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Bay Area Steelhead Summit to Showcase Regional Stream Restoration

Fish Conference Will Connect Agencies, Scientists, Conservationists, Watershed Organizations; Evaluate Steelhead Status; and Assess Progress Toward Recovery

PLEASANTON, Calif. – Conservation and salmon restoration groups will host the first ever [Bay Area Steelhead Summit](#) on November 5th to 7th, a conference on the science, management, advocacy, design, and practice of restoration projects in Bay Area watersheds to benefit steelhead trout. The summit will bring together biologists, conservation organizations, water districts, land management and regulatory agencies, fishing groups, salmon restorationists, and interested Bay Area watershed residents working on restoring steelhead trout in Bay Area waterways.

The summit will be based out of the DoubleTree by Hilton Hotel in Pleasanton, within the Alameda Creek watershed.

Thursday, November 5th will be a General Assembly with keynote presentations by Environmental Scientist Dr. Andrew Gunther with the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Board, and Restoration Ecologist Joe Merz with Cramer Fish Sciences. The summit will open with State of Our Steelhead status reports from priority watersheds around the Bay, followed by a summary of the health of the Central California Coast steelhead population from the new California Trout report [State of the Salmonids III](#), a scientific assessment of the state's salmon populations to help guide restoration priorities. There will be panels on recent fish passage projects, steelhead monitoring efforts, steelhead recovery planning, and restoration in practice, with examples of watershed restoration projects.

Friday, November 6th will feature field tours of watershed-scale restoration efforts in Alameda Creek, San Francisquito Creek, and South Bay creeks such as the Guadalupe River, Coyote Creek, and Stevens Creek. Saturday, November 7th is geared toward the general public, with a lively agenda including citizen science presentations, and talks and book signings with author and illustrator Obi Kaufmann and Jeff Miller, author of *Bay Area Wildlife: An Irreverent Guide*. Half-day Saturday field trips will be offered for an Alameda

Creek watershed restoration tour, a Pinole Creek tour, and a Lagunitas Creek salmon habitat enhancement tour.

The summit will showcase restoration success and in-progress stories from around the Bay, such as the multi-agency effort over the past two decades to open the Alameda Creek watershed to migratory fish for the first time in half a century through removal of instream barriers, construction of fish ladders, and release of cold water from Calaveras Reservoir. Watershed-scale fish passage projects on the Napa River are removing artificial migration barriers to reopen access for steelhead to spawning and rearing habitat throughout this North Bay watershed. Multiple partners are working to restore critical estuarine habitat for steelhead in the lagoon and marsh at the mouth of Pescadero Creek on the Peninsula. Stanford University, agencies and activists are discussing and debating modifications to or removal of Searsville Dam to enhance steelhead in San Francisquito Creek.

The Steelhead Summit is hosted by the Salmonid Restoration Federation, Alameda Creek Alliance, and Center for Biological Diversity, with funding from the Fisheries Restoration Grant Program and DeSilva Gates Construction. Sponsors include California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Trout, and Zone 7 Water Agency.

Background

Steelhead trout (*Oncorhynchus mykiss*) are one of the three species of Pacific salmon which regularly occur in the Bay Area, along with Chinook salmon and coho salmon. The Central California Coast population of steelhead trout, which includes steelhead in the Bay Area, was protected under the Endangered Species Act in 1997 as a “threatened” species.

Steelhead are the migratory (anadromous) form of rainbow trout, genetically the same species except that rainbows spend their entire lives in fresh water while steelhead migrate to the ocean to mature. Adult steelhead are eighteen to thirty inches in length. Central California coast steelhead typically spawn from late December through April. Juveniles live one to two years in streams, and adults remain at sea for up to three years before returning to spawn. Unlike salmon, steelhead do not necessarily die after spawning, so adults can head back to the ocean and repeat the breeding cycle for several years. Steelhead are considered an indicator species for the health of Bay Area watersheds.

During the early 1960s, it was estimated that nearly 100,000 steelhead spawned in Central Coast and Bay Area streams, from the Russian River down to the San Lorenzo River in Santa Cruz County. Most Bay Area region watersheds now support less than a few hundred

adult steelhead spawners each year. Current populations are likely less than 10% of historical estimates.

Major reasons for the decline of steelhead are dams and other manmade barriers, which block more than a fifth of historical spawning, migration, nursery, and feeding habitat. Sprawl development has reduced steelhead habitat suitability through water diversions, groundwater pumping, degradation of riparian habitat, and pollution. The associated expansion of roadways, agriculture, sewage discharge, flood control projects, and other infrastructure has reduced suitable habitat for steelhead. Sediment from upstream land uses such as development and agriculture alters the estuaries and lagoons which serve as critical nurseries for juvenile steelhead. More than 90% of critical wetland and estuarine habitat in the San Francisco Bay has been drained and/or filled.

Bay Area steelhead populations are in long-term decline and with the onset of dramatic climate change face extinction in the next century without significant investments in monitoring, habitat restoration, and increased efficiency in water use and management.

Key watersheds for steelhead in the Bay Area include: Russian River tributaries, Lagunitas Creek, Corte Madera Creek, Sonoma Creek, Napa River, Petaluma River, and Suisun Creek in the North Bay; Pinole Creek and Alameda Creek in the East Bay; Coyote Creek, Guadalupe River, and Stevens Creek in the South Bay; and San Francisquito Creek, San Mateo Creek, and Pescadero Creek on the Peninsula.