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Alameda Creek listed as steelhead habitat

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FREMONT — It may be more than two years before work gets under way to remove obstacles that prevent the Central Coast steelhead from returning from the ocean to spawn in Alameda Creek.

But in a little more than two weeks, much of the Alameda Creek watershed will be protected by federal law as critical habitat for the threatened fish's survival.

As of March 17, the National Marine Fisheries Service will consider streams in the watershed where the steelhead have traditionally spawned to be critical habitat, such as Alameda Creek in Fre-

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While small populations of landlocked rainbow trout believed to be capable of breeding Central Coast steelhead now live in the watershed, they do not enjoy the same protections afforded steelhead.

Projects near the streams requiring federal permits will be subject to review under the Endangered Species Act, even if the projects would not result in immediate harm to steelhead trout.

The impact of these and other federal rules on activities ranging from construction and cattle grazing to gravel mining and flood control remains to be seen, members of a multi-agency committee studying ways to manage the Alameda Creek Watershed were told Wednesday.

"I personally don't think it will be a huge impact on anybody," said Pete Alexander, a fisheries specialist for the East Bay Regional Park District. "The doors will still be open to development, it will just have to be more environmentally sensitive."

A January study funded by Alameda County and the California Coastal Conservancy found that building fish ladders around barriers in lower Alameda Creek could give steelhead access to 20 miles of potential spawning grounds.

Laura Kilgour, a water resources biologist with the Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District, said the agency is hoping to meet a September deadline to apply for up to \$5 million for the project from the Army Corps of Engineers. The corps would then need two to three years to study the feasibility of the project.

"The problems are far from insurmountable," Kilgour said. "If everything goes well in the future, they will be able to come up through Alameda Creek and complete their life cycle."