



Steelhead Trout Moved Over Barriers in Alameda Creek

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Fremont, CA – Alameda Creek Alliance volunteers yesterday helped fish biologists from the East Bay Regional Park District capture adult steelhead trout in lower Alameda Creek below an impassable concrete barrier that blocks fish spawning migration, and moved them upstream into Niles Canyon. Five steelhead trout were netted during a half hour fish rescue by about 30 volunteers and fisheries staff. Radio transmitters were attached to four steelhead so their upstream migration can be tracked by Park District biologists. There may be another attempt next week to capture several dozen more steelhead that are thought to remain in lower Alameda Creek below the BART weir, the site of a future fish ladder.

“With the wet winter we’re having it’s nice to welcome steelhead and other migratory fish back into the Alameda Creek watershed, the largest local tributary to San Francisco Bay,” said Jeff Miller, director of the Alameda Creek Alliance. “The steelhead we tagged yesterday can move into tributary streams in Niles Canyon to spawn, and may even be able to migrate up to prime trout habitat in Sunol Regional Wilderness. Water agencies are close to completing planning for two fish ladders in lower Alameda Creek that will allow future salmon and steelhead to migrate upstream on their own to reach spawning areas.”

Steelhead trout were initially spotted in lower Alameda Creek on February 6 at the BART weir, a 12-foot concrete barrier that is monitored during fish migration season by Alameda Creek Alliance volunteers. Dozens of steelhead were seen jumping at the barrier throughout March. Pacific lamprey, bizarre native fish that resemble eels and which also migrate to freshwater for spawning, were seen at the weir throughout the past month. Lamprey can suction their way over barriers that block steelhead, and are known to make it upstream to spawn in upper Alameda Creek in Sunol Regional Park. The Alameda County Water District and California Department of Fish and Wildlife helped coordinate yesterday’s fish capture and tagging. Trout Unlimited and the Diablo Valley Fly Fishers also provided volunteers.

Local, state and federal agencies have been working on multiple projects to restore steelhead trout to Alameda Creek. The Alameda County Water District and Alameda County Flood Control District are planning critical fish ladder projects in the flood control channel that have been delayed for many years. Beginning in 2019 the agencies plan to construct two fish ladders that will allow steelhead to bypass the BART weir and two inflatable rubber dams in the lower creek channel.

Background

Alameda Creek, the largest watershed of all local streams tributary to the San Francisco Bay, is becoming an urban stream success story after decades of restoration efforts. Since steelhead trout in the Bay Area were listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1997, numerous organizations and agencies have cooperated on restoration projects to allow migratory fish to reach spawning habitat in upper Alameda Creek, including dam removals and construction of fish ladders and fish screens. Fifteen fish passage projects have been completed in the watershed since 2001. Multiple agencies are in the planning process for 10 additional smaller fish passage projects. Water agencies are also working on multiple projects to improve stream flows and restore stream and riparian habitat along Alameda Creek and its tributaries. These restoration projects will make up to 20 miles of Alameda Creek and its tributaries accessible to ocean-run fish for the first time in over half a century.

In 2011, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission began rebuilding the seismically-challenged Calaveras Dam in the upper Alameda Creek watershed. The SFPUC is currently constructing a fish ladder and fish screens on an associated diversion dam in upper Alameda Creek. When construction is completed in 2019, the SFPUC will begin to provide enhanced stream flows below both dams to benefit steelhead trout.

Alameda Creek is considered an 'anchor watershed' for steelhead, since it has regional significance for restoration of the threatened trout to the entire Bay Area. The watershed drains an area of about 680 square miles and once supported populations of steelhead trout and salmon. Steelhead, salmon and lamprey are anadromous fish, living out their adult lives in the ocean and migrating up fresh water streams and rivers to spawn and rear their young. Construction of dams, water diversions, modifications to the Alameda Creek streambed, and urbanization made it impossible for steelhead to migrate upstream, eliminated access to suitable spawning areas, and reduced suitable habitat for cold-water fish.

The [Alameda Creek Alliance](#) is a 2,000-member strong community watershed group, dedicated to protecting and restoring the natural ecosystems of the Alameda Creek watershed. The Alameda Creek Alliance has been working to restore steelhead trout to the Alameda Creek watershed since 1997.