

Alliance seeks to bring back 'wild fish' to Alameda Creek

Tribune

Water district says cost is too high

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FREMONT — Environmentalists have started a movement to bring wild king salmon and steelhead trout back to Alameda Creek. But water district officials say the effort would cost too much and deplete local water supplies.

The newly formed activist group — the Alameda Creek Alliance — will hold its first meeting from 7 to 9 p.m. Tuesday to discuss strategies for bringing the fish back.

"We used to have runs of tens of thousands of fish," said environmental activist Jeff Miller. "These are big, wild fish, and all over the Pacific Coast they are in decline."

The fish — which must migrate between fresh and salt water to survive — are cousin to the freshwater rainbow trout now found in the creek.

Because they must migrate so far, their populations have been destroyed by water district diversion projects, urbanization, cattle grazing, and the building of dams for the Calaveras, San Antonio and Del Valle reservoirs, Miller said.

The steelhead has declined so much that it was listed as a threatened species by the federal government this year. The wild king salmon — once thought to be extinct from the area — were seen last No-



STEPHEN J. PRINGLE — Staff

Activists with the Alameda Creek Alliance will meet to devise a plan to bring wild salmon and steelhead back to Fremont's Alameda Creek.

vember trying to scale a dam near the BART tracks in Fremont.

Environmentalists say they hope these factors will bring money and support to their effort.

But, this is not the first time people tried to bring the fish back.

In 1989, officials from the Alameda County Water District, the San Francisco Water Department, the East Bay Regional Water District and the California Department of Fish and Game studied the possibility of bringing the fish back to the creek.

The group considered ideas such as annually releasing extra water from several reservoirs above Alameda Creek so young fish could make it to the Bay, building fish ladders and removing temporary dams to help

mature fish travel back upstream. But they decided such a project would cost too much.

"The value of the water alone in 1989 would be \$1.5 million a year," said Paul Piraino of the Alameda County Water District. In addition, wild steelhead and king salmon could interfere with the survival of the 20,000 to 30,000 freshwater rainbow trout that water and parks districts stock the creek with every year, he said.

But such farmed fish should not replace the wild species, said naturalist Joanne Dean-Freemire.

"There is a basic need for nature to be there for us," she said. "With every species we lose, every place we lose it is a little poorer."

For information about the alliance, call 376-6518.