

UP YOUR CREEK!

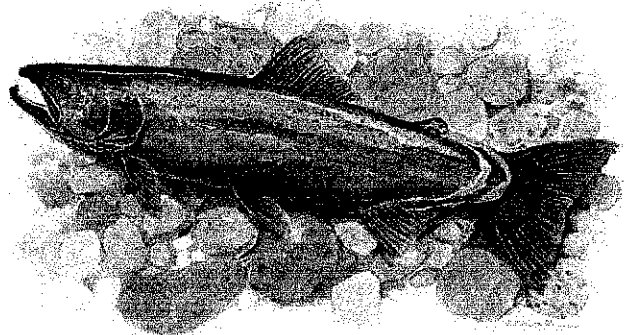
ALAMEDA CREEK ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

Issue 11 • February 2001

NEXT ACA MEETING

Tuesday, February 27, 7 - 9 PM
Sunol Glen School, Sunol

Note that we will be meeting in a new location, more centrally located in the watershed. See page 5 for directions to Sunol Glen School.



Central Coast Steelhead © Stuart Helmtoller

AGENCIES MOVE FORWARD WITH RESTORATION PLANS

Plans for four fish passage restoration projects in Alameda Creek are moving forward. Fish ladder construction and dam removal projects in the flood control channel and Niles Canyon are scheduled to be completed by 2003/2004, allowing ocean-run steelhead trout to access the upper creek in Sunol Wilderness for the first time since the 1950's.

FLOOD CONTROL CHANNEL

The Alameda County Flood Control District (ACFCD) and the Alameda County Water District (ACWD) have submitted a restoration proposal to the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) for fish passage improvements in the lower 12 miles of creek comprising the flood control channel.



MIDDLE ACWD RUBBER DAM

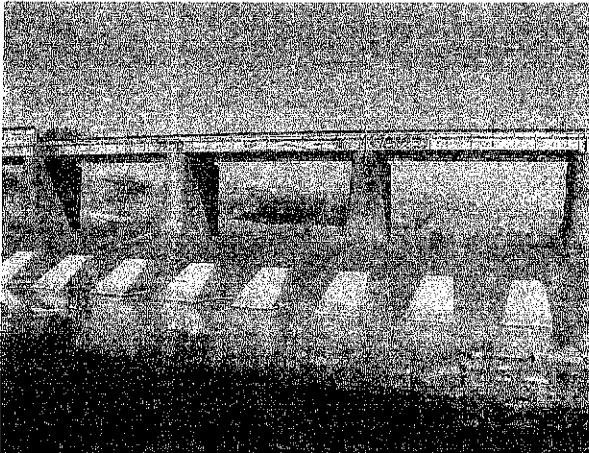
The Corps is currently preparing a Preliminary Restoration Plan for the project. The proposed project includes construction of one fish ladder bypassing the BART weir (owned by ACFCD) and the middle ACWD inflatable rubber dam; another fish ladder at the upper ACWD rubber dam; and installation of fish screens at several major ACWD water diversions (where water is diverted out of the flood control channel into the Fremont Quarry Lakes for groundwater recharge).

If approved, the Corps will provide 75% funding for the project, which will be completed by fall of 2003 at the earliest. ACWD will pursue separate funding for improving fish passage at the lower rubber dam and for screening their smaller diversions.

The lower ACWD dam is not considered a permanent migration barrier, and is operated at a lower height than the middle or upper rubber dams. Salmon and steelhead have been able to move past this dam during storm events while it was dropped flat in the channel. The proposed design is one ladder which would operate at higher flows, and an adjacent "false weir Alaska Steeppass" ladder at low flows which would trap fish for hauling around the dams.

continued page 2 →

The consulting firm CH2M Hill has prepared a report on the conceptual designs and cost estimates for the ladders and screens, which will be available shortly on-line at www.amarine.com/information/acwcp/acfisheries.html. The fish ladder design for the BART weir and middle rubber dam is proposed to include a public viewing area and the ability to trap fish for future monitoring.

