

Conservationists look to restore Arroyo Mocho as steelhead run

January 04, 2002

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LIVERMORE -- Advocates seeking to restore fish runs in the East Bay say remote parts of the Arroyo Mocho could be a suitable spawning ground for steelhead trout.

The group Alameda Creek Alliance and other organizations are seeking to take down dams and other barriers that prevent the fish from making their way from historic spawning grounds to the ocean.

The alliance and other members of the Alameda Creek Fisheries Workgroup have made progress in the lower portion of Alameda Creek, where many blockages are scheduled to be removed and fish ladders added by 2004. Work to date includes the removal of two small dams near Sunol this past summer.

The case of those seeking to restore the lower Alameda Creek area has been strengthened by photos and other documents showing evidence of steelhead populations in the creeks in the past, before man-made obstructions interfered with the fish habitats and migration routes.

Now the Alameda Creek Alliance is turning its attention north, toward the Valley and such tributaries as the Arroyo Mocho.

Group members believe that at some point in the future, fish could go from Alameda Creek to the Arroyo de la Laguna in Pleasanton, then on to the Arroyo Del Valle and the Arroyo Mocho in Livermore. A study done in 2000 by the workgroup suggests a suitable spawning area is available on the Arroyo Mocho southeast of Livermore, near the intersection of Mines Road and the creek.

A new report by the alliance adds further strength to the case for fish restoration activity in the creeks near Pleasanton and Livermore. The Dec. 15 report by alliance member Bob Moir pinpoints numerous man-made obstructions. Without these obstructions, Moir reported, the fish could make their way up the various creeks and then back to the ocean.

But the alliance and other backers of fish restoration work have at least one obstacle not faced with the lower Alameda Creek area: No one seems to know for sure if there were ever large numbers of steelhead in the Arroyo Mocho.

Jeff Miller of the alliance said he has not seen evidence that steelhead lived along the Arroyo Mocho, although he believes they did historically.

What government agency would help pay to introduce fish to a region in which they have no historical roots? That is the kind of question faced by the Zone 7 water agency, which handles flood control and water management activities in the creek and its tributaries.

Making a historical connection is not easy, in part because the Arroyo Mocho connects to the ocean only via man-made channels, said Dennis Gambs, a principal engineer for Zone 7.

Still, Miller thinks he has good reason to believe the fish at one point lived or thrived along the Arroyo Mocho's banks. The creek does have rainbow trout, which is identical to the steelhead except it is not migratory.

—>The questions surrounding the possibility of steelhead in the Arroyo Mocho and fish restoration in the region in general will be discussed in detail at an alliance meeting on Monday, Jan. 14, at the Dublin Library.

The meeting, which is open to the public, begins at 7 p.m.

Miller said there is no guarantee that the steelhead can be introduced successfully in the Arroyo Mocho, but the effort is worth a try.