

Sick Frogs Stymie Fish Ladder Project

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Two species of frogs in Sunol Regional Park's Little Yosemite canyon are supposed to leave their homes in and around Alameda Creek to make way for a fish ladder. The ladder will help steelhead migrate upstream for spawning.

The federally listed red-legged frog and the yellow-legged frog, a candidate for listing, are the affected species.

The frogs have to leave what will become a noisy, disturbed site where workers will alter the stream bed's rocks and pools. The changes will enable the steelhead to gain better leverage to make their jumps, and eventually move upstream beyond the park.

However, the frogs are sick with a fungus infection. Environmentalists are afraid moving the frogs to another environment would affect amphibians there.

The plan to move them has been appealed by the international organization Save the Frogs, and the Alameda Creek Alliance.

The project's sponsor, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC), owns Calaveras Dam and reservoir, is improving the dam, and has agreed to build the fish ladder.

SFPUC wants to complete its projects on time, and is in talks with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and other agencies to try to resolve the new problem of sick frogs. However, SFPUC says that there definitely is a commitment to build the fish ladder. The district won't give up that commitment, said Tim Ramirez, the SFPUC division manager for natural resources and lands management. The agency intends to complete its obligation in a timely way, said Ramirez. SFPUC will not delay for a long time.

Jeff Miller, director of the Alameda Creek Alliance, objects to moving the frogs because it would infect other populations. Further, he said he is not sure that the project would even be needed, since it's not clear to him that the ladder would help trout to migrate at low flows.

The San Francisco Planning Department is in charge of reviewing the project.