

SAN FRANCISCO RUSHING ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW FOR CALAVERAS DAM PROJECT

*Controversy over Mitigations for Impacts to Steelhead Trout and Other
Endangered Species*



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Sunol, CA – Over two dozen Bay Area conservation and fly-fishing organizations are [insisting](#) that San Francisco and the Army Corps of Engineers extend the public comment period on environmental review for the controversial Calaveras Dam replacement project. The San Francisco Planning Department and the Corps are refusing to extend the comment period or provide a public hearing in Sunol, near the communities most affected by the project, despite requests by conservation groups and the project proponent, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC).

“The Calaveras Dam replacement is a large-scale, complex project, the environmental review documents are highly technical, and there is considerable controversy over biological impacts of the project and the adequacy of proposed mitigations,” stated Jeff Miller, Director of the Alameda Creek Alliance. “The decision not to extend the comment period and hold a hearing in Sunol is counter to the principles of public participation and full disclosure, and will reduce the ability of the public to provide informed comments.”

The Planning Department in early October released a flawed draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Calaveras Dam project, in which the SFPUC proposes to operate the rebuilt dam in a manner that is incompatible with restoring steelhead below the dam. The proposed stream flow releases for migratory fish are clearly inadequate, the proposed operations of Calaveras Dam and the related Alameda Diversion Dam are illegal, and the proposed mitigations for what will be significant construction impacts on habitat for numerous endangered species are meager and inappropriate.

“Although we support rebuilding Calaveras Dam as quickly as possible, at issue is how the rebuilt dam and reservoir will be operated,” said Miller. “Along with upgrading the aging water supply infrastructure, San Francisco’s water agency needs to be brought into the twenty-first century regarding compliance with modern environmental protections. San Francisco’s water system can and should be operated in a sustainable manner.”

The 45 day comment period on the 1,600-page draft EIR currently closes on November 20. The Corps comment period on their federal permit closes November 27. The Planning Department has scheduled two public hearings on the draft EIR: November 10 in Fremont at the Main Library, 2400 Stevenson Blvd., beginning at 6:30 pm; and November 12 in San Francisco before the City Planning Commission, in Room 400 of City Hall, beginning at 1:30 pm or later.

Alameda Creek is becoming an urban stream success story after decades of restoration efforts. Since steelhead trout in the Bay Area and central coast were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species

Act in 1997, numerous organizations and agencies have been pursuing restoration projects to allow migratory fish from the Bay to reach spawning habitat in upper Alameda Creek. Downstream of San Francisco's dams, 11 fish passage projects at small and medium barriers in the creek have been completed since 2001 and several more major fish ladder and dam removal projects will be completed by 2012. This will allow anadromous fish access to 20 miles of suitable spawning and rearing habitat in the watershed for the first time in almost half a century. Alameda Creek is an "anchor watershed" considered regionally significant for restoration of threatened steelhead trout to the entire Bay Area.

From 2011-2015, San Francisco will rebuild the seismically-challenged Calaveras Dam on Alameda Creek, the largest local tributary to San Francisco Bay. The environmental review for the Calaveras Dam project is a significant milestone in the restoration of Alameda Creek. With all major fish passage projects in the watershed now underway, stream flows for fish below the San Francisco dams is a critical last piece of the puzzle for the full restoration of Alameda Creek.

The SFPUC manages 36,800 acres of public land and operates three dams in the upper Alameda Creek watershed. Calaveras Dam, completed in 1925, captures runoff from 100 square miles of the Calaveras Creek and Arroyo Hondo watersheds. The SFPUC diverts 86 percent of the stream flows of the upper watershed and plans to divert almost all winter and spring stream flows from upper Alameda Creek at their Alameda Diversion Dam, which diverts flows from upper Alameda Creek into Calaveras Reservoir. Completion of Calaveras Dam trapped formerly ocean-run steelhead trout above the reservoir and blocked fish migration into the best trout spawning and rearing habitat in the watershed. Because the dam is near an active fault zone and was determined to be vulnerable in a strong earthquake, the Division of Safety of Dams in 2001 restricted reservoir storage level to 40 percent of capacity until the dam is rebuilt.

The groups sending the [letter](#) are Alameda Creek Alliance, Beyond Searsville Dam, Center for Biological Diversity, Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge, Clean Water Action, Close to Home: Exploring Nature in the East Bay, Diablo Valley Fly Fishermen, Friends of the Arroyos, Friends of the River, Golden West Women Flyfishers, Grizzly Peak Flyfishers, Guadalupe-Coyote Resource Conservation District, Lake Merritt Institute, Mission Peak Fly Anglers, Nature in the City, Northern California Council Federation of Fly Fishers, Peninsula Fly Fishers, Pilarcitos Creek Advisory Committee, Regional Parks Association, Restore Hetch Hetchy, Salmon Protection and Watershed Network, Salmon and Steelhead Restoration Group, Sierra Club, Tri-City Ecology Center, and Tuolumne River Trust.

The Alameda Creek Alliance (www.alamedacreek.org) is a community watershed group with over 1,750 members, dedicated to protecting and restoring the natural ecosystems of the Alameda Creek watershed. The ACA has been working to restore steelhead trout and protect endangered species in the Alameda Creek watershed since 1997.