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Groups hoping to damn 2 dams

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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 members of the same population that gained federal protection four years ago.