

RESTORATION GROUPS OPPOSE NEW RUBBER DAM IN ARROYO MOCHO



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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Livermore, CA – Local creek restoration groups are opposing plans by the Zone 7 Water Agency (“Zone 7”) to build an inflatable rubber dam without a fish ladder in Arroyo Mocho between Livermore and Pleasanton near El Charro Road. On October 21, Zone 7 released a Mitigated Negative Declaration (“MND”) stating their intent to construct a rubber dam and diversion facility in the Arroyo to capture additional releases of Delta water from the South Bay Aqueduct, without further environmental review. The Alameda Creek Alliance (“ACA”) and Friends Of The Arroyos (“FOTA”) are opposing the project due to potential impacts to ongoing steelhead trout restoration efforts and to other sensitive species such as the California red-legged frog. The two groups are also opposing Zone 7’s proposal to widen and realign sections of Arroyo Mocho and Arroyo las Positas, a project that involves construction of a concrete drop structure without a fish ladder in Arroyo Mocho.

Jeff Miller, Director of the ACA, blasted the dam proposal, saying, “We will not allow another potential fish barrier to be built in the Alameda Creek watershed. This project could block future fish migration to upper Arroyo Mocho and would be a setback to steelhead restoration efforts. Zone 7 should abandon this project and focus its energies on water conservation measures.” Louann Tung, spokesperson for FOTA, added, “Zone 7 should deal with their existing barriers to fish migration rather adding additional dams and drop structures without fish ladders.”

A consortium of 12 local, state, and federal agencies have been pursuing steelhead restoration projects for the Alameda Creek watershed since 1999. Planned fish passage projects in lower Alameda Creek may make Arroyo Mocho accessible to steelhead by 2005. Native rainbow trout inhabit the upper portion of Arroyo Mocho along Mines Road, upstream of the proposed Zone 7 projects. The upper Arroyo Mocho habitat is thought to be suitable spawning and rearing habitat for ocean-run steelhead trout, although migratory fish would have to negotiate flood control channels in Pleasanton and Livermore. Zone 7 owns several small concrete grade-stabilization structures in Arroyo Mocho near Stanley Blvd. and Isabel Ave. that are potential barriers to migratory fish.

On October 21, Zone 7 also released a MND for the Arroyo Mocho Widening/Arroyo Las Positas Realignment Project. This project would realign the confluence of Arroyo Mocho and Arroyo Las Positas, and deepen and widen Arroyo Mocho downstream of El Charro Road, requiring installation of a 10 foot high drop structure which may be a barrier to fish migration. The project also could impact a population of western pond turtles, a state species of concern, which would be relocated from lower Arroyo Las Positas.

Although under the current proposal the rubber dam would only operate during summer months when steelhead would not be found in the Project area and would only capture Delta water released from the South Bay Aqueduct, the dam may be used in future water supply plans which could harm steelhead restoration efforts. Zone 7 has ambitions to capture up to 10,000 acre-feet annually of natural runoff from Arroyo Mocho and Arroyo Las Positas, stream flow that would likely be diverted by the rubber dam during periods of steelhead migration.

The ACA and FOTA are considering pursuing legal action if the Zone 7 Board of Directors approves the projects at upcoming meetings on December 4th and 18th, due to inadequate environmental review. “The potential impacts to steelhead trout and other sensitive species require that an Environmental Impact Report be prepared for these projects,” said Miller. “The Negative Declaration is an inadequate environmental review - Zone 7 completely failed to consider any alternatives to the rubber dam.” Adoption of a Negative Declaration presumes there are either no potentially significant impacts to the environment or that potential impacts are mitigated by conservation measures proposed as part of the project. “If these projects go through with a Negative Declaration, we will have two additional fish barriers in the Arroyo, with no opportunity for regulatory agencies or the public to suggest alternative projects,” added Miller.

Zone 7 is taking public comments on the MND for the rubber dam project until November 21st and on the MND for the Arroyo widening and realignment project until November 19th. Write to Zone 7 Water Agency, 5997 Parkside Drive, Pleasanton, CA 94558.

The Alameda Creek Alliance is a community restoration group formed in 1997 that is working to protect and restore Alameda Creek and its tributaries, with over 1200 members and supporters in the East Bay. Contact the ACA at (510) 845-4675 or www.alamedacreek.org. Friends Of The Arroyos is a creek protection group formed in 2001 to protect and restore the creeks of Livermore and Pleasanton, including Arroyo Mocho and Arroyo las Positas. Contact FOTA at (925) 455-8823.