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Trout return to Alameda Creek

STEELHEAD trout, which had all but vanished from Alameda Creek, appear to be back.

In fact, genetic tests show they may never have left.

The comeback kids were spotted in the creek last winter over a five-month period, despite transformation of the creek into a flood-control channel by the Army Corps of Engineers in 1977.

The Alameda Creek Alliance, a local group striving to preserve the steelhead in the creek, recently commissioned the genetic tests they said showed the fish were native to the creek.

The genetic testing makes it likely the Corps will pay the majority of construction costs for a bypass so the threatened species once again can use the creek.

"It can only help," said the Corps' Scott Miner. "The fact they are descendants of the local population certainly supports the case for spending money on restoring the steelhead trout there."

So what's not to like in all this?

The Corps is permitted to pay for 75 percent of the project's estimated cost of from \$100,000 to \$1 million. The Alameda Creek Alliance is trying to convince Alameda County water and flood-control districts to pay the remaining 25 percent of the tab.

"We think this can be done, so it's a pretty good deal for the districts and the fish," said Alliance member Jeff Miller.

"We intend to see this through. We think the districts are violating three Fish and Game codes and, if we have to, we fully intend to seek enforcement of those laws."

If officials authenticate the genetic tests and determine the trout can successfully spawn in Alameda Creek, the local districts immediately should take steps to fund the bypass. At any rate, let's keep this issue out of the courts where it could drown in years of litigation.