-20 cfs of water from Calaveras Reservoir year-round to benefit native trout below the dam.

However, the SFPU C intends to recapture the water 5 miles downstream at the site of the Sunol Pumping Plant. SFPU C had originally proposed a 6' high rubber dam, which would have created a 6 acre impoundment. The proposal has now been scaled back to a 3' high dam, with a 4 acre impoundment.

The project is within designated Critical Habitat for steelhead trout and the red-legged frog. There are also native yellow-legged frogs, tiger salamanders, and pond turtles at the site. The impoundment would create prime habitat for introduced predators such as bullfrogs and predatory fish, which eat native amphibians and trout eggs. Fish passage and entrainment of eggs and young at the diversion are also concerns.

An interagency meeting to discuss the impacts to listed species is planned for Monday, March 12 in Sunol. Jeff Miller has been attending the rubber dam meetings on behalf of ACA to ensure that habitat for trout and native amphibians is not destroyed or degraded by the project.

FISHERIES WORKGROUP
The next meeting of the Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup will be held on Tuesday, April 3, at 9:30 AM at the ACFCD offices, 951 Turner Court in Hayward. The Fisheries Workgroup is the stakeholder group that is working out the details and timing of how to proceed with steelhead restoration in the watershed. Meetings are open to the public. Minutes from Workgroup meetings and most of the reports mentioned in this newsletter are available on-line at www.amarine.com/information/acwp/acfisheries.html.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE WATERSHED
Two proposed destructive sprawl development projects in the East Bay need your action:

Blue Rock Country Club (Hayward 1900, Inc.)
- on Walpert Ridge in Hayward - adjacent to Garin/Dry Creek and Pleasanton Ridge Regional Parks, and Stonybrook Canyon
- over 600 exclusive luxury homes and an 18 hole golf course planned
- will destroy over 800 acres of critical habitat for the red-legged frog and the Alameda whipsnake
- loss of breeding ponds for the frog; will fragment habitat for one of only five remaining populations of the whip snake; will fill and pollute the headwaters of Palomares, Dry, and Ward Creeks
- the Army Corps of Engineers improperly issued a federal permit with approval from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- the Hayward Area Planning Association and Center for Biological Diversity have sued to stop the development - court hearing scheduled for May

Happy Valley Golf Course (City of Pleasanton)
- 34 luxury homes plus infrastructure and an 18 hole golf course (there already are 4 golf courses within five miles of this site)
- will develop or modify over 240 acres which are potential habitat for endangered species (Alameda whipsnake, red-legged frog, California tiger salamander, and Callippe silverspot butterfly)
- so far no federal permit, but no one is suing on this project

What you can do:
Please attend the Regional Water Board permit hearings for these developments (both hearings are the same day). The hearings are Wednesday, February 21 starting at 9:30 AM, in the 1st Floor Auditorium of the State of California Building, 1515 Clay Street, in downtown Oakland.
21st Annual Rivers Festival
February 23-25
Herbst Pavilion - Fort Mason Center, S. F.

Help table for the ACA and get into the Festival free - contact Jeff ASAP if you are interested.

On Saturday, February 24, from 3:00 to 3:50 (Room 205), Jeff will represent the ACA as part of a panel at the Festival; Rivers Reborn - an Update on Dam Removal Efforts in California.

Attend the 2nd Annual
Fremont Steelhead Festival
and Watershed Awareness Fair!

Saturday, May 12, 9 AM to 3 PM

This year’s Fremont Steelhead Festival will be held at Niles Community Park, along Alameda Creek in the Niles District of Fremont. The Festival is a celebration of the progress made toward restoring native steelhead trout to Alameda Creek and a chance to improve public awareness of the project.

Sponsored by:
Alameda Creek Alliance
City of Fremont
Alameda County Flood Control District
Alameda County Water District
S. F. Public Utilities Commission
Union Sanitary District
East Bay Regional Park District

The Festival runs from 10 AM to 3 PM, with educational booths and displays by organizations and agencies involved in the Alameda Creek watershed and East Bay fish restoration activities.

A 10K Spawning Run and a 5K fun-run will be held along Alameda Creek starting at 9 AM. There will also be walking tours of the proposed fish restoration sites, as well as food, live music, prize giveaways, activities for kids, and more.

If you would like to volunteer, or if your organization is interested in participating, or for more information about the Fremont Steelhead Festival, please contact Paul Salop at (925) 373-7142 or via e-mail at salop@amarine.com.

I came as a blind man led by a seeing-eye salmon - and it showed me a world I’d believed was destroyed, a world where a man could still walk unfeared among the animals and birds he calls “wild.”

- From The River Why by David James Duncan

FISH RESCUE

ACA and local water agencies currently transport migratory fish past barriers in the lower creek. These “fish rescues” are a temporary solution to fish passage until dam removals and fish ladder construction are completed. If you would like to volunteer to move fish, contact the ACA.

