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AGENCY'S FISH PROPOSAL EYED STEELHEAD TROUT RUN MAY NOT BENEFIT FROM ARROYO MOCHO "LADDER"

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State Fish and Game officials and local environmentalists are raising concerns about a plan to reconfigure a stretch of Arroyo Mocho east of Pleasanton, warning it could seriously hurt potential steelhead trout migration.

The Zone 7 water agency's proposed flood-control project near El Charro Road would include a 10-foot-high drop structure near where a widened segment of Arroyo Mocho would be joined by a newly realigned stretch of Arroyo Las Positas.

Zone 7 officials say the design would allow fish ladders to be added later, if needed, to help steelhead migrate upstream from the ocean for spawning.

But in a letter sent Friday, Fish and Game officials -- citing years of work in trying to remove steelhead barriers further downstream toward the Bay -- suggests studying other options.

"DFG appreciates Zone 7's intent to provide fish passage, but recommends that alternative channel designs be proposed which would avoid the necessity of a fish ladder," the letter states, recommending such things as logs and rock structures for a more gradual fish ascent.

The letter says provisions for fish passage should be a part of the project now, not at some vague time in the future.

And despite attempts by Zone 7 to enhance wildlife habitat as part of the project, the letter also requests more study of effects on western pond turtles and the California red-legged frog.

Zone 7 officials said Monday they are sensitive to efforts to restore steelhead habitat from the Bay to Alameda Creek and its tributaries, and vowed to seriously consider Fish and Game concerns.

But environmentalists are threatening legal action if the Zone 7 board approves the project next month without a full-blown environmental report.

And they are raising similar objections to a separate Zone 7 proposal to build a 3-foot-high inflatable dam to divert some state-imported water from Arroyo Mocho into a series of man-made lakes planned at former gravel-quarry pits along Stanley Boulevard.

"We will not allow another potential fish barrier to be built in the Alameda Creek Watershed," said Jeff Miller, director of the Alameda Creek Alliance. "This (inflatable dam) project could block future fish migration to upper Arroyo Mocho and would be a setback to steelhead restoration efforts."

Zone 7 official Jim Horen, who serves on a task force working on steelhead restoration, said neither of the projects would interfere with that effort.

"The effort that's gone on for a couple of years to establish a steelhead run is continuing," Horen said. "There is a strong, ongoing effort to do that, and we are not doing anything that would preclude it."

He noted the rubber dam would be up only during dry months, when steelhead couldn't migrate upstream or downstream in any event.

But Miller said he's concerned Zone 7 will attempt in the future to get rights to divert natural rainfall from Arroyo Mocho, something that was attempted once before.

Horen said Zone 7 has "no intention" of seeking such rights to his knowledge.

Fish and Game intends to send a letter to Zone 7 raising concerns about the proposed inflatable dam, fisheries supervisor Kevan Urquhart said Monday.