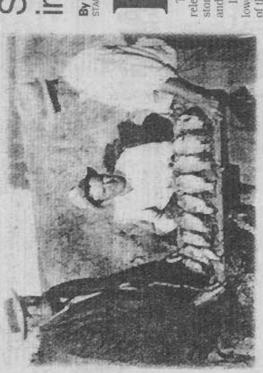
HURSDAY

February 3, 2000

CALIFORNIA NEWARK AND UNION CITY FREMONT,

caught steelhead trout in shed by the dozen. This ieved to have ermen once the Alameda photo is bebeen taken in the 1930s or Sport fish Creek water 1940s. COURTESY EAST BAY REGIONAL PARK DISTRICT



in Alameda Creek, tributaries Steelhead revival possible

By Matt Carter

STAFF WRITER

F MAN wills it, Central Coast steel-

Pleasanton and Livermore to breed in their historic spawning grounds head could once again journey up-stream through Fremont, Sunol, That's the conclusion of a soon-to-bestoring the steelhead to Alameda Creek released study on the potential for reand its tributaries.

lowed, work to get steelhead around many If the study's recommendations are folocean-going trout from completing their of the mary-made barriers that keep the

stream-to-ocean life cycle could be com-pleted as soon as 2003.

environmental regulators and activists who But first, the coalition of water agencies helped prepare the study must line up the political support - and the money - to carry out its recommendations.

Alameda Creek watershed has been kicked around for decades. Although discussions The idea of restoring steelhead to the consensus is building that the work can stages, there are signs that, this time, a in 1989 never got beyond the planning

Please see Steelhead, NEWS-11

Steelhead: Directors vote to work with county

Continued from NEWS-1

and should be done.

The Alameda County Water District's Board of Directors voted last Thursday to work with the Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District on an application for up to \$5 million in federal funding to begin the work.

The backbone of the work recommended, as outlined in a draft version of a study to be released next week, includes:

- ➤ Building a fish ladder in Fremont around a 13-foot-high inflatable capture dam operated by the water district and an 8-foot-high flood control weir that prevents erosion around a Bay Area Rapid Transit rail crossing.
- ➤ Removing the San Francisco Public Utility Commission's 12-foot-high Sunol Dam in Niles Canyon.
- ➤ Mordifying a 10-foot-high PG&E gas line crossing in Sunol Valley to improve passage in Alameda Creek up to Little Yosemite in Sunol Regional Wilderness.
- Improving passage to Arroyo Mocho by building fish ladders around a weir near Stanley Boulevard and around an access road to a Lawrence Livermore Lab pumping station.

The study found that making those improvements and others could give steelhead access to 20 miles of suitable spawning grounds on public and private lands upstream of Fremont. Fish on their way to some spawning grounds would travel through Pleasanton in the Arroyo de la Laginia and Arroyo del Valle and through Livermore in the Arroyo Mocho.

Steelhead might also thrive again in

Sinbad Creek near Sunol, where Randy Mills' family caught strings of the fish just yards from their home on Kilkare Road into the 1950s.

"My folks came from Oklahoma, and saw the fish when they first moved up there. They didn't know what they were," Mills recalled, "My uncle came up here (from Modesto) and said, 'My God they're steelhead.' In the summertime, the creek never really dried up. The fish would get stuck in these pools of water."

Part of the study involved genetic tests of landlocked rainbow trout in the Alameda Creek watershed. The tests strongly suggested the fish are descended from steel-head trout that once made mass migrations to the ocean.

Because they are well-adapted to local conditions like water temperature, the fish could be ideal for restoration efforts, the study found.

In fact, some scientists believe they may be the source of ocean-going steelhead that have been spotted in increasing numbers at the so-called BART weir in Fremont. In rainy years, young trout may be able to get down to the ocean, but can't get past the weir on their way back. Conservationists have been carrying a few fish past the barrier by hand.

The Army Corps of Engineers built the weir, the first big obstacle to migratory fish on the creek, in 1972.

The federal government might provide as much as \$5 million to bypass the weir and other barriers as part of a program designed to minimize the environmental impacts of corps projects built in less enlightened times. But there's only about

\$25 million available from that program each year, and the project must compete with others for the money.

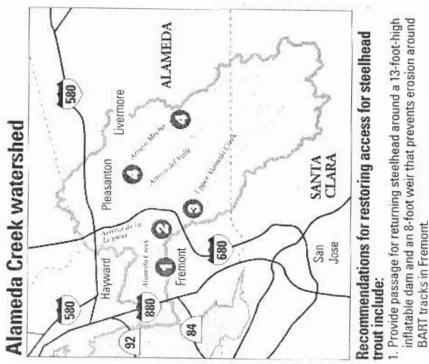
Backers of the study say a federal designation of the Central Coast steelhead as a threatened species in 1997 boosts the chances of a program to restore the fish to Alameda Creek. And, they say, increased public interest and more opportunities to land state and federal money for the project also improve the prospects.

Throughout the West, man-made barriers such as dams in the watercourses that serve as the steelheads' "roads" are coming down, said state Department of Fish and Game steelhead specialist Dennis McEwan Nevertheless, a 1996 study estimated there were only about 250,000 steelhead in California — probably less than half the popula tion of 30 years ago, McEwan said.

If fish can't get around it, a 15-foot obstacle is "as much of a barrier as Shasti Dam," he said. Even smaller barriers — both natural and man-made — can be obstacles depending on stream depth.

While water agencies are supportive or plans to build fish ladders, there are wor ries that they eventually may be required to allow more precious water to flow to Sa Francisco Bay if steelhead are restored to Alameda Creek.

McEwan said it's too early in the proces to speculate on whether more water may be required. But it is physical barriers, rathe than water flows, that pose the bigges problems for steelhead — especially in relatively pristing watersheds like Alamed Creek. McEwan said. "We're not going threatify all the barriers, but there are plen we can start with that will keep us busy."



Build fish ladder or remove the 12-foot-high Sunol Dam in Niles Canyon.

Modify the 10-foot-high PG&E gas line crossing in Sunol Valley

to improve passage by building a fish ladder or weirs.

4. Improve passage to Arroyo Mocho by building small weirs or fish ladders at Stanley Boulevard weir and Lawrence Livermore Lab pumping station access road.

SOURCE. Alameda Croek Fishinnes Restoration Workgroup