

# *The ACWD Aqueduct*

*News and Information for the Customers of the Alameda County Water District*

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## *Restoring a Fishery in Alameda Creek*

With a little help from their friends, steelhead trout may one day find it easier to make their way to spawning grounds in the upper reaches of the Alameda Creek watershed. As it stands now, some quite literally need a helping hand around the barriers in the stream.

Steelhead trout spawn in freshwater streams such as Alameda Creek and eventually migrate to the ocean. They stay at sea for one to three years and then return to the same stream in which they were reared to take their turn at reproduction. The upstream journey to the spawning grounds is not an easy one, and in the case of Alameda Creek, in-stream barriers make it virtually impossible.

Once abundant in Alameda Creek, steelhead began a slow decline as 20th century urbanization encroached upon the Alameda Creek watershed. Reservoirs constructed to supply the Bay Area with drinking water reduced the water needed by steelhead for their migration, while urban development in many parts of the watershed degraded water quality and reduced steelhead habitat. In 1968, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers constructed a flood control channel in the lower portion of Alameda Creek. Although this channel greatly reduced the potential for flooding in the Tri-City area, the construction of a flood control drop structure near the BART overcrossing also prevented any remaining steelhead from migrating to prime spawning grounds in upper sections of the creek. The Alameda Creek steelhead run became a thing of the past.

Or so it was thought. A series of wet winters over the past several years created conditions in Alameda Creek which prompted a few steelhead to once again attempt the upstream migration. Barriers in the flood control channel such as the drop structure, however, stopped them far short of their goal. In an effort to help them on their way, area residents and East Bay Regional Park District employees literally carried them around the barriers to a location further upstream. ACWD lent a helping hand as well, modifying the operation of its inflatable rubber dams to facilitate the rescue of the fish and notifying Park District employees when fish needed help around the drop structure.

With the listing of the California steelhead trout as a threatened species under the Federal Endangered Species Act, efforts to make Alameda Creek more hospitable to steelhead gained momentum. The Alameda Creek Fishery Workgroup was formed in order to investigate the feasibility of restoring a steelhead fishery in the creek. This workgroup, comprised of federal, state and local agencies (including ACWD) and public interest groups, completed a technical study this past February which indicates that it may be feasible to restore a viable steelhead fishery to Alameda Creek. In keeping with a key recommendation of the study, ACWD and the Alameda County Flood Control District

have applied for \$5 million in federal funding for the construction of fish ladders which would allow steelhead to negotiate the drop structure and ACWD's rubber dams. Further studies will be conducted to determine how much water would need to flow to the Bay to facilitate fish migration, the timing of the migration, and the sources of water available to provide the needed flows. These studies will help ACWD determine the impacts the fishery restoration efforts will have on its operations and its ability to meet the water supply needs of residents and businesses in the Tri-City area.

Restoring steelhead to Alameda Creek will be a cooperative effort that will take time, effort, and money. ACWD is committed to doing its part in helping this fish regain a foothold in our local watershed while still remaining faithful to its primary mission - to provide a reliable supply of high quality water to the Tri-City area.