

Screens set stage for steelhead return

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FREMONT — While it's still impossible for steelhead trout to swim up the Alameda Creek watershed, it's now a lot easier for them and other fish to head downstream to the Bay.

The Alameda County Water District unveiled four fish screens Monday in Alameda Creek designed to keep fish from getting sucked into a diversion pipeline and ending up in Quarry Lakes.

The screens, which cost a combined \$2.5 million, are part of an estimated \$19 million program to return steelhead trout to the watershed for the first time in nearly a half-century.

The cylindrical screens are about 15 feet long with quarter-sized slots that let water pass through, but not fish. They each block an opening that feeds into a diversion pipeline located at the mouth of Vallejo Street, just west of Mission Boulevard in the Niles district.

Steelhead live most of their adult lives in the ocean before migrating up freshwater streams and rivers to spawn and rear their young. Young steelhead then head downstream to spend most of their adult lives in salt water.

Alameda Creek had been home to one of several East Bay steelhead runs before a flood control channel and several dams blocked access to the watershed in the 1960s.

If all goes as planned, steelhead would return to Alameda Creek in 2010 when fish ladders are scheduled to be constructed over the flood control channel and a cement structure further upstream.

The ladders, which are expected to cost about \$3 million apiece, would allow the fish to jump over the barriers and continue upstream.

They are now being designed, but grant money is still needed to pay for their construction, said Robert Shaver, the water district's engineering manager.

The district is also planning to build additional screens along the creek where water is diverted to Bunting Pond, Kaiser Pond and the Quarry Lakes.