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Dam plan approved for valley

The Zone 7 Water Agency promises the water diversion will not affect trout migration

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PLEASANTON - Promising it will not interfere with steelhead trout migration, the valley's water wholesaler approved plans this week to build an inflatable rubber dam in Arroyo Mocho between Livermore and Pleasanton to divert water for storage.

On Wednesday, the Zone 7 Water Agency board approved environmental documents for the project. Zone 7 now will work with a local quarry operator to get construction permits from regulatory agencies, including the state Department of Fish and Game.

The plan is to take state-imported water pumped into Arroyo Mocho and divert it into a series of man-made lakes at former gravel quarry pits along Stanley Boulevard.

The project has raised concerns from groups pushing to reintroduce ocean-going steelhead to Alameda Creek and its tributaries, including Arroyo Mocho. They worry the 3-foot-high dam could interfere with steelhead migration.

But Zone 7 officials said the rubber dam would be up only during dry months, when steelhead could not migrate upstream or downstream in any event. And they have redesigned the project to add a fish screen to prevent fish from being diverted from the creek into the lakes.

"We feel the current design will not preclude fish from migrating up," Zone 7 engineer Matt Katen said Thursday. "Still, it has to go through a permitting phase that will provide another design check from the fisheries experts" for possible additional modifications.

Jeff Miller of the Alameda Creek Alliance said he is pleased with some of the changes already made and hopes that further issues can be resolved in the permitting process.

"We're not happy that another rubber dam will be in the creek, but it seems that the operational constraints and the addition of the fish screen will make it so it doesn't impede (steelhead-run) restoration efforts," said Miller, who has been pushing for removal of rubber dams and other structures toward the Bay in Alameda Creek.

Miller said a remaining concern with the Arroyo Mocho project is that the dam's hardened base could hamper fish migration even when the dam itself is deflated.

He also is worried that Zone 7 might in the future attempt to get rights to divert natural rainfall, not just state-imported water, from Arroyo Mocho into the lakes.

Zone 7 assistant general manager Ed Cummings said the agency has no intention of seeking such rights and, if it does, it would require a new permit and environmental study.

Cummings said Zone 7 "is committed" to making sure its projects do not impede fish migration, and will continue working with a task force trying to restore and establish a steelhead run.

A Zone 7 consultant told the board Wednesday that decades ago, there were probably steelhead that in some years made it from the Bay to the upper reaches of Arroyo Mocho and Arroyo Del Valle southeast of Livermore.