

# Festival raises steelhead awareness

By Robert Dennis  
STAFF WRITER

FREMONT — The BART train rumbled overhead as Richard Wetzig pointed out the steelhead trout's nemesis in the creek below.

An 11-foot high concrete weir protects the BART bridge from erosion where it runs across the Alameda Creek just south of Niles. It is one of the major barriers facing steelhead as they try to move upstream to spawn.

"They may get about four or five feet up (the weir), but then they slide back down," said Wetzig, who works with the Alameda County Flood Control District. "It's really kind of heart wrenching to see that."

Wetzig's tours of the creek were part of the second annual Fremont Steelhead Trout Festival and Water-

shed Awareness Fair Saturday at Niles Community Park.

The event began at 9 a.m. with the Alameda Creek "Spawning" Run — a 10-kilometer race along the creek — and a 5-kilometer fun run and walk.

The runs were followed by a day of music, food and information about the steelhead-restoration effort in the creek.

"Today's event is mainly just educational," said Jeff Miller of the Alameda Creek Alliance, a community group dedicated to preserving and restoring the ecosystems of the creek. "People want to see these fish in the creek. The fish restoration has come to symbolize people's desire to have someplace near where we live that is special and beautiful."

Miller has been in the front lines of the battle to restore the creek's steel-

head population, which was decimated by a series of water-supply and flood-control projects beginning in the late-1950s, including the weir and a series of dams.

The alliance ran into opposition in the beginning, as some agencies resisted restoration attempts and argued no steelhead were left in the creek.

"They didn't think there was any fish left," Wetzig said. "But somebody forgot to tell the fish...and they kept showing up."

Since its inception in 1997, the alliance has documented the existence of steelhead in the creek, worked to achieve public awareness and pleaded their case to the numerous boards

Please see **Fish**, LOCAL-3

# Fish: Activists give steelhead a needed lift

Continued from LOCAL-1

and agencies involved. Now, the work may be starting to pay off. A ceremony kicking off the demolition of two small dams in the Sunol Regional Wilderness is scheduled for Aug. 17, and Miller said he hopes efforts to build 'fish ladders' at the two 13-foot high lower dams will reach fruition as soon as 2003.

Meanwhile, the festival crowd combined education with entertainment, taking in the fly-fishing lessons, music, food and presentation booths from various groups and agencies.

Jackie Redding of Niles watched as her son Joshua, 5, spun a wheel and answered a steelhead-related question to pick up a prize at the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission booth.

"We love to fish, and we wanted to see what was going on and have some fun," Redding said.

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ANDY CHU — Staff  
Maria Hassett, 11, of Castro Valley takes a look at an aquarium filled with native coldwater species of fish, like sturgeon, rainbow trout and steelhead trout.