



ROD A. LAMKEY JR. — Staff photos

Fish and game officials gather a net in hopes of catching a school of steelhead trout trying to make their way up Alameda Creek on Wednesday. The trout can't get past the rubber dam and are stuck in the area.

Local steelhead find suggests possible comeback of species

By Kristin Butler
STAFF WRITER

FREMONT — About a dozen steelhead trout were spotted trying to scale a concrete weir in Alameda Creek Wednesday afternoon, suggesting that the threatened species is trying to make a comeback in local waters.

The fish were found by several state and federal officials, who were visiting the creek to design a fish ladder for the area near the BART tracks and Peralta Boulevard. Steelhead have been spotted alone or in pairs swimming upstream in the creek at least three times since November, but never in such large numbers.

Environmentalists say the latest sighting proves the steelhead are trying to swim up Alameda Creek from the Bay to the spawning grounds they favored decades ago. But the weir and several inflatable dams used to collect drinking water now alter the flow and bar the way for fish traveling upstream.

"This, for us, is the proof — a sign — that a number of wild fish are trying to use the system," said Jeff Miller, an activist with the Alameda Creek Alliance, a group of local environmentalists and fishermen who have been fighting to restore steelhead and salmon runs to



Ian Gilroy of the National Marine Fishery Service struggles to keep a grip.

the creek for more than a year.

Regulatory agencies, including the Alameda County Water District, say they are already carrying out measures to protect the fish. For example, the Alameda County Water District is training employees to look for fish before inflating the dams and to contact the parks district when fish need to be rescued, General Manager Paul Piraino said.

But officials also have expressed concerns that changes needed to

help the steelhead could jeopardize local water supplies. They say the Alameda County Water District would need to divert water from its normal flow to replenish drinking water supplies.

Despite a 120-foot net brought in Wednesday by biologists from the East Bay Regional Parks District, the fish escaped and hid. Officials plan to try again to catch the fish Friday. If successful, they will transport the fish upstream to breeding habitat.

The decline of the steelhead trout population is increasingly drawing attention statewide.

Steelhead are anadromous rainbow trout — born in freshwater streams, they migrate to sea then return inland to spawn. Like their cousins, the salmon, they have suffered from decades of human tampering with their environment. Unlike salmon, they can spawn more than once.

But logging, road building and development have stripped the tree canopies that keep streams cool enough for young steelhead to survive. Clear cutting along banks has eliminated the woody, debris-filled hiding places the fish need, and led to erosion that clogs streams with dirt. And water pumping and dam releases have further upset river flows and temperatures.