

Up Your Creek!

The electronic newsletter of the Alameda Creek Alliance

Scaled Back Caltrans Niles Canyon Project Draft EIR Released



Caltrans has released a draft Environmental Impact Report for the Niles Canyon Safety Improvements Project. The project proposes localized safety improvements on Highway 84 through Niles Canyon and in Sunol. The draft EIR/EA is available [here](#).

This project is dramatically scaled back from the original road widening that Caltrans began cutting trees for in 2011, and includes some common sense measures with no environmental impacts, such as installing additional road signs, upgrading guard rails, and installing active warning system, speed feedback signs, and dynamic active warning systems to reduce driver speeds.

However, there are still some objectionable elements of the proposed project, particularly the “improvement” and re-engineering of the low speed curve midway through the canyon (which is not particularly an accident hot spot), which would allow increased driver speeds. Caltrans has failed to consider alternative design speeds for the low speed curve, to reduce the amount of rock cuts and retaining walls that will be needed. Caltrans also proposed to install two large mesh drapery screens at areas with potential rockfall – these screens would be a visual blight in the canyon. The project proposes a little more than a mile of shoulder widening - at Sims Park/Quarry Road, the west side of Silver Springs, and Paloma Way - as well as removal of about 40 trees that are next to the roadway.

The project also proposes installing two traffic signals at the Pleasanton/Sunol-SR-84 intersection to reduce rush hour backups in Sunol.

The project does not address two of the most dangerous locations in Niles Canyon, the intersection of Palomares Road with Highway 84, nor the Rosewarnes Underpass.

The project includes a beneficial measure for steelhead trout restoration: the removal of a reinforced concrete box culvert at Stonybrook Creek and replacement with a clear-span bridge. This fish passage barrier removal is a mitigation measure for impacts of tree cutting during the abandoned Niles 1 highway widening project.

Caltrans again promises mitigation during this project for tree cutting impacts, though the agency still has not followed through on promised mitigation for cutting trees during the Niles I project in 2011.

Caltrans will be taking public comments on the project and the draft EIR until **December 2**. Caltrans will hold two public open-forum hearings to solicit comments on the draft EIR:

Wednesday, November 2, 2016 from 6-8 PM

Niles Elementary School
371421 2nd Street
Fremont, CA 94536

Monday, November 7, 2016 from 6-8 PM

Sunol Glen Elementary School
111601 Main Street
Sunol, CA 94586

The Alameda Creek Alliance will post our comments and concerns before these hearings.

Lower Alameda Creek Fish Ladder Projects Environmental Review



The Alameda County Water District has re-released the environmental review for the two crucial fish ladder projects in lower Alameda Creek. The projects consist of building two fish ladders and installing fish screens on water diversions to allow steelhead trout and salmon to safely migrate upstream and downstream through the flood control channel. The projects have a 4-year construction schedule from May 2018 through October 2021. The environmental review document details the design of the fish ladders, proposed bypass flows past the rubber dams for fish migration, and fairly complex proposed operating procedures for the water district's facilities.

You can read the environmental review document [here](#).

The Alameda County Water District and the Alameda County Flood Control District issued a notice of intent to adopt a Mitigated Negative Declaration for the project (meaning no significant environmental impacts after mitigation), and the Army Corps of Engineers will adopt a finding of No Significant Impact. The Alameda Creek Alliance supports these findings.

The project also includes future water bypass flows past the ACWD dams to assist fish migration. The ACWD will divert water from the channel behind inflatable dams when the flow is below 400 cfs. There will be no water diversions when flow is more than 700 cfs. The dams may be raised when flow is between 400-700 cfs, but no diversions when water turbidity is high,

During the steelhead in-migration season (Jan 1 – Mar 31), the bypass flows will be from 20-25 cfs, depending on stream flow. During the steelhead out-migration season (April 1 – May 31), bypass flows will generally be 12 cfs, except at critically low flows in dry years.

The specific facilities that will be constructed include: a fish ladder at ACWD's middle rubber dam and BART weir; a fish ladder at ACWD's upper rubber dam; a new Shinn Pond diversion and fish screening facility. ACWD will decommission existing unscreened diversion pipelines, and replace the upper rubber dam material, equipment and controls, and the middle rubber dam equipment and controls. Facilities for monitoring in-migrating steelhead adults through the BART weir fishway will be incorporated into the fishway design.

The very complex fish ladder at the BARY weir and middle rubber dam will be designed to operate continuously up to a flow of approximately 1,100 cfs in the channel. Fishway flow will vary between 24 and 45 cfs during the steelhead immigration season and could be higher outside this season. The upper rubber dam fishway will not need to operate when the rubber dam is deflated. The upper rubber dam fishway flow will vary from approximately 24 cfs to about 45 cfs. The ACWD will implement complex operation procedures for raising and lowering the dams to reduce the potential for dewatering downstream and to provide a safe outmigration route for juvenile salmonids.

The ACWD will take comments on the environmental review document through November 3.

In Memoriam - Gordon Becker (1963-2016)



We are very sad to mark the passing of Gordon Becker, a fisheries scientist who contributed greatly to the appreciation and restoration of Alameda Creek. Gordon was also an active Alameda Creek Alliance member and a close personal friend.

As a senior fisheries scientist at the Center for Ecosystem Management and Restoration, Gordon provided critical research on Alameda Creek, publishing studies on steelhead restoration and fish

passage projects in the Alameda Creek watershed. Gordon had not only the scientific basis, but also enormous energy and enthusiasm for restoring the creek.

