

Bay Area Review  
12/14

# Steelhead trout spotted in creek raise fish stakes

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FREMONT — A federally protected steelhead trout was found Thursday trying to swim up Alameda Creek, raising the stakes in a growing conflict between water needs and fish rights in the creek-turned-flood control channel.

On Thursday, an 11-year-old Fremont boy found the 22-inch trout struggling to swim upstream in the flood control channel near Decoto Road.

Activists with the Alameda Creek Alliance say the discovery is the proof they need to convince local water districts to build fish ladders and make other changes on the creek to help the fish reach spawning grounds upstream.

It is the first wild steelhead documented in the area since the fish disappeared from the creek during the 1950s. Water districts have demanded physical proof and this sighting, according to activists, is it.

"This is a big breakthrough because the steelhead is listed as a threatened species," said Jeff Miller, organizer with the grass-roots environmental group.

But the National Marine Fisheries — which listed the fish as threatened in August and is responsible for its protection

— has been slow to decide what actions, if any, districts must take to protect the fish. Usually the agency has 60 days to set rules on newly listed species, but experts estimate the rules will not happen until February 1998.

Water district officials say the fish's needs must be balanced against the community's need for water and contend that more research must be done to prove that the fish could survive upstream if they made it that far.

The trout, which is being weighed and studied by officials at the East Bay Regional Parks District, is the second wild spawning fish to be found in the lower end of the creek in recent months.

On the day after Thanksgiving, Ken Elliot, 48, photographed a 25-pound king salmon trying to scale a concrete weir near the BART tracks on Alameda Creek before water district dams inflated, stranded, and killed it.

"It was really obvious watching that fish that it wouldn't take much to help it," Elliot said.

The salmon is not endangered, but its presence shows that wild fish are trying to swim up the creek, a fact that used to be disputed, Miller said.



**An Alameda County Water District employee drags a dead king salmon out of Alameda Creek.**

Both fish swam from the Bay, four or five miles away, and seemed to be trying to reach ancient spawning grounds upstream. They were blocked by a concrete weir and three inflatable dams operated by the Alameda County Water District. The dams are inflated during low-flow periods to retain water

used to replenish ground water supplies.

Environmentalists say they want the water district to build fish ladders, install fish screens, and release extra water to help the fish travel back to the Bay.

That would cost too much money and cause a water shortage for local residents,

said Paul Piraino, assistant general manager for the Alameda County Water District. San Francisco residents — served by the San Francisco Water District channel that flows through Alameda Creek — and future residents in the Tri-Valley area also may be affected, he said.

Officials at the districts insist

that studies be done to prove the fish would survive if they made it upstream.

*The Alliance's next meeting is Jan. 6 at 7 p.m. in the Centerville Public Library, 3101 Nicolette Ave., in Fremont. For information, call 376-0518.*