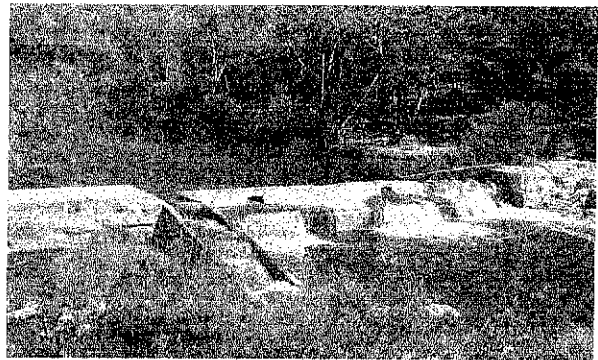


BART WEIR

NILES CANYON DAMS

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) is moving forward with plans to remove the Niles and Sunol Dams in Niles Canyon. Niles Dam has a non-functional fish ladder, and the fish ladder on Sunol Dam was blown out long ago. Neither dam is currently used for water supply. SFPUC has completed a feasibility study and analysis of the impacts of dam removal. The major issues studied for removing these dams were what to do with sediment accumulated behind the dams, whether riparian vegetation would be harmed by hydrologic changes after dam removal, and the historic significance of the dams.

The effects of removing Niles Dam on riparian vegetation and sediment transport are expected to be minor. It is tentatively proposed to excavate and truck out the majority of sediment accumulated behind Sunol Dam, rather than to let it flush out of the system after dam removal. The Sunol Dam →



NILES DAM

removal is expected to lower the groundwater table in the area adjacent to the dam, but to not significantly impact the mature riparian vegetation along the east bank.

Both dams qualify as historic structures. The lower stone portion of Niles Dam was built in 1841 to supply water to the Vallejo Flour Mill at the bottom of Niles Canyon. It was capped with concrete in 1887 by the Spring Valley Water Company to supply water to San Francisco. Sunol Dam was constructed in 1900.

Both dams are considered “attractive nuisances” by the SFPUC. The SFPUC has tentatively proposed restoring the Vallejo Mill site as remediation for the removal of these historic structures. Removal of these structures will allow the much more historic runs of steelhead to once again ascend Niles Canyon.



SUNOL DAM

**Come Celebrate the First
Alameda Creek Dam Removal!**

Friday, August 17, 10 AM
Sunol Swim Dams
Sunol Regional Wilderness

Contact the ACA for more info.
Wear your ACA T-shirt

SUNOL SWIM DAMS

The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) will begin the first Alameda Creek dam removal project on August 17, 2001, at 10 AM in Sunol Regional Wilderness. EBRPD will begin removing two low swim dams in Alameda Creek which are barriers to fish movement at lower flows. The 3 foot high dams will be removed and the streambanks restored and re-vegetated by the end of summer 2001. The Alameda Creek Alliance contributed \$200 toward the dam removal.

STONYBROOK CREEK CULVERTS

ACFCD is finishing up a fish passage study for 11 County-owned culverts in Stonybrook Creek, a tributary to Alameda Creek in Niles Canyon. A radio tagged steelhead went up this creek in 1998, and there is a healthy population of native trout.



STONYBROOK CREEK CULVERT
AT ALAMEDA CR. CONFLUENCE

All of the road crossing culverts are potential barriers to fish migration. The ACFCD and CalTrans will be looking into modifying these culverts, which could open up 2 miles of trout spawning and rearing habitat in Stonybrook Creek.

RESTORING THE CREEK MOUTH

ACFCD is investigating Corps funding for a restoration project at the mouth of Alameda Creek. ACFCD is interested in removing or setting back the levees which contain the mouth of the creek, to facilitate sediment transport into the Bay. This project could alleviate the need for ACFCD to dredge the lower creek channel, while re-creating wetlands and providing nursery and smolt habitat at the creek mouth for steelhead.

