



UP YOUR CREEK!

ALAMEDA CREEK ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER Issue 18 • Spring 2004

ALAMEDA CREEK ALLIANCE

Protecting and restoring the natural ecosystems
of the Alameda Creek watershed

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ACA Membership Drive

Our members help the Alameda Creek Alliance stay active and viable - roughly half of our financial support comes from membership donations. We need your support to keep going. The ACA currently has 500 active members and we would like to double our membership within the next year. You can help by becoming a member or renewing your membership. If you know of neighbors, friends, or other watershed residents interested in Alameda Creek fish restoration and wildlife issues, please pass on this newsletter or send us their contact information.

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www.alamedacreek.org



Arroyo Las Positas Fish Ladder

Congratulations to Zone 7 Water Agency!

Zone 7 constructed two fish ladders as part of a project that widened, realigned, and restored the confluence of Arroyo Mocho and Arroyo las Positas in Livermore. Zone 7 removed existing concrete fish passage barriers, added the ladders to steep sections of the creek, restored a more natural stream channel, planted native vegetation, and generally enhanced wildlife habitat in the project area. The ladders will allow steelhead trout to access spawning and rearing habitat in the Arroyo Mocho gorge when barriers in lower Alameda Creek are removed.



Arroyo Mocho Fish Ladder

WATERSHED FISH PASSAGE PROJECTS

Lower Alameda Creek

Army Corps Fish Ladder Project Grinds to Halt

Due to budget constraints, the Army Corps has revoked funding for habitat restoration projects not currently under construction, including the fish ladder and fish screen projects in the Alameda Creek flood control channel. Under the Corps' Section 1135 Program, federal money could have provided up to 75% of the funding for these projects. The agencies and organizations involved are committed to moving forward with restoration as soon as possible, and will approach Bay Area congressional representatives about legislation dedicating Corps funding for the Alameda Creek steelhead restoration projects. The California Coastal Conservancy has also offered up to \$200,000 for design and environmental review of the proposed fish ladder at the BART weir. The estimated additional costs of \$880,000 needed to bring fish ladders and fish screens in the lower channel to construction would have to be provided by the Alameda County Water District (ACWD) and Alameda County Flood Control District (ACFCD), which own the fish passage barriers in the lower creek, state fish restoration grants, and potentially mitigation money from the CalTrans Bay Bridge replacement project.

Alternative Fish Ladder Designs Move Forward

In January 2001 the ACWD and ACFCD produced conceptual fish passage designs and cost estimates for the restoration work needed in lower Alameda Creek. The Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup (Workgroup) is also investigating alternatives to a traditional fish ladder at the BART weir and middle rubber dam. Three alternatives are being prepared for conceptual design and analysis: removing the BART weir and re-grading downstream from the railroad bridge; removal of the weir with "balanced" re-grading both upstream and downstream; and a modified "ramp" fish ladder.

The most promising design is a ramp at the BART weir between the north wall of the flood control channel and the adjacent railroad bridge support. The ramp would slope 2-3%, with the upstream end near the base of the middle inflatable dam. Similar ramp designs have

successfully been used for salmon passage in Europe. The design is being evaluated for flood carrying capacity and fish passage impacts. The ramp design may be feasible with or without removal of the middle inflatable dam (retention of the middle rubber dam may be needed for ACWD water supply reliability in case the upper rubber dam is damaged or being repaired). The study is expected to be complete by fall 2004.

Fish Friendly Alvarado Sewer Crossing

The Union Sanitary District (USD) is planning a sewer line crossing of lower Alameda Creek in the vicinity of the I-880 freeway. At issue is the planned sewer pipeline depth of three feet below the streambed in the flood control channel. The concern is that runoff from a large storm could damage the pipe, leading to a sewage release or expose the pipe, creating a migratory barrier for fish. After discussions with NOAA Fisheries, USD has proposed installing a roughened cap over the pipeline to prevent future scouring. The presence of a grade structure that provides hydrologic control in the channel downstream should allow sufficient water depth for future fish passage. The engineering report on the project will be available shortly on the web at www.cemar.org.

Niles Canyon

Technical Questions Slow Sunol Dam Removal?

