

CALAVERAS DAM REBUILD WILL LEAVE STEELHEAD RESTORATION HIGH AND DRY

SFPUC Dam Project Does Not Include Adequate Water Flow for Alameda Creek



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Sunol, CA – The Alameda Creek Alliance (ACA) is calling on the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) to include adequate stream restoration measures for Alameda Creek as part of a project to rebuild the seismically vulnerable Calaveras Dam, ten miles southeast of Fremont. The SFPUC will hold public hearings next week on the scope of an Environmental Impact Report that will be prepared for the \$134 million Calaveras Dam Replacement Project. The ACA is insisting that the project include adequate water releases from Calaveras Reservoir to restore steelhead trout in Alameda Creek, passage for migratory fish past the new dam, and removal of Alameda Diversion Dam, which diverts the majority of upper Alameda Creek stream flow into Calaveras Reservoir.

“We support San Francisco making needed repairs and earthquake retrofits to its water system, however the new Calaveras Dam and Reservoir must be operated to allow restoration of steelhead trout to Alameda Creek,” said Jeff Miller, Director of the ACA. “The current dam is operated in violation of state wildlife protection laws, and to rebuild the dam without restoring stream flow to Alameda Creek is unacceptable,” added Miller.

Calaveras Dam and Reservoir, part of the San Francisco water system, was completed in 1925. The reservoir captures runoff from 100 square miles of the Calaveras Creek and Arroyo Hondo watersheds. The Alameda Diversion Dam and tunnel also diverts winter flows from upper Alameda Creek into Calaveras Reservoir. Completion of the Calaveras Dam trapped formerly ocean-run steelhead trout above the reservoir and blocked fish migration from S. F. Bay into the best trout spawning and rearing habitat in the Alameda Creek watershed. An estimated adult population of 300 or more landlocked steelhead/rainbow trout survives in Calaveras Reservoir and spawns in the Arroyo Hondo tributary. The SFPUC does not release water from either dam to benefit fish and wildlife downstream, and low summer flows and high water temperatures have reduced native trout populations in upper Alameda Creek. Resident rainbow trout in Alameda Creek and in the SFPUC’s reservoirs have been proposed for Endangered Species Act (ESA) listing, with a determination due in December.

Because the dam is near an active fault zone and was determined to be vulnerable in a strong earthquake, the state Division of Safety of Dams in 2001 restricted the reservoir storage level to 60% of capacity until the dam is rebuilt. The SFPUC has proposed a replacement earthen dam immediately downstream of the existing dam, with a core that could allow future enlargement of the dam. The rebuild is scheduled to be completed by 2012.

The ACA submitted formal scoping comments today on the Environmental Impact Report, requesting that the project include migratory fish passage at the rebuilt Calaveras Dam and at the Alameda Diversion Dam, water releases to Alameda Creek to help restore steelhead trout and keep other native fish and wildlife in good condition, and restoration of stream processes below the dams to maintain suitable fish habitat. The ACA also asked that the SFPUC not construct the dam to allow future enlargement and not construct a controversial rubber dam and water recapture facility in the Sunol Valley.

The SFPUC began scoping hearings this fall for the Water Supply Improvement Program, a \$4.3 billion S. F. water system upgrade plan through the year 2030. The SFPUC manages 36,800 acres of public land and operates three dams in the upper Alameda Creek watershed, diverting 86% of natural stream flows tributary to upper Alameda Creek into Calaveras and San Antonio Reservoirs for water supply. In June 2005, the ACA and 68 other Bay Area conservation groups called on the SFPUC to improve its stewardship of local and regional watershed lands, particularly by restoring water flow in Alameda Creek. The groups asked the SFPUC to abide by state Fish and Game Codes requiring sufficient instream flows to sustain native fish in good condition. The SFPUC signed an agreement in 1997 to release very minimal flows from Calaveras Reservoir to restore about five miles of Alameda Creek in the Sunol Valley, but to date has not released any water.

Since steelhead trout in the Bay Area were listed as threatened under the ESA in 1997, the ACA has been advocating for projects to allow migratory fish from the Bay to reach spawning habitat in upper Alameda Creek. There are 12 local, state, and federal agencies cooperating on migratory fish passage projects in Alameda Creek, including dam removals and construction of fish ladders and fish screens. The projects will allow adult steelhead, currently blocked by barriers in the lower creek, to access up to 15 miles of spawning and rearing habitat in and above Sunol Regional Wilderness. In May 2005, the Alameda County Water District (ACWD) received a \$1 million grant to fund two projects that will help improve passage for steelhead trout in the Alameda Creek Flood Control Channel. In 2006, the ACWD will remove an inflatable rubber dam and install a fish screen at a water diversion in the lower creek, and the SFPUC will remove two abandoned dams from Niles Canyon.

The Fremont scoping meeting will be held on Monday, November 14, 2005, from 6:30-8:30 PM at the Fremont Main Library, 2400 Stevenson Boulevard. The San Francisco meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 15, 2005, from 6:30-8:30 PM at San Francisco State University, 425 Market Street, Room 301.

The ACA is a community watershed restoration group with over 730 members, dedicated to protecting and restoring Alameda Creek and its tributaries. The ACA scoping comments can be viewed on the ACA web site at www.alamedacreek.org by clicking on "Calaveras Dam Project".