

## Busting 2 dams to assist fish run

### Festival focuses on steelhead spawning

By Matt Carter  
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This summer, East Bay Regional Park District officials hope Gov. Gray Davis will be on hand for an Aug. 17 ceremony kicking off the demolition of two small dams in the Sunol Regional Wilderness.

The dams, constructed in the 1970s, aren't much to look at. Built to back up Alameda Creek into wading pools for swimmers, the dams have collected silt and are no taller than a child.

But removing them would symbolize the first concrete steps to restore spawning runs of ocean-going steelhead trout to the creek.

As Alameda Creek makes its way down to San Francisco Bay, there are other, larger barriers to fish that must come down or be circumvented before steelhead again swim upstream through Fremont, Sunol, Pleasanton and Livermore.

With a group of federal, state and local agencies working together to eliminate those barriers, organizers of Saturday's second-annual Steelhead Festival and Watershed Awareness Fair say there will be plenty to celebrate at Niles Community Park in Fremont.

The event begins at 9 a.m. with the Alameda Creek Spawning Run, a 10-kilometer race along the creek. A 5-kilometer fun run and walk will start half an hour later. From 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., there will be chances to learn about the steelhead restoration effort and to enjoy music, food and fly-fishing lessons.

In some respects, Fremont is ground zero in the battle to remove barriers to fish and restore a self-sustaining steelhead run.

The Alameda County Water District, which supplies water to more than 300,000 people in Fremont, Newark and Union City, gets 15 percent of its water from the Alameda Creek watershed. The district operates three inflatable dams on Alameda Creek that divert water to the Quarry Lakes, where it percolates down to groundwater basins.

Although steelhead have trouble getting over those dams, an even bigger obstacle is a concrete weir that protects the bridge carrying BART trains over Alameda Creek from erosion. Genetic tests show steelhead that have been carried over the barriers by hand are from the same population that gained federal protection four years ago.

So the Water District and other agencies that have formed a workgroup to bring the

steelhead back have applied to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a \$5 million grant.

The money, together with an additional \$1.7 million from local agencies, would be used to build two fish ladders and install screens to stop fish from being sucked up at four locations where water is drawn from the creek.

The fish ladders -- which resemble gently ascending stairs with water flowing over them -- would allow steelhead and even salmon to power themselves around the BART weir and two of the inflatable dams.

The project must vie with others for federal dollars, but the Corps likes the idea enough that it's spending \$10,000 to study it further.

"It looks good -- the only thing is we're competing for funds," said Jeff Miller, a spokesman for the Alameda Creek Alliance. "Presuming that goes through, then we'd be competing with other projects in the region for a full-blown ecosystem restoration report."

That report will cost between \$500,000 and \$600,000, so there is some question whether money will be available if the Corps budget is cut by Congress, Miller said.

As for the third inflatable dam, steelhead can get sometimes get over it if there is enough water flowing in the creek. If money were no object, the agencies studying steelhead restoration would prefer to build another fish ladder around the third dam and screens for three more water intakes.

The next obstacles are two dams in Niles Canyon. The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission is looking for money to remove the dams, which date back to the turn of the century. Although the dams are no longer functioning, they are old enough to be considered historic structures, adding to the difficulty of removing them.

Under the most optimistic timetables, new fish ladders would be up and old dams would be out by 2003, reopening an estimated 20 miles of spawning grounds to steelhead and perhaps even salmon.

Miller said while most of the fish are expected to head for sites in the southern Alameda Creek watershed, some fish may also head north through Pleasanton and Livermore. The fish would travel through Pleasanton in the Arroyo de la Laguna and Arroyo del Valle and through Livermore in the Arroyo Mocho.

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The second annual Fremont Steelhead Festival and Watershed Awareness Fair takes place from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, May 12, at Niles Community Park in Fremont. Admission is free. For more information, call the Alameda Creek Alliance at (510) 845-4675. Race registration for the Alameda Creek Spawning Run is \$20 in advance or \$25 the day of the event, with proceeds benefiting steelhead restoration efforts. For information on the run, call (9510) 657-6179. More information on the Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup is available at [www.cemar.org](http://www.cemar.org)