

Salmon spotted in Bay Area creek, marking return for 1st time in decades after restoration project

Just weeks after our report, fish are being spotted in a scenic stretch of an East Bay watershed

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SUNOL, Calif. (KGO) -- When Claire Buchanan led us up Alameda Creek in the hills above Fremont about eight weeks ago, the waters were flowing again after a major restoration. Buchanan and her colleagues at the environmental nonprofit California Trout helped spearhead the removal of a PG&E pipeline that had partially blocked the creek for decades, effectively acting as a barrier to migrating fish.

"It's been blocked by this pipeline. And now that these fish have over 20 miles of really high quality spawning habitat, it just increases their chances of recovery," Buchanan explains.

But nobody could predict with certainty what would happen next. With the creek open, would trout and salmon find their way this far up the watershed and perhaps begin spawning along the quiet banks?

Then shortly after the removal, volunteers spotted a site that hadn't been seen in roughly 70 years, Chinook salmon, moving upstream towards lower Niles Canyon.

"We have got some exciting news," Buchanan says. "From our biologists that are on site monitoring Arsenal Valley fish passage project. The biologists work for Sequoia Ecological Consulting, and they spotted two Chinook salmon who had migrated past the erosion control mat that was formerly there, blocking fish migration on Alameda Creek."

For the first time in nearly three decades, the 40-mile path from Union City to Sunol is flowing free for steelhead trout wanting to start a family.

And some local volunteers believe there may already be more Salmon migrating into the area. The confirmed migration could be the beginning of a major turn-around for the watershed. And could potentially help bolster endangered populations of Steelhead Trout... and possibly restore habitat for animals ranging from Eagles to otters and beavers.

And while the pipeline project took 15 million dollars and years of planning to complete, the speed of the payback seems nothing short of stunning.

"So proving success that quickly after completion of a project is I mean, there's no better feeling," Buchanan believes.

Researchers believe recent rains may have helped spur the migration. And with more rains ahead, there's excitement building for what could be a major environmental success story.

The project also had support from a number of groups including the Alameda Creek Alliance.