Both SFPUC dams in Niles Canyon are scheduled to be partially removed in the summer of 2005 at a total estimated project cost of \$5.5 million. Sunol Dam was constructed in 1910 at a height of 28 feet to bedrock. Ten feet of the dam is presently exposed above the streambed. The SFPUC has proposed removing the upper 7 feet of the dam, notching the remaining sill at two locations, creating a low-flow channel, and filling the downstream plunge pool. Restored channel contours would be based on historic cross sections and profiles of the site developed at the time of dam construction.

NOAA Fisheries and other dam removal experts have concerns regarding engineering aspects of the project such as the depth to which the dams will be notched and whether the stream will abandon the low flow channel when the project is completed. The issue is whether the remaining sill of the dam will become a fish

Livermore Valley

Zone 7 Mocho Diversion Dam

Zone 7 Water Agency is proceeding with an inflatable dam on Arroyo Mocho which will divert water into quarries (Lake H and I) for groundwater recharge. A permit will be issued in early fall 2004 for a temporary dam, while the permanent facility is still under design. This rubber-liner covered temporary gravel dam will capture only Zone 7's South Bay aqueduct water deliveries into Arroyo Mocho, not natural stream flow. Diversion from the rubber dam will only occur when the natural flow in Arroyo Mocho is below 1 cfs. The dam will not be operated if there is a hydrologic connection suitable for fish passage through Arroyo Mocho to the Mocho Gorge upstream. The permanent dam will have a fish ladder as well as a screened diversion, but may occasionally prevent downstream passage of juvenile fish. As mitigation, the dam will be lowered every 30 days to provide bypass flows of up to 50 cfs.

LLNL Road Crossing Removal Imminent

The Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory expects to remove a cement stream crossing in Arroyo Mocho upstream of Mines Road and replace it with a bridge crossing this summer. Thank you to LLNL biologist Michael VanHatterm for making this project happen!

Upper Alameda Creek

Calaveras Dam Replacement

The SFPUC is currently investigating the suitability of a new dam site immediately downstream from the existing Calaveras Dam. The draft Conceptual Engineering Report for the project is expected in early 2005. The ACA will link our support of the dam replacement with removal of the Alameda Creek Diversion Dam (ACDD) from upper Alameda Creek between Little Yosemite and Camp Ohlone. The ACDD is the uppermost fish passage barrier in Alameda Creek, with 8 miles of trout spawning and rearing habitat upstream of the dam.

passage barrier in the future. Plans for the disposition of trapped sediment behind Sunol Dam have not been finalized, but it may be possible to leave much of the sediment in place, as it is mostly large gravel and cobble and there have been no pollutants or hazardous materials found in the sediment.

Niles Dam was built in two phases in 1841 and 1887 to a height of about 8 feet. Dam removal at this site would be similar to the Sunol removal. At least one or both of the cement wing walls on the stream banks would be left in place.

Stonybrook Creek

A planned renovation of the CalTrans Highway 84 crossing of Stonybrook Creek at Palomares Road offers the opportunity to remove an existing culvert that is a barrier to fish migration into Stonybrook Creek. Despite meetings with the Dept. of Fish and Game and the ACA, CalTrans conceptual designs for the crossing do not address fish passage. NOAA Fisheries has indicated they will require a design that produces maximum fish passage efficiency.

The Workgroup is moving forward with conceptual designs for fish passage at 2 county-owned road crossing culverts on lower Palomares Road above the CalTrans culvert. The project will also involve outreach to local landowners to explain the project and to identify solutions and funding for fish passage at private road crossings. These projects could make up to 2 miles of suitable spawning and rearing habitat in Stonybrook Creek available to steelhead trout.

USGS Lower Niles Canyon Weir

The Northern California Council of the Federation of Fly Fishers (NCFFF) is investigating potential fish passage improvements at the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) gaging station weir in lower Niles Canyon. A fish passage expert concluded that the structure is an upstream barrier at most flows and needs a passage facility. Since the gaging station has provided over 100 continuous years of record of Alameda Creek stream flow, any project must not decrease the quality of the USGS data from the stream gauge. The NCFFF intends to develop a conceptual plan and cost estimates for proposed modification.

STREAM FLOW ISSUES

In early 2004 the ACA, Natural Heritage Institute, California Trout, and American Rivers sent a letter to water districts in the Alameda Creek watershed requesting negotiations on Alameda Creek stream flow releases to help restore native fisheries. The SFPUC and Alameda County Water District are advancing a study program to determine which stream reaches need supplemental flows, how much flow would be required, timing of flows, and potential costs and impacts on water supply. The