

EXPRESS

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update

Feds Another Impediment to Plucky Salmon

Steelhead have a lot to put up with: culverts they must swim through on their way upstream to spawn, ten-foot-high dams in their path, trash and litter in denuded creeks—and now foot-dragging bureaucrats. In March 1998, environmentalists and fisherpeople cheered when the National Marine Fisheries Service listed Bay Area populations of steelhead as a threatened species. That meant regulations could be enforced that would ultimately upgrade Bay Area steelhead runs, including Alameda Creek and other streams that drain into San Francisco and San Pablo bays. Fish farther south had won the "threatened" designation a year earlier; together, the annual migration of steelhead had dropped from millions of fish to less than 20,000. The protective regulations issued by the NMFS address not only the numbers of steelhead that could be fished from the sea but all other conditions that affect their survival. Unfortunately, no rules means no enforcement, and to the disappointment of fish fans, the

NMFS has let months fly by without producing regulations for Bay Area steelhead runs or those farther south.

This June, eight steelhead advocacy groups, from the Alameda Creek Alliance to the California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, sued the NMFS for unreasonable delay. After four months, the groups won—which won't give the steelhead any relief this winter migration season, but at least sets a time limit. Now the federal agency has until December 15 to come up with a proposal, with final regulations due next June. According to the Alameda Creek Alliance's Jeff Miller, "The next step is to ensure that these protective regulations adequately address the major threats to steelhead: dams, water diversions, and habitat destruction."

What this means to alliance members is that they'll be up to the tops of their hip waders in storm-high creeks again this year, trying to capture salmon so they can be carried beyond diversions that would otherwise prevent them from spawning.

—Gina Covina

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