JUMP-STARTING THE RUN

The Alameda Creek Fisheries Workgroup has recommended jump-starting the steelhead run before barriers are removed in the creek. The idea is to restock native steelhead smolts (young steelhead moving downstream in preparation for the ocean phase of their life-cycle) in the lower creek for several years. It would take 1-3 years for the smolts to return from the ocean as steelhead, at which time these fish would be able to migrate upstream into the newly-opened spawning habitat.

Landlocked trout behind Calaveras and San Antonio Dams still exhibit the migratory behavior of steelhead. These fish are thought to be the purest strain of Alameda Creek-adapted fish, and most likely to respond to restoration efforts. The SFPUC will conduct a genetic study of rainbow/steelhead trout behind these dams and in upper Arroyo Mocho to determine a population suitable for jump-starting a run in the lower creek.



Landlocked

© Stuart Helmsmoller

SFPUC RUBBER DAM

The SFPUC is still pursuing plans to construct an inflatable rubber recapture dam in Alameda Creek in the upper Sunol Valley. As part of a settlement of a water rights complaint filed by CalTrout in 1989, SFPUC has agreed to release from 7-20 cfs of water from Calaveras Reservoir year-round to benefit native trout below the dam.

However, the SFPUC intends to recapture the water 5 miles downstream at the site of the Sunol Pumping Plant. SFPUC had originally proposed a 6' high rubber dam, which would have created a 6 acre impoundment. The proposal has now been scaled back to a 3' high dam, with a 4 acre impoundment.

The project is within designated Critical Habitat for steelhead trout and the red-legged frog. There are also native yellow-legged frogs, tiger salamanders, and pond turtles at the site. The impoundment would create prime habitat for introduced predators such as bullfrogs and predatory fish, which eat native amphibians and trout eggs. Fish passage and entrainment of eggs and young at the diversion are also concerns.

An interagency meeting to discuss the impacts to listed species is planned for **Monday, March 12** in Sunol. Jeff Miller has been attending the rubber dam meetings on behalf of ACA to ensure that habitat for trout and native amphibians is not destroyed or degraded by the project.

FISHERIES WORKGROUP

The next meeting of the Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup will be held on **Tuesday, April 3, at 9:30 AM** at the ACFCD offices, 951 Turner Court in Hayward. The Fisheries Workgroup is the stakeholder group that is working out the details and timing of how to proceed with steelhead restoration in the watershed. Meetings are open to the public. Minutes from Workgroup meetings and most of the reports mentioned in this newsletter are available on-line at www.amarine.com/information/accwp/acfisheries.html.

DEVELOPMENT IN THE WATERSHED

Two proposed destructive sprawl development projects in the East Bay need your action:

Blue Rock Country Club (Hayward 1900, Inc.)

- on Walpert Ridge in Hayward - adjacent to Garin/Dry Creek and Pleasanton Ridge Regional Parks, and Stonybrook Canyon
- over 600 exclusive luxury homes and an 18 hole golf course planned
- will destroy over 800 acres of critical habitat for the red-legged frog and the Alameda whipsnake
- loss of breeding ponds for the frog; will fragment habitat for one of only five remaining populations of the whipsnake; will fill and pollute the headwaters of Palomares, Dry, and Ward Creeks
- the Army Corps of Engineers improperly issued a federal permit with approval from the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- the Hayward Area Planning Association and Center for Biological Diversity have sued to stop the development - court hearing scheduled for May

Happy Valley Golf Course (City of Pleasanton)

- 34 luxury homes plus infrastructure and an 18 hole golf course (there already are 4 golf courses within five miles of this site)
- will develop or modify over 240 acres which are potential habitat for endangered species (Alameda whipsnake, red-legged frog, California tiger salamander, and Callippe silverspot butterfly)
- so far no federal permit, but no one is suing on this project

What you can do:

Please attend the Regional Water Board permit hearings for these developments (both hearings are the same day). The hearings are **Wednesday, February 21 starting at 9:30 AM**, in the 1st Floor Auditorium of the State of California Building, 1515 Clay Street, in downtown Oakland.

21st Annual Rivers Festival

February 23-25

Herbst Pavilion - Fort Mason Center, S. F.

