

Alameda Creek plan moves forward to revive steelhead-trout runs

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Five stream restoration projects have won approval to help bring back steelhead, the sea-run rainbow trout, to 20 miles of Alameda Creek. If it works, steelhead would return to Alameda Creek and their spawning areas for the first time in more than 50 years.

Alameda Creek starts as a trickle in the Sunol Regional Wilderness in remote northeastern Santa Clara County, gathers strength and runs north toward Sunol in Alameda County, and then flows west through Niles Canyon and Fremont en route to San Francisco Bay. Thousands of drivers pass along the stream every day on Highway 84 in and around Fremont.

Alameda Creek is one of several streams that feed the bay that once attracted steelhead. Those runs evaporated because of many reasons, including concrete channels, dams, diversions or pollution in runoff.

A key to bringing back the steelhead, according to Jeff Miller of the Alameda Creek Alliance, is removing obstructions and providing fish ladders to allow the adult steelhead upstream passage to spawning areas and the smolts downstream passage to nursery areas.

That is because steelhead spawn in streams and the newborn hatchlings and smolts spend their first months in downstream "nursery" areas. In their life cycle, they migrate through the bay to the ocean as adults, where they commonly reach 8 to 15 pounds before returning to the river in winter to spawn, often in three- and four-year cycles.

The primary players in the latest restoration efforts are the Alameda County Flood Control District and Alameda County Water District. The projects:

-- Screen, Part 1: A \$500,000 fish screen is being installed at a water diversion below Mission Boulevard. It should be completed by December.

-- Screens, Part 2: A \$600,000 grant from state Proposition 50 funds will pay for additional fish screens downstream of a diversion at Bunting Pond. This is where

downstream migrating smolts can be trapped in pipes and sent to Quarry Lakes. The screens should be in place by 2009.

-- Ladder: A fish ladder will be built that allows steelhead to pass over a cement barrier known as the BART weir. It is in a flood control channel and is one of the main obstructions to fish passage. Construction is projected to be completed by 2010.

-- Eliminate dam and diversion: The rubber inflatable dam on lower Alameda Creek will be removed next year and an adjacent unscreened diversion will be discontinued, an expense of \$500,000 covered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

-- Remove blockage: Earlier this month, a concrete crossing and fish barrier was removed from a feeder stream, Arroyo Mocho. A year ago, the Sunol Dam was removed as part of the stream restoration project.

For information, contact the Alameda Creek Alliance at (510) 499-9185 or visit alamedacreek.org.