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SFPUC Slates Dam Removal to Help Steelhead Trout
Sunol and Niles Dams on Alameda Creek May Come Down

San Francisco — The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) plans to modify or remove the Sunol and Niles dams in southern Alameda County to help future runs of steelhead trout survive in Alameda Creek. The announcement positively responds to the National Marine Fisheries Services action listing steelhead as a threatened species.

"These old dams are no longer needed for water delivery and are barriers to the restoration of a steelhead run on Alameda Creek," said Larry Klein, Acting General Manager for Operations. "We have been given a green light by our Commission to do the necessary work required for modification or removal. Next steps are to complete planning, find funding and begin the environmental review process."

The 12-foot Sunol Dam, located in Niles Canyon just downstream from the Alameda County town of Sunol, was built in 1901 by the Spring Valley Water Company. Now decommissioned, it once helped supply water from Alameda Creek to San Francisco and much of the Bay Area. The 4-foot Niles Dam, built in 1886, is farther downstream from Sunol.

[MORE]

SFPUC Slates Dam Removal to Help Steelhead Trout March 13, 2000 Page 2 of 2

Steelhead trout are anadromous fish, like many species of salmon. Adult fish give birth to their young in freshwater creeks and rivers. As juveniles, they migrate downstream and live as adults in the ocean. At maturity, they swim back upstream to spawn in the creek waters of their birth.

Alameda Creek once boasted a strong steelhead run. Its headwaters are located above Livermore Valley near Mount Hamilton and it passes through Niles Canyon on its way to meet the Bay in Fremont. It is part of the 633 square-mile Alameda Creek Watershed. The SFPUC acquired 40,000 acres of land bordering Alameda Creek in the 1930's as part of the purchase of the Spring Valley Water Company.

"The SFPUC is delighted to aid the recovery of an important fish species," said Klein. "We take our guardianship mission seriously in the area of environmental preservation."

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission is the guardian of the water delivery system that serves over 2.4 million Bay Area residents in 33 communities. The SFPUC takes seriously its responsibility to protect the environment while providing a reliable and high-quality water supply to the Bay Area.