Help table for the ACA and get into the Festival free - contact Jeff ASAP if you are interested.

On Saturday, February 24, from 3:00 to 3:50 (Room 205), Jeff will represent the ACA as part of a panel at the Festival; Rivers Reborn - an Update on Dam Removal Efforts in California.

Attend the 2nd Annual

Fremont Steelhead Festival and Watershed Awareness Fair!

Saturday, May 12, 9 AM to 3 PM

This year's Fremont Steelhead Festival will be held at Niles Community Park, along Alameda Creek in the Niles District of Fremont. The Festival is a celebration of the progress made toward restoring native steelhead trout to Alameda Creek and a chance to improve public awareness of the project.

Sponsored by:

Alameda Creek Alliance

City of Fremont

Alameda County Flood Control District

Alameda County Water District

S. F. Public Utilities Commission

Union Sanitary District

East Bay Regional Park District

The Festival runs from 10 AM to 3 PM, with educational booths and displays by organizations and agencies involved in the Alameda Creek watershed and East Bay fish restoration activities.

A 10K Spawning Run and a 5K fun-run will be held along Alameda Creek starting at 9 AM. There will also be walking tours of the proposed fish restoration sites, as well as food, live music, prize giveaways, activities for kids, and more.

If you would like to volunteer, if your organization is interested in participating, or for more information about the Fremont Steelhead Festival, please contact Paul Salop at (925) 373-7142 or via e-mail at salop@amarine.com.

*I came as a blind man led by a seeing-eye salmon -
and it showed me a world I'd believed was destroyed,
a world where a man could still walk unfeared
among the animals and birds he calls "wild."*

- From **The River Why** by David James Duncan

FISH RESCUE

ACA and local water agencies currently transport migratory fish past barriers in the lower creek. These "fish rescues" are a temporary solution to fish passage until dam removals and fish ladder construction are completed. If you would like to volunteer to move fish, contact the ACA.

ACA MEETINGS

The Alameda Creek Alliance meets the last Tuesday of each month from 7 to 9 PM (except during summer) at Sunol Glen School, 11601 Main Street, in the town of Sunol.

DIRECTIONS TO SUNOL GLEN SCHOOL:

From Highway 680:

Take the Hwy. 84 exit from Hwy. 680 (about 7 miles south of 680/580 interchange). Go west on Hwy. 84 (Niles Canyon Road) ¼ mile, go straight through the stop sign at four corners. Go over the bridge (over Arroyo de la Laguna) and make the first right into Sunol. The school will be immediately on your right. We meet in the Community Room.

From Fremont/Highway 84

Go east on Hwy. 84 (Niles Canyon Road), up Niles Canyon. At the top of the canyon, take the Sunol exit into town. Continue through town on Main Street past the brew pub and the post office, over the railroad tracks, and the school will be on your left. We meet in the Community Room.

CONTACT US

Contact the Alameda Creek Alliance at:

P. O. Box 192

Canyon, CA 94516

Phone (510) 845-4675

e-mail: alamedacreek@hotmail.com

web site: www.alamedacreek.com

OUTDOORS

Alameda Creek's Renaissance

Steelhead's return
a symbol of change

By Paul McHugh
CHRONICLE OUTDOORS WRITER

Bike, hike or ride a horse out to a spot where Alameda Creek flows into San Francisco Bay, and you'll soon score a splendid and educational view.

This point — 2 miles out in the bay from the edge of Coyote Hills Regional Park in Fremont — is reached by a pair of trails atop flood-control levees that bracket the stream.

Usually, only yachtsmen enjoy such tranquil views. The bay's rim of natural landforms dominates the skyline; human structures seem shriveled in scale and importance. Sounds of wind and wave are ascendant. Noise only issues from aircraft drifting into SFO, 10 miles to the north-west.

Near you, herons and egrets stalk the estuarine marsh along the creek. Harriers hover on the breeze. Sandpipers lit to and fro.

