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FESTIVAL ATTEMPTS TO HOOK SUPPORTERS EVENT IS A CELEBRATION OF THE STRIDES MADE IN RESTORING NATIVE STEELHEAD AND SALMON RUNS IN ALAMEDA CREEK

Bonita Brewer, Times staff writer

Organizers hope the upcoming Fremont Steelhead Festival and Watershed Awareness Fair helps demonstrate public support for efforts to restore steelhead trout runs along Alameda Creek.

The May 12 festival will be held from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. at Niles Community Park and will be free to the public. The creekside park is on Third Street between G and H streets in Fremont's Niles District.

The event will celebrate the progress made toward restoring native steelhead trout and salmon to the creek, said Jeff Miller of the Alameda Creek Alliance, an event co-sponsor. He hopes a strong showing will help persuade federal and local agencies to fund the needed creek improvements.

"It can't hurt for any of these agencies to see the level of support," Miller said. "This is a good way to express that."

Various Alameda Creek restoration projects are planned or proposed to allow adult steelhead, which have been blocked by barriers, to reach spawning and rearing habitat upstream in the Sunol Regional Wilderness.

The East Bay Regional Park District will complete the first Alameda Creek dam removal project when two small swim dams are removed this summer in the Sunol wilderness.

Two other dams, in Niles Canyon below the community of Sunol, are nonfunctioning and will be removed by the San Francisco Water Department to help steelhead migrate upstream. That work is expected to be completed by 2003 or 2004.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is reviewing a potential \$6 million project in lower Alameda Creek. It would involve building fish ladders to help trout migrate upstream over a series of dams and other barriers, and installing fish screens where water is diverted from the creek for municipal uses.

The federal government is being asked to fund 75 percent of the project. Local agencies would have to come up with the other 25 percent, possibly with help from grants.

Miller said he is optimistic that securing funds won't be an upstream battle.

"We're presuming the project will go through; it's a question of when," he said.

Festival activities will include educational displays by organizations and agencies working to restore Alameda Creek and other East Bay waterways.

There will be fly-fishing demonstrations, and the California Department of Fish and Game will provide display tanks with live steelhead and salmon. Also planned are walking tours of proposed restoration sites in lower Alameda Creek, activities for kids, food and a live bluegrass band.

The event will kick off at 9 a.m. with the Alameda Creek Spawning Run, a 10-kilometer race along lower Alameda Creek. A 5-kilometer run/walk will start at 9:30 a.m.

Race registration, which includes a T-shirt, costs \$20 in advance and \$25 the day of the event, and benefits steelhead restoration efforts. For information, call 510-657-6179.