

CBS CHANNEL 5

Project In The Works To Restore Alameda Creek

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(CBS 5) SUNOL It's only tiny minnows that swim in Alameda Creek now, but workers are clearing a path for the big fish.

A native Steelhead trout and salmon habitat is being restored with the removal of two old dams owned by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission. They are the largest dams ever removed for fish restoration in Bay Area history.

"When all the projects are finished, we'll open about 20 miles of Alameda Creek and tributaries to ocean run fish to spawn and rear and have self-sustaining populations," said Jeff Miller of the Alameda Creek Alliance.

And that's expected to benefit the entire Alameda watershed, a 175 square mile expanse running from Pleasanton to Mt. Hamilton.

"It's a riparian corridor. These are in great danger," said Julie Remp of Environmental Service Associates. "Fish and Game tried very hard to protect these sensitive ecosystems."

Water hasn't flowed freely since 1849 when Jose De Jesus Vallejo first placed rocks around here to block water for his flour mill.

"That's probably it. And in the 1880s, we put up two dams that helped provide water. That was the Spring Valley Water Company," said Susan Leal of the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission.

Spring Valley was the predecessor of the San Francisco PUC. It also built the Sunol Water Temple to mark the spot where waters from the Alameda watershed mixed before being pumped to San Francisco.

That was long ago, before most of the City's drinking water was brought in from the Sierra.

"These dams, since they're no longer used, it was pretty much a no brainer to take them out,"

Miller said.

Leal of the Public Utilities Commission agrees. "They weren't needed since the Hetch Hetchy System was built in the 1930s," Leal said. "And they also were a hazard in many ways."

CBS 5 asked why it took so long to get them out.

"Well, it... that's a good question," Leal said.

The answer is, even a no brainer costs money. In this case, about \$1.5 million dollars to take the dams out. San Francisco got a grant to help pay for some of it. Fish restoration and liability concerns persuaded the city to pay the rest.

It may take a few more years for the Steelhead to return, but the minnows had better enjoy being the big fish in a small pond while they still can.