This Alameda Creek scene seems a living gift, a tiny fragment from the south bay's past. Turn and gaze back upstream toward Fremont, and it looks as though development's concrete and asphalt jaws are snapping shut on the stream's watershed like pliers.

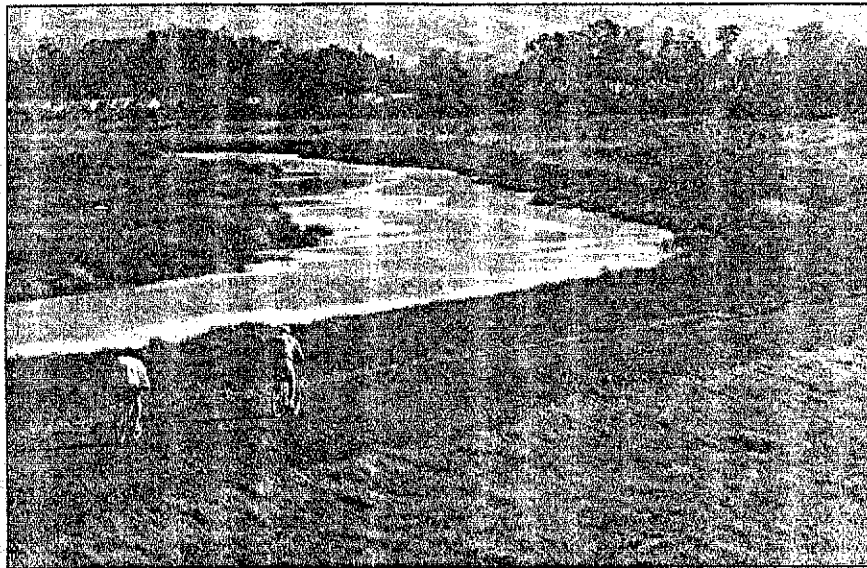
But the reality is more interesting. Alameda Creek is on the brink of a natural renaissance. Moves are under way to enhance ecologic values, and make this whole drainage a grander place for outdoor recreation. Symbol of the change: Massive sea-wandering steelhead trout. A few return to this creek, striving to swim upstream to ancestral spawning riffles. Soon, that struggle will get easier.

In summer, two of nine dams barring their progress will come down. Plans are afoot to remove others, modify their operation or add fish ladders, allowing steelhead to reclaim miles of stream. Next, major enhancement efforts will be launched to restore this magical but threatened species.

This fall, the Quarry Lakes, just north of the creek in Fremont, will be reborn as wildlife preserves and recreational sites — complete with a new swimming beach. Envisioned for the future: hiking trails, picnic grounds and campsites in a linked system ascending Alameda Creek through Niles Canyon, going more than 40 miles inland, all the way from the creek's mouth to Sunol Regional Wilderness and beyond.

"Many issues remain to be dealt with," said Jeff Miller, director of the Alameda Creek Alliance. The new, non-profit group organizes volunteers to work for watershed restoration. "But last year, the watershed's major management agencies agreed on what should be done. Momentum for restoration seems to be snowballing."

Miller, who also works for the Berkeley Center for Biodiversity, snatched up the torch for restoring steelhead here, a flame that has flickered since the 1940s. He has toured board meetings and classrooms making his pitch — lately with a stuffed steelhead named Stella under one arm. A 27-inch, gravid female, Stella was found three miles up San Lorenzo Creek, just to the north, during last winter's spawning run.



CHRISTINA ROOS/HERNANDEZ / The Chronicle

Alameda Creek is on the brink of a natural renaissance that will make it a grander place for outdoor recreation.

Miller has also hoisted live fish. The 180-member Alliance has promoted cleanups of in-stream trash, and also netted steelhead below the dams and given them a boost up to spawning areas in Niles Canyon — one of several *ad hoc* efforts to keep the runs alive.

Stand at the mouth of Alameda Creek on any day this winter and adult steelhead may be finning past just below you, invisible in the turbid water.

