

Steelhead trout get help from officials

Threatened species moved past barriers

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FREMONT — Four steelhead trout have moved closer to their former spawning grounds in Alameda Creek, thanks to a boost from government biologists and environmental activists.

The officials moved the fish — a threatened species — past migration barriers in the creek Sunday morning with the help of a backpack shocker and nets. The fish were part of a group of steelhead seen trying to scale a concrete weir near Peralta Boulevard and the BART tracks Wednesday.

About eight other fish still are hiding in the muddy water there. Biologists plan to try to catch more fish today.

The fish-moving operation is the latest attempt by the Alameda Creek Alliance — a group of local fishermen and environmentalists — to return the rare species to their former breeding grounds. Their old route from the Bay up the creek is blocked by the weir and several inflatable dams the Alameda County Water District uses to collect drinking water.

On Wednesday, activists and government engineers visiting Alameda Creek to design a fish ladder spotted about a dozen steelhead.

That afternoon, the men tried to move the fish upstream, but could not catch them. They tried again Friday morning, but the creek was flowing too quickly and the water was too

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muddy.

The activists tried again Sunday because of concerns that several dams were being inflated downstream and might soon trap the fish. They were also afraid that the fish were becoming weaker from trying to leap over the weir.

Early Sunday morning, the activists and biologists with the East Bay Regional Parks District draped a net across the creek about 20 feet below the weir.

They then used a backpack shocker to send a low current into the water and stun the fish, which caused seven steelhead to become disoriented and rise to the surface.

Biologists scooped up four of them with smaller nets and put them into coolers and special tanks in a park district van. They were measured, weighed, and clipped for identification. The other three fish dodged the nets.

Two of the fish were found to be female, one male. Biologists could not determine the sex of the fourth one. They were 23 to 27 inches long and in good health.

Biologists drove them upstream and set them free in creek waters at the base of Niles Canyon. Activists say they hope the fish will continue up-

stream on their own and spawn, then make it back down to the Bay on the currents of the next big rainstorm.

Any offspring from the venture would remain in the creek for one or two years, then follow their parents to the Bay. He said he hopes that by that time, other solutions — such as fish ladders and increased water flows — will be in place to assist them.

Once plentiful in the area, steelhead trout were thought to have vanished from Alameda Creek two decades ago. But steelhead have been discovered swimming upstream in the creek on several occasions in the past five months.

Steelhead trout are born in freshwater streams, migrate to the sea, then return to spawn. But urban development has destroyed much of the population, and the fish was listed as a threatened species by the federal government last year.

Activists are using various methods to return the steelhead to their former homes.

"As an interim solution, (moving the fish) is working," said Jeff Miller, organizer with the Alameda Creek Alliance. "But we won't be able to do this all the time."

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