Gordon had more than 20 years of experience working on freshwater ecology and water management issues. He worked with resource agencies, local jurisdictions and non-governmental groups to advocate for and restore steelhead, salmon and their habitats throughout California coastal streams. Gordon was a board member of Friends of the River, Beyond Searsville Dam, and the Tuolumne River Trust, and also advised and provided expert comments on many projects for the Alameda Creek Alliance. Gordon enjoyed rafting and kayaking on rivers, lakes, estuaries and oceans whenever possible. He was a rafting guide with Friends of the River and with Environmental Traveling Companions.

Some of Gordon's more important publications for Alameda Creek restoration:

San Francisco Estuary Watersheds Evaluation: Identifying Promising Locations for Steelhead Restoration in Tributary Streams of the San Francisco Estuary (2007)

Historical Status of Steelhead Trout in Streams of the Urbanized San Francisco Estuary, California (2005)

Stonybrook Creek Salmonid Migration Barrier Removal Project (2005)

Fish Passage Assessment of Private Stream Crossings on Lower Stonybrook Creek (2005)

Conceptual Design and Feasibility of a Natural Fishway at the Fremont BART Weir, Alameda Creek, California (2005)

Draft Steelhead Restoration Action Plan for the Alameda Creek Watershed (2002)

Gordon cared deeply about the environment, water policy, and preservation of our wild rivers. He gave much of his professional talent and personal time to organizations focused on these issues. Donations in Gordon's name may be made to: [Friends of the River](#), [Tuolumne River Trust](#), and [Alameda Creek Alliance](#).

Gordon will be hugely missed.

Central California Coast Steelhead Recovery Plan Launched



NOAA Fisheries has released the final recovery plan to guide the recovery of three threatened salmonids species in California—California Coastal chinook salmon, Northern California steelhead trout, and Central California Coast steelhead trout. The threatened Central California Coast steelhead trout population includes fish in Alameda Creek.

The science-based recovery plan identifies the actions necessary to recover chinook salmon and steelhead throughout their broad geographic range that extends from Redwood Creek in Humboldt County, south to Santa Cruz County, including the San Francisco Bay area.

Alameda Creek is identified as an essential population for recovering steelhead in the interior San Francisco Bay, along with Coyote Creek, Green Valley/Suisun Creek, Napa River, Petaluma River and Sonoma Creek.

The Recovery Plan identifies numerous steelhead habitat indicators were rated poor for Alameda Creek: large woody debris frequency, fish passage flows, physical migration barriers, floodplain connectivity, turbidity, spawner density, flow conditions, estuary quality and extent, magnitude of water diversions, temperature, spatial structure, smolt abundance, and stream side road density. Threats to Alameda Creek steelhead were identified as water diversion and impoundments, channel modification, residential and commercial development, roads and railroads, livestock ranching, gravel mining, and severe weather patterns.

The general recovery strategy for Alameda Creek is to improve fish passage, develop flow schedules for reservoirs, improve habitat complexity, improve the quality and extent of the estuary, and investigate potential population augmentation for steelhead. The recovery plan targets restoring a spawning population of 2,900 adult steelhead in the Alameda Creek watershed.

Read the [recovery plan](#) and supporting materials.

Read the NOAA Fisheries story, [New Multispecies Plan Provides Roadmap to Salmon and Steelhead Recovery](#)

Alameda Creek Watershed Forum – **October 25**



The Alameda Creek Watershed Forum will hold a State of the Watershed conference in Fremont next Tuesday, October 25.

Topics will include: a Watershed Report Card with the latest information on toxic algae from the Regional Water Quality Control Board; updates on fisheries and fish passage projects; a presentation on planning and implementation by the Alameda County Flood Control & Water Conservation District; updates on the Calaveras Dam construction and the Alameda Creek Diversion Dam fish ladder by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission; the Medeiros Parkway floodplain stream restoration project by Zone 7 Water Agency; the Living Arroyos stewardship program by Livermore Area Recreation and Parks Department with Zone 7 Water Agency; and Niles Cone Groundwater Basin management by the Alameda County Water District.

Register [here](#) – or view the [Eventbrite registration page](#) or www.acwForum.org/calendar for full details.

Help Us Survey Sinbad Creek in Sunol



The Alameda Creek Alliance invites you to participate in monitoring programs of Sinbad Creek in Sunol, which we will be initiating this fall. The goal of the project is to provide baseline information about Sinbad Creek, and to involve the community in monitoring of creek health.

The information gathered will help us to gauge water quality in Sinbad Creek, to and to better understand how stream flow and water quality might be changing over time. Our project consists of mapping of Sinbad Creek, rainy-season water quality sampling, and surveys to characterize the aquatic insects that live in the creek and are the base of the food chain. Visit our [Sinbad Creek Stewardship page](#) on the Alameda Creek Alliance website.

We will be hosting a training session in Sunol to discuss the stewardship project and how community members can participate. Stay tuned for more information.

Regional Salmon Restoration News

[*A Cal Alum's Recipe for More Tuolumne River Salmon: Add Water*](#)

Cal Alumni Magazine – October 18, 2016

[*It Ties the Ocean to the Mountains: A History of Salmon in California*](#)

KCET – October 17, 2016

[*SF Bay Ecosystem Collapsing As Rivers Diverted, Scientists Report*](#)

San Francisco Chronicle – October 7, 2016

[*Matilija Dam Clears One Hurdle; More Ahead*](#)

Ventura County Star – October 6, 2016

[Lawmakers Formally Oppose Delta Tunnels Scheme](#)

Central Valley Business Times – October 5, 2016

[Napa Fish Monitoring Shows Mixed Results for Salmon, Trout](#)

Napa Valley Register – October 4, 2016

[\\$16 Billion Delta Tunnels May Hit Taxpayers](#)

KCET – September 29, 2016

The Alameda Creek Alliance is a non-profit community watershed protection group. Please support our efforts by [becoming a member](#)