Were you to ascend with them, your first obstacle would be a big, inflatable dam of black rubber — one of three operated by the Alameda County Water District. Their job is to impound winter run-off, letting it percolate down to recharge ground water. The first is only 5 feet high; steelhead can leap it easily. The others may be inflated to 13 feet. The district is exploring the notion of operating these dams in a way that permits fish passage.

The next major impasse is a big concrete weir built to stabilize overhead BART tracks. This impediment needs ancillary construction of a fish ladder.

You'd pass the final black rubber dam at Niles, just before the entrance to the canyon, near a large parking and staging area for hikers and cyclists. This point is 12 miles upstream from the Alameda Creek mouth. Two other staging areas for human recreationists are found in between: Beard, at 5.98 miles; and Isherwood, at 7.83 miles.

Beautiful as the steep, green, 6-mile-long Niles Canyon is, it still poses a transit problem for people and fish. You can drive it, but the very best way to see it is to take a Sunday run on the Niles Canyon Historic Railway.

If they made it up this far, steelhead would bump into two old concrete dams, owned by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC). The first is 6-foot high, the second is 11 feet. Both are slated to be either removed or notched to enhance fish passage. The hope is to acquire Army Corps of Engineers mitiga-

Alameda Creek Information

■ **Alameda Creek Alliance** — www.alamedacreek.com.

■ **Coyote Hills Regional Park** — Take Patterson Ranch Road west from Pason Padre Parkway, west of Fremont. Visitor Center has natural history displays. It's open: 9:30 a.m.-5 p.m., Tuesday-Sunday (park gate opens at 8 a.m.). Parking: \$4. (510) 795-9385.

■ **Alameda Creek Regional Trail** — Distance from Niles Staging Area (off Old Canyon Road) to the bay: 12 miles, paved south side; 12.4 miles, unpaved north side. Open: sunrise-10 p.m. daily. (510) 881-1833.

■ **Niles Canyon Heritage Railroad** — One-hour runs on historic trains, first and third Sundays of each month. Cost: \$7 (general), \$3 (children ages 3-12). No reservations. (925) 862-9063.

■ **Sunol Regional Wilderness** — Located off Calaveras Road, southeast of Sunol. Open 7 a.m.-sunset daily. Fees: \$4 (parking), \$5 (night, backpack camping); \$11 (car camping). (510) 536-1684.

■ **Quarry Lakes Recreation Area** — The nine quarry pits of this 450-acre site now are used for groundwater recharge by the Alameda County Water district. Over the past year, the shoreline has been resloped, and a third of the area will be opened in fall for wildlife habitat and low-impact recreation. Facilities include a swim beach, boat ramp, picnic areas and hiking trails. General information, on this and other parks above: (510) 635-0138, or www.eparks.org.

— Paul McHugh

tion funds or other environmental grants to accomplish it.

Also, the SFPUC may transfer some of its 40,000 acres in the Alameda Creek watershed to the East Bay Regional Park District. This would permit reestablishment of connecting trails through Niles Canyon and beyond.

Once past the town of Sunol, Alameda Creek fans out into valleys of its 700 square-mile drainage. Problems here include road crossings, an armored PG&E gas line, and hurdles like steep rock-falls and a partially denuded landscape.

"To restore a fishery, you must work on water courses and the whole riparian corridor," said Michael Carlin, planning director for the SFPUC. "That includes replanting forests to shade the water, establishing pools and riffles, and getting sufficient flows at the right times of year — which means agencies will have to change the way they look at water."

One ace in the hole is the existence of

native steelhead populations (who are a variant on native rainbow trout) that have survived locked behind two SFPUC dams high in the watershed, San Antonio and Calaveras.

Pete Alexander, fishery biologist for East Bay Regional Parks, said using smolts from these fish to repopulate the creek could mean the creation of a catch-and-release fly-fishery within 10 years after dams come down.

"We are excited about this," Alexander said. He stood near two swimming impoundment dams scheduled to be yanked out of Sunol Regional Wilderness by August. "We're on a long, pristine stretch here. This could be one of the best restorations possible in the entire Bay Area."

