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Fish Run Urged For Alameda Creek

Study says steelhead could return

Benjamin Pimentel, Chronicle Staff Writer

EAST BAY -- Steelhead trout could thrive again in Alameda Creek if artificial ladders were built to help the fish swim upstream to spawn, according to a report released yesterday.

The report, part of a study commissioned by several county agencies, said modifying or removing man-made structures along the creek could restore a once-booming steelhead population in the 700- square-mile watershed in southern Alameda County.

``We have an opportunity to create a future East Bay that includes the wild steelhead run from the ocean,'' said Andy Gunther, vice president of Applied Marine Sciences, a Livermore consulting firm that helped draft the study.

The project could take more than five years to complete and could cost between $2 million and $3 million in federal ecological restoration funds and money from the California Department of Fish and Game, Gunther said.

Jeff Miller, spokesman for the Alameda Creek Alliance, a citizens group fighting to restore the steelhead run, said the study offers a realistic way to ``get this run going.''

But Paul Piraino, general manager of the Alameda County Water District, said restoring the steelhead run means redirecting some water to make way for the fish migration -- and that could mean disruptions in service to 312,000 customers in Newark, Fremont and Union City.

The study proposes building ramps along the river to enable the fish to reach breeding areas along the creek. A series of pools would also be built near the ramps so the fish would have places to rest.

The report was drafted in response to growing public interest in protecting steelhead in Alameda Creek, where the construction of dams and rail bridges during the past century destroyed the fish's natural habitat, Gunther said.

For example, bridge supports where BART crosses Alameda Creek in Fremont block the way of steelhead swimming upstream from San Francisco Bay to spawning grounds.

The study has been presented to the groups and agencies that commissioned the report, Gunther said. The project must be sponsored by a local public agency to receive financing, Gunther said.