ACA MEETINGS

The Alameda Creek Alliance meets the last Tuesday of each month from 7 to 9 PM (except during summer) at Sunol Glen School, 11601 Main Street, in the town of Sunol.

DIRECTIONS TO SUNOL GLEN SCHOOL:

From Highway 680:
Take the Hwy. 84 exit from Hwy. 680 (about 7 miles south of 680/880 interchange). Go west on Hwy. 84 (Niles Canyon Road) ¼ mile, go straight through the stop sign at four corners. Go over the bridge (over Arroyo de la Laguna) and make the first right into Sunol. The school will be immediately on your right. We meet in the Community Room.

From Fremont/Highway 84:
Go east on Hwy. 84 (Niles Canyon Road), up Niles Canyon. At the top of the canyon, take the Sunol exit into town. Continue through town on Main Street past the brew pub and the post office, over the railroad tracks, and the school will be on your left. We meet in the Community Room.

CONTACT US

Contact the Alameda Creek Alliance at:

P. O. Box 192
Canyon, CA 94516
Phone (510) 845-4675
e-mail: alamedacreek@hotmail.com
Alameda Creek's Renaissance

Steelhead's return a symbol of change

By Paul McHugh
Chief-Engineer Outdoors Writer

Bike, hike or drive a hair out to a spot where Alameda Creek flows into San Francisco Bay, and you'll soon score a splendid and educational view.

This point - 2 miles out in the bay from the edge of Coyote Hills Regional Park and Fremont - is reached by a path of trails atop Wood-Road levees that bracket the creek.

Dabbling, yellowcombed eider duck tussle tranquil waves. The bay's size of natural flushing dominates the skimmers. Human structures are submerged in scale and imperceptible. Sounds of wind and waves are unannounced. Noise only issues from aircraft drifting into SFO, 10 miles to the northwest.

Next year, herons and egrets will be in the estuarine marsh along the creek. Herons hover on the beaver. Sandpipers live to and for.

This Alameda Creek some years a living gift, a tiny fragment from the southern bay's past. Turn and gaze back upstream toward Fremont, and it looks as though development's concrete and asphalt jaws are snatching up the stream's watered lake place.

But the reality is more interesting. Alameda Creek is on the teeter of a natural renaissance. Moves are underway to enhance ecological values, and make this special place a great place for outdoor recreation.

Symbol of the change: Massive $32-million steelhead trout. A few are stocked in the creek, stirring to winter upstream to ancestral spawning sites. Soon, that struggle will get easier.

In summer, two small dams burning their progress will come down. Plans are made to remove others, modify their operation or old fish ladder, allowing steelhead to reclaim miles of stream. Next, naturalizing surrounding areas will be launched to restore this magical but threatened species.

This is the Quarry Lakes, just north of the creek in Fremont, to be returned with river diversion and recreational sites - complete with a new walking beach. Envisioned for the future: hiking trails, picnic areas and a guided system extending Alameda Creek through Niles Canyon, going more than 40 miles from the creek's mouth to San Luis Reservoir.

"Many issues remain to be dealt with," said Jeff Miller, director of the Alameda Creek Alliance. The new, non-profit group organizes volunteers to work for watershed restoration. "But last year, the watershed management approach gained on what should be done. Momentum for restoration seems to be snowballing."

Miller, who also works for the Berkeley-based group for BioDiversity, stuck up the torch for restoring steelhead here, a flame that has flared since 1994. He has joined board meetings and clean-up rooms, making his pitch - lately with a stuffed steelhead named Stella under center ears. 27-inches, grand Stella, was found three miles up San Lorenzo Creek, put to the north, during last winter's spawning run.

Miller has also hosted live steelhead. The 18-member Alliance has promoted changes in stream-truck traffic, and stocked steelhead below the dam and given them a boost up to spawning areas in Niles Canyon - one of several of its efforts to keep the runs alive.

Standing at the mouth of Alameda Creek today this writer and adult steelhead may be finding just past you, invisible in the turbid water.

"Wore you to ascend with them, your first obstacle would be a big, inessential dam of black rubber - one of three operated by the Alameda County Water District. Their job is to impound winter rainfall, letting it percolate down to recharge ground water. The first is just 6 feet high, steelhead can't pass it easily. The others may be in a foot. The district is exploring the notion of operating these dams in a way that permits fish passage.

The next major impasse is a big concrete wall built to stabilize eroding stream banks. TARP Bank. You'd pass the final black rubber dam at Niles, just before the entrance to the canyon, near a large parking and staging area for hikers and cyclists. This point is 12 miles upstream from the Alameda Creek mouth. Two other major barriers to human recreation are found in between: Borden, at 598 miles, and Livermore, at 275 miles.