In the upper Alameda Creek watershed, tule elk roam, coyotes yip, raptors soar, red-legged and yellow-legged frogs splash. Add spawning steelhead to this mix, and humans will be able to visit a site in which they can take joy, awe, inspiration and pride.

JOIN THE ACA

Support the work of the Alameda Creek Alliance by becoming a member. If you haven't already joined, please send in the enclosed membership form below. You get a free T-shirt with a membership of \$25 or more. We now have 180+ members! If you wish to receive regular e-mail updates and alerts about the issues and activities of the ACA, e-mail us at:

alamedacreek@hotmail.com

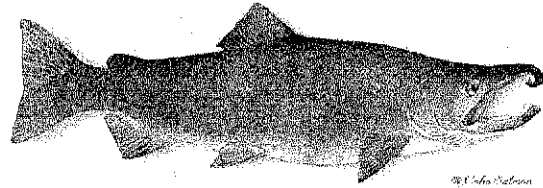
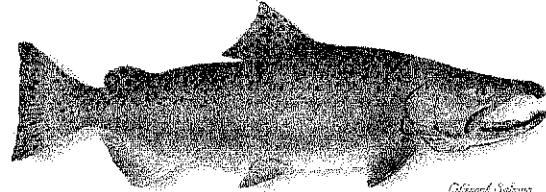
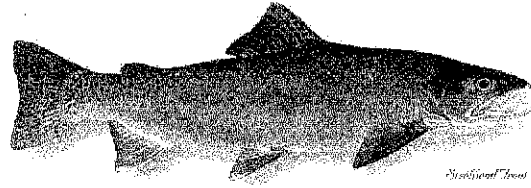
ACA T-SHIRTS

Beautiful color T-shirts on a white background (see adjacent design) are available for \$25. Check payable to Alameda Creek Alliance, P. O. Box 192, Canyon, CA 94516. Specify size (S, M, L, XL, XXL).

HELMINTOLLER FISH ART

The beautiful steelhead drawings on pages 1 and 3 are courtesy of Stuart Helmintoller. Please visit Stuart's web page at <http://helmintoller.com/streamside/>.

Three Reasons to Save and Restore Alameda Creek



ALAMEDA CREEK ALLIANCE MEMBERSHIP FORM

Yes, I would like to become a member of the Alameda Creek Alliance and receive the newsletter *Up Your Creek!* Enclosed is \$10 or more for a one year membership. For a membership of \$25 or more you will receive an Alameda Creek Alliance T-shirt (please specify size). Make checks payable to Alameda Creek Alliance.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ Zip _____

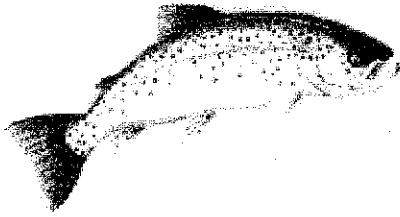
Phone _____

e-mail _____

- \$15 Fry
- \$25 Parr
- \$50 Smolt
- \$100 Spawner
- Send me a bumpersticker

Mail to: Alameda Creek Alliance, P.O. Box 192, Canyon, CA 94516

Alameda Creek Alliance
P.O. Box 192
Canyon, CA 94516



Up Your Creek!

ACA Newsletter #11

UPCOMING EVENTS - MARK YOUR CALENDAR

- ☞ February 21 Water Board Hearings, Oakland (see page 4)
- ☞ February 23-25 Rivers Festival, S. F. (see page 5)
- ☞ **February 27** **Next ACA Meeting**, Sunol (see page 1)
- ☞ March 27 ACA Meeting, Sunol (see page 5)
- ☞ April 3 Fisheries Workgroup Mtg., Hayward (see page 4)
- ☞ April 24 ACA Meeting, Sunol (see page 5)
- ☞ **May 12** **Fremont Steelhead Festival**, Fremont (see page 5)
- ☞ **August 17** **Sunol Dam Removal**, Sunol Wilderness (see page 3)