

# Trout help rebirth of spawning grounds

By Kristin Butler  
STAFF WRITER

FREEMONT — Two steelhead trout were found spawning in a tributary to Old Alameda Creek Tuesday, spurring local environmentalists to call once again for measures to protect the once-abundant fish.

The fish are the first couple found spawning in the area since the species vanished from the creek 20 years ago.

Employees of Alameda County's Clean Water Program spotted the 21-inch-long male and female fish courting and trying to spawn in a shallow section of the flood control channel in Hayward.

Biologists say the fish — a threatened species — are wild, not stocked. They apparently

made their way from the Bay to the Hayward channel through Fremont's Alameda Creek Flood Control Channel, the same path their ancestors once took to spawn.

But their efforts to reproduce will likely be fruitless because the area where they were found was not a suitable habitat for spawning. The channel is clogged with garbage, loaded with silt, lined with concrete and devoid of the vegetation needed to shade the water, biologists said.

The discovery gives one more piece of ammunition to the Alameda Creek Alliance, a group of local environmentalists and fishermen. The grassroots group has been fighting to restore steelhead and salmon runs to Alameda Creek, said or-

ganizer Jeff Miller.

"This scenario sort of sums up the problems with our urban creeks, but these fish also represent their amazing potential," Miller said.

Large numbers of steelhead trout — an ocean-going variety of rainbow trout — used to swim up Alameda Creek from the Bay to former spawning grounds. The fish vanished in the 1950s because of urban development. Their habitat was further damaged when Alameda Creek was reconfigured to serve as a flood control channel.

Today, the old route is also blocked by a concrete weir and three inflatable dams the Alameda County Water District uses to collect drinking water.

Last August, the federal government listed the species as

threatened. The issue became a local one when an 11-year-old boy found a 22-inch steelhead trout last December. The trout was struggling to swim upstream in the Alameda Creek to try and reach its former home.

Activists have met with local, state, and federal agencies and held several public meetings to come up with strategies to save the fish and bring back its habitat.

They are applying for a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers to build a fish ladder on the Fremont section of the creek. They also have convinced local water district officials to change several policies to help protect the fish.