

FREMONT BULLETIN

Water district dedicates Alameda Creek fish screens

by Wes Bowers
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Alameda County Water District marked the completion of a major step in restoring the steelhead population in Alameda County on Tuesday.

The district dedicated four fish screens along Alameda Creek near Vallejo Street screens designed to keep juvenile steelhead trout in the creek and out of the public water system and the nearby Quarry Lakes.

The screens were part of the district's steelhead restoration project that began in 1999.

Construction on the screens began last May and was completed in January.

The screens near Vallejo Street are just one component of a larger project along Alameda Creek.

The water district is planning other fish passage improvements including the installation of fish passage facilities at its lower rubber dam, fish ladders at its middle and upper rubber dams, and additional fish screens at other water diversions along the creek.

The purpose of these improvements is to create a safe pathway through the flood control channel that steelhead will be able to use to access the upper watershed for spawning.

Construction for the Vallejo Street fish screens cost \$2.5 million.

Another \$2.6 million has been awarded to the water district, with \$600,000 coming from Proposition 50 for the "Bunting Fish Screen Project." The remaining \$2 million will come from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

According to the water district, Alameda Creek once supported runs of steelhead, and fishing was common on the creek until about 40 years ago. By the late 1950s, California Department of Fish and Game decided the steelhead run was no longer viable.

A series of floods in the 1950s prompted the channelization of the lower creek by the Army Corps of Engineers.

By the early 1970s, the lower 12 miles of the creek was channelized and rip-rapped, with numerous fish passage barriers installed that closed the door on fish runs.

The last steelhead trout and coho salmon runs were seen in the lower creek in 1963 and 1964, the district said. Subsequent flood control and water supply projects in the creek did not allow for migratory fish passage.

Recently, the water district said there has been an increase in documented sightings of steelhead in the lower creek, possibly due to increased stream flows from wet winters and an increased public awareness of fishery issues.

In 1997, steelhead trout were placed on the endangered species list. That's when the Alameda Creek Alliance was formed to help repopulate the fish.

Jeff Miller, alliance president, said this project would restore fish populations across the state.

"This is a drop of good news when salmon populations are collapsing all up and down the coast," he said. "This project won't just help steelhead recover in Alameda County, it will help steelhead repopulate up and down the West Coast."

Chuck Armor, California Department of Fish and Game Bay-Delta regional manager, said there was no better place to begin a restoration project than in Alameda Creek.

"This is an ideal creek to restore the steelhead back to the San Francisco Bay Area," he said. "This is a unique creek, and it's one of the largest watersheds in the Bay Area.

"The steelhead is an important species for a lot of people," he added. "I don't know of any other fish species where people will stand out in extreme weather conditions to catch."

Armor said the steelhead population will see an amazing growth progress over the next few years thanks to the screens.

"This was just a great collaboration," he said. "It's a wonderful example I'll use in other parts of the state where people say something like this can't be done. I'll tell them about Alameda Creek and let them know it can be done."