

The search for steelhead in Alameda Creek

The hunt is on to capture and tag precious steelhead trout in the muddy waters of Alameda Creek.

The last time the fish was confirmed in these waters, it was 2008. George W. Bush was president, property values were plummeting -- and we were a couple of years away from entering into a long drought.

In March, the fish returned to the creek. Fierce winter rains have increased creek flows, inviting them to return.

They were sighted by Dave Gargas, a volunteer with the Alameda Creek Alliance. He was at his office during an ordinary day at work. While watching the creek's webcam from his desk, he was startled to see a fish leap from the water -- not just once, but twice. Then a third time.

The trout -- a threatened species because its numbers are so low -- were trying to migrate upstream to spawn. They were near Niles Community Park in Fremont. But a concrete barrier, erected to prevent erosion of BART piers, blocked their passage.

The Alameda Creek Alliance rushed to the waters to try to catch the fish. They hoped to move them upstream so they could continue their journey. They also wanted to radio-tag them, enabling tracking of their route and track them. And they sought to clip a tiny sample of a fin for genetic analysis.

They caught plenty of other creatures, ranging from native lamprey to exotic carp.

But the trout evaded capture.

Are they still there? No one knows. The volunteers will keep searching.

You can help: If you see any steelhead trout, call Alameda Creek Alliance at 510-499-9185.