

Steelhead trout seen again in Alameda Creek

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**By Mary Nauman
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FREMONT -- A flood control district employee spotted a lone steelhead trout Sunday in Alameda Creek.

This is the first sighting of the year, but the second year in a row trout have been seen there, reinforcing arguments the endangered species is returning to the area.

The Alameda County employee spotted the 24-inch trout as it was trying to jump over one of the district's cement structures, said Jeff Miller of the Alameda Creek Alliance.

"It's only one, but I'm pretty sure there are others in there with it," Miller said. "This shows that last year was not a fluke. It makes it more pressing for us to do something about it."

Steelhead trout once were a common sight along the creek. But the trout were considered gone from the area long before the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers converted the creek into a flood control channel several decades ago.

Last March, a school of 20 to 60 steelhead were discovered in the creek, but they could not spawn because they were blocked by the barriers constructed by the flood control and water districts.

Fin samples taken from the fish confirmed they are native to the area, said Miller, but skeptics argue genetic tests are not foolproof.

For the past year, the Alliance has sought to persuade the Corps of Engineers to construct a "fish ladder," which would help the fish bypass the barriers. Cost estimates have ranged from \$100,000 to \$1 million.

Scott Miner of the corps said his agency is likely to pay 75 percent of the cost, but the Alliance is required to find a local agency, such as the flood or water district, to fund the rest.

Miller said the flood control district has been "very, very responsive" but the Alameda County Water district has been more hesitant. Water District officials say that, before paying for the ladder, they want to study whether the trout can adequately survive in the creek.