



## **ACWD awarded \$1 million to improve steelhead migration in Alameda Creek**

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by Paul Piraino

The Alameda County Water District (ACWD) has been awarded two \$500,000 grants from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation (NFWF) to improve steelhead migration in Alameda Creek.

NFWF recently announced that it has awarded over \$2,178,000 to 11 projects from the 2005 San Francisco Bay Salmonid Habitat Restoration Fund. The selected projects will accomplish on-the-ground restoration of riparian habitat and migratory fish passage, involve community participation, and benefit salmon and steelhead trout in central and southern San Francisco Bay watersheds.

NFWF funded two ACWD projects that will help improve passage for steelhead trout in the Alameda Creek Flood Control Channel. In conjunction with other Alameda Creek watershed projects completed, planned, or underway, these projects will restore a steelhead run in the largest local watershed tributary to San Francisco Bay. Upward of 15 miles of stream habitat will once again be available to migrating and spawning steelhead upon the completion of all projects.

One NFWF grant will help fund the removal of an inflatable rubber diversion dam in the lower Alameda Creek Flood Control Channel which acts as a barrier to migrating steelhead when inflated. ACWD diverts water impounded behind three rubber dams in the flood control channel to groundwater recharge ponds. This water percolates into the aquifers beneath the Tri-City area and supplies up to 50 percent of the water used in Fremont, Newark and Union City. Since the removal of the dam will impact the water supply for some of the recharge ponds, the project also calls for construction of a pipeline connecting the affected pond to other recharge ponds to maintain ACWD groundwater recharge capacity.

The other project funded by the NFWF grant provides for the installation of fish screens on ACWD's water supply diversion point at the mouth of Niles Canyon. Fish screens eliminate the potential for out-migrating juvenile steelhead from being trapped and entrained in the diversion pipelines and adjacent groundwater recharge ponds at Quarry Lakes Regional Recreation Area. Both projects will be completed by fall of 2006.

These two projects are part of a much larger effort to restore steelhead in the Alameda Creek watershed. The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission is planning on removing two small dams on Alameda Creek upstream in Niles Canyon in summer of 2006. As part of the project to realign Arroyo Las Positias and to widen Arroyo Mocho, Zone 7 Water Agency in the Livermore-Amador Valley engineered and constructed two fishway passages that improve fish passage in these tributaries to Alameda Creek. The East Bay Regional Park District removed two swim dams from

the creek in Sunol Regional Park in 2001. ACWD and the Alameda County Public Works Agency are also looking for funding to provide fish passage at other barriers in the flood control channel. "These grants are an important step in restoring this very important resource to Alameda Creek," said Alameda County Supervisor Scott Haggerty. "With the support of local agencies, environmental groups, and resource agencies we hope to secure additional funding so that in the near future we will see native steelhead trout completing their lifecycle in the Alameda Creek watershed."

ACWD's efforts to improve fish passage at its facilities on Alameda Creek have been strongly supported by the Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Work Group, a multi-agency stakeholder group formed in 1999 to develop and implement a strategy to restore steelhead trout to Alameda Creek. The Work Group is composed of numerous community and citizens groups, local water management and flood control agencies, state and federal resource agencies, and others. The Work Group has been supported with contributions from participating agencies and by grants from the California Department of Fish and Game.

Jeff Miller, director of the Alameda Creek Alliance, was encouraged by NFWF's decision to fund the ACWD projects. Said Miller, "ACWD is to be commended for modifying its water supply facilities to begin to allow steelhead to thrive once again in Alameda Creek. These two critical fish passage projects in the lower creek mark the beginning of a concerted effort to return steelhead to upper Alameda Creek and will hopefully open the floodgates of community support for further creek restoration."

Both projects were also supported by Rep. Pete Stark (CA-13), "With sufficient funding, we can bring one of the greatest spectacles of nature back to Alameda Creek," stated Stark. "Because of the size of the watershed and the preservation of its headwaters during the past century, Alameda Creek could form the nucleus for returning steelhead to the larger South Bay region."

ACWD Board President Marty Koller was enthusiastic about the grants, stating that the NFWF funding is a tangible example of the success of the Work Group. "Over the past six years, members of the Work Group have put an incredible amount of effort into restoring steelhead to Alameda Creek," said Koller. "Their support of our efforts to remove or modify barriers to fish passage in the creek has resulted in grant funding from NFWF that will bring those efforts to fruition."

Initial funds for the San Francisco Bay Salmonid Habitat Restoration Fund were provided by the California Department of Transportation as required mitigation for potential impacts to steelhead and salmon from pile driving and other activities undertaken during construction of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge East Span Seismic Safety Project.