

BAY CITY NEWS SERVICE

ALLIANCE OBJECTS TO LISTING DECISION FOR STEELHEAD TROUT

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The head of the Alameda Creek Alliance said today that a listing decision by the National Marine Fisheries Service leaves trout in the creek without protection.

Jeff Miller, Director of the Alameda Creek Alliance, said the decision is "biologically unjustified" and probably will be challenged in court by several environmental groups.

Alameda Creek, which is located in southern Alameda County, is the largest creek in the county and is home to a host of birds and other wildlife. It drains into the San Francisco Bay in Fremont.

The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) today announced its final Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing decisions for 10 populations of West Coast steelhead trout, including Alameda Creek steelhead, which are part of the Central California Coast population.

Miller said the decision by the NMFS reaffirms the threatened status of Central Coast steelhead, which were originally listed under the ESA in August 1997, but excludes resident rainbow trout and landlocked steelhead trout above dams.

He said the NMFS had proposed in June to include resident trout and some landlocked steelhead, including those in Alameda Creek, as part of the Central Coast steelhead trout population based on genetic evidence that Alameda Creek's resident fish are similar to adult ocean-run steelhead.

But he said that under a controversial new listing policy for steelhead, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) will retain jurisdiction over resident trout populations, such as the trout in Alameda Creek.

Miller said he believes it would have been better for the NMFS to have jurisdiction over the trout in Alameda Creek.

Miller said he believes today's decision is biologically unjustified since it arbitrarily divides steelhead populations, listing only adult anadromous fish, which are those that go from salt water to fresh water or up rivers to spawn, yet excluding trout below dams that can interbreed with migratory steelhead and even juvenile trout that are the offspring of steelhead.

He said the dwindling trout population won't be able to grow if the only trout that are protected are those that make it from the ocean back to local rivers.

Miller said the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission lobbied against listing Alameda Creek trout, including landlocked populations of steelhead and rainbow trout, in two of the dams that it operates - the Calaveras and San Antonio Dams.

He alleged that the commission took its position despite genetic evidence that these fish are descendants of wild steelhead.

Miller said the decision also excludes Alameda Creek from critical habitat designation for Central Coast steelhead.

"All life forms of steelhead in the Bay Area and the Central Coast should be protected since many streams have only remnant populations of ocean-run fish," Miller said.

Miller said groups such as the Environmental Defense Center, the Center for Biological Diversity and California Trout may all join the Alameda Creek Alliance in taking legal action to challenge the listing decision announced today.

He said the only other viable steelhead trout populations in San Francisco Bay tributaries are in Coyote Creek and the Guadalupe River in the South Bay and San Francisquito Creek on the Peninsula.

The Alameda Creek Alliance is a community restoration group with more than 740 members dedicated to protecting and restoring Alameda Creek and its tributaries, Miller said.