"Beautiful as the steep, green, 6-lane Niles Canyon is, it's simply a transit problem for people and fish,"Miller said. "But the very best way to see it is to take a Sunday run on the Niles Canyon Historic Railway.

If they made it up this far, steelhead would jump into one of the orange dams, owned by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPU). The first is 4-deck high, the second is 1 foot. Both are slated to be either removed or reached to enhance fish passes. The hope is to acquire Army Corps of Engineers mitigation funds or other environmental grants to accomplish it.

Also, the SFPU may transfer some of its 40,000 acres in the Alameda Creek watershed to the East Bay Regional Park District. "This would permit establishment of connecting trails through Niles Canyon and beyond."

Once past the town of Sunol, Alameda Creek fans out into valleys of its 700-mile drainage. Problems here include easel crossings, an armored PG&E gas line, and hinds like steep rock-strewn and partially dammed hangars.

"To improve a fishery, you must work on water courses and the whole mountain corridor," said Michael Callan, planning director for the SFPU. "That includes replanting forests to shade the water, establishing pools and riffles, and getting sufficient flows at the right times of year - which means agencies will have to change the way they look at water."

One are in the hole is the existence of

Alameda Creek Information

- Alameda Creek Alliance — www.alamedacreek.com
- Coyote Hills Regional Park — Take Potrero Ranch Road west from Pacheco-Fremont, 10 miles from Fremont. Visitor Center has natural history displays, 10 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Tuesday-Saturday on weekends 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Park $5. (510) 575-9360.
- Alameda Creek Regional Trail — Distance from Niles Staging Area (old Old Canyon Road) to the lake 12 miles, patrol with vehicles 12.5 miles, unpaved north side. Open Sun.-Thurs. 6:30 a.m.-9:30 p.m., Fri.-Sat. 6:30 a.m.-10 p.m. (510) 868-1833.
- Niles Canyon Heritage Railways — One-hour runs on historic train, first and third Sun. each month. Coach $17 (per person), $9 (children ages 3-12). No reservations. (510) 662-9063.
- Sunol Regional Wilderness — Located on Calaveras Road, southeast of Sunol. On July 7, annual salmon, steelhead, 4,500 free tickets, backpacking, 8 a.m.-5 p.m., 7am-5p.m., (510) 586-1684.
- Quarry Lakes Recreation Area — The 12-acre quarry is off the 450-acre site, now opened for groundwater recharge by the Alameda County Water District. Over the past year, the site has been restored, and the area has been open for the fall for wildlife viewing and waterfowl. Envisaged for the future: hiking trails, interpretive guided tours. General Information, on the other hand is below: (510) 521-0138 or www.queyinalake.org.

Paul McHugh

Steve Miller
JOIN THE ACA

Support the work of the Alameda Creek Alliance by becoming a member. If you haven’t already joined, please send in the enclosed membership form below. You get a free T-shirt with a membership of $25 or more. We now have 180+ members! If you wish to receive regular e-mail updates and alerts about the issues and activities of the ACA, e-mail us at:

alamedacreek@hotmail.com

ACA T-SHIRTS

Beautiful color T-shirts on a white background (see adjacent design) are available for $25. Check payable to Alameda Creek Alliance, P. O. Box 192, Canyon, CA 94516. Specify size (S, M, L, XL, XXL).

HELMINTOLLER FISH ART

The beautiful steelhead drawings on pages 1 and 3 are courtesy of Stuart Helmintoller. Please visit Stuart's web page at http://helmintoller.com/streamside/.

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ALAMEDA CREEK ALLIANCE MEMBERSHIP FORM

Yes, I would like to become a member of the Alameda Creek Alliance and receive the newsletter Up Your Creek! Enclosed is $10 or more for a one-year membership. For a membership of $25 or more you will receive an Alameda Creek Alliance T-shirt (please specify size). Make checks payable to Alameda Creek Alliance.

Name ________________________________

Address ____________________________________________

City __________ Zip __________

Phone ________________________________

e-mail ________________________________

☐ $15   Fry

☐ $25   Parr

☐ $50   Smolt

☐ $100  Spawner

☐ Send me a bumpersticker

Mail to: Alameda Creek Alliance, P.O. Box 192, Canyon, CA 94516
UPCOMING EVENTS - MARK YOUR CALENDAR

📅 February 21  Water Board Hearings, Oakland  (see page 4)
📅 February 23-25  Rivers Festival, S. F.  (see page 5)
📅 February 27  Next ACA Meeting, Sunol  (see page 1)
📅 March 27  ACA Meeting, Sunol  (see page 5)
📅 April 3  Fisheries Workgroup Mtg., Hayward  (see page 4)
📅 April 24  ACA Meeting, Sunol  (see page 5)
📅 May 12  Fremont Steelhead Festival, Fremont  (see page 5)
📅 August 17  Sunol Dam Removal, Sunol Wilderness  (see page 3)