

Habitat Could Support Steelhead Manmade Structures Block Access to Spawning Grounds

A report released Monday concludes that steelhead could move up Alameda Creek to spawn if manmade structures in the creek channel are modified or removed.

Steelhead are an ocean-going form of rainbow trout closely related to salmon.

There has been an interest in restoration of steelhead in Alameda Creek in the past. Recently, volunteers have captured adult steelhead, transported them around the major barriers and released them upstream. In addition, state-of-the-art genetic techniques have documented that these fish are not from hatcheries. Instead they are the remnants of a wild population of trout that are listed as a threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act.

"The fact that these fish are part of the native population means that

they are adapted to the local environment," said Pete Alexander, a fisheries biologist for the East Bay Regional Park District. "This means they are well-sited to respond to restoration actions."

"There appears to be adequate habitat for spawning. Presently, the fish cannot get to it," said Laura Kilgour of the Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, which commissioned the study along with the California Coastal Conveyancy.

A key barrier to fish migration is a drop structure that prevents seouring around bridge supports where Union Pacific Railroad and BART cross the Creek in Fremont.

Preparation of the final report was supervised by the Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup, a committee composed of staff from

fish and wildlife, flood control and water supply agencies, local fisherman and environmental organizations.

The report was prepared by Applied Marine Sciences of Livermore and Hagar Environmental Science of Richmond. It concludes that the steelhead could complete their life-cycle in the watershed with provision of fish passage at key locations.

"The precise size of the steelhead run that would result cannot be predicted," cautioned Andrew Gunther, vice president of Applied Marine Sciences. Gunther pointed to climate variation, water diversion practices and future human development as factors that could influence the ultimate success of restoration efforts.

Federal funds available through the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (See STEELHEAD, page 4)

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paid for the study.

Jeff Miller of the Alameda Creek Alliance, a watershed protection group which has been lobbying to have steelhead and salmon restored to the creek, said his group is pleased with the report. "We've had wild steelhead stacking up in the lower creek the past two years. This report provides the basis for moving forward with restoration projects which will allow native fish to once again thrive in Alameda Creek."

Miller concluded, "Residents along the watershed are going to be thrilled when they can watch these fish spawn in their local creek in a few years."

Paul Piratino, general manager of the Alameda County Water District, said the report raises some key questions that still need to be answered before a full evaluation can be made of the impacts of the restoration effort would have on the district's water supply operations. These issues include how much water would need to flow to the Bay to facilitate fish migration, the timing of the migration, and sources of water to provide the needed flows.

The water district operates several inflatable dams on Alameda Creek which are used to divert water to the adjacent quarry lakes for groundwater recharge.