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CHRONICLE SECTIONS

## Steelhead Ends Up in Alameda Creek -- First Time in Fremont Since '50s

[Thayer C. Scott, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

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**FREMONT** -- A threatened fish en route to its native spawning area sent environmental officials scrambling when it got lost and blundered into a Fremont creek.

The 22-inch steelhead trout -- a species not seen in the city's Alameda Creek since the 1950s -- was spotted Thursday stranded in a "puddle" of the creek near Decoto Road, said Jeff Miller of the Alameda Creek Alliance. Pete Alexander of the East Bay Regional Parks District was dispatched to the spot and made a positive identification.

The find ignited hopes that the trout may return to Alameda Creek, once a steelhead spawning ground. But state officials cautioned against such exuberance.

"I'm sure that this was a stray fish that lost its way," said Bob Snyder, a fish habitat supervisor with the Department of Fish and Game.

Snyder said recent rains have swelled the bay and local streams, such as Alameda Creek, that until recently had been too shallow for steelhead to navigate.

"Basically, the rising water levels allowed the fish to go places it couldn't before," Snyder said.

The steelhead is an anadromous fish, which means that it spawns in freshwater creeks, migrated to the Pacific for three to four years and then return to its native creekbeds to lay eggs.

A homing instinct supported by the trout's olfactory sensors usually brings the fish back to its homestead. But man-made barriers or simply bad luck sometimes make the fish disoriented, and they stumble into places like Alameda Creek.

The steelhead flourished in Northern California until water projects, agriculture and other human encroachments altered their habitat. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has designated the steelhead as threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act.

No attempts have been made to restock Alameda Creek with steelhead. Earlier this year, local creek watchers noted increased numbers of steelhead in San Francisquito Creek, which runs from the Coast Range to the bay near Palo Alto. In 1995, Stanford University built a fish ladder -- a metal structure that creates a faster-moving stream over a dam for fish to travel -- at Los Trancos Creek to restore a steelhead run over the university's diversion dam.