

Alliance forms for San Francisco Bay steelhead

By Brad Sundeen

One and a half miles north of the Dumbarton Bridge toll plaza, a broad, diked channel opens on the east shore of the southern San Francisco Bay. In the winter months of a wet year a copious fresh water flow exits the channel, mixing with the salty, estuarine waters. The outflow, with its

canal.

Even with the environmental degradation, steelhead and salmon are still occasionally observed attempting to migrate up this channel during high flows. Unfortunately there are other obstacles.

Upstream from the bay, the Western Pacific Railroad crosses the channel on a bridge supported by a concrete structure that cuts into the channel bedside, creating a "step" that salmon cannot get over unless the water flow is high. Three inflatable dams are deflated during major storm events and are pumped back up soon afterward to entrap water. When inflated they check all significant flow below them, forming complete barriers and stranding any fish trapped downstream; last winter more than a dozen chinook were stranded in puddles below the dams. Alameda Creek is fed by a huge 700 square mile watershed.

Unfortunately, most of the water is impounded in three major reservoirs.

San Francisco Water Department, which controls two of these impoundments, claims they are legally bound to hold all water for "domestic and other municipal purposes."

Despite these obstacles, there is hope for the salmon. This fall Jeff Miller, a veteran environmental activist, began making phone calls and writing press releases that led to the establishment of the Alameda Creek Alliance. This group of environmentalists and anglers has begun meeting and working with the involved agencies. After storms, when the outflow is high, volunteers walk the trail along the channel looking for migrating fish to document their existence to disbelieving state and local officials.

On Nov. 28, an Alliance member observed a large chinook vainly attempting to leap up the drop structure below the railroad tracks. If another incident of trapped salmon occurs a phone tree will alert Alliance members and a rescue operation will ensue. In the meantime, Alliance members have begun an effort to get funding for a fish ladder that would enable the fish to get over a concrete drop under Mission Street in Fremont. The fish are doing their part, and the Alameda Creek Alliance is working hard to do theirs. For more information, write Alameda Creek Alliance, P.O.Box 192, Canyon, CA 94516. Call: Jeff Miller @ (510) 376-0518 or Visit our web site <http://www.formulate.com/alamedaCreek>.

-Brad Sundeen is a volunteer with the Alameda Creek Alliance.



scent of willow, bay and sycamore leaves, grasslands and clean gravel beds, beckons to remnant populations of chinook, coho and steelhead that cruise the bay's waters. In natural terms, the channel bottom is salmon heaven. A thick growth of riparian foliage overhanging most of the bank and steep canyon walls casts cooling shadows on the waters below, even in summer. The gradual slope of the bank provides broad areas, slow moving waters and intermittent riffles. If steelhead and salmon could reach this channel, as they once did, they most likely could survive and possibly breed. The problem lies in the 12 miles between the bay and the channel.

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In the 1960s, in order to make the housing tracts and shopping malls in Fremont and Union City safe from flooding, the stream was drastically altered by the Army Corps of Engineers. The bank-side cottonwoods and willows were cut down. The meanders were straightened. The bed was broadened, flattened and the banks graded and diked. A once natural riparian corridor was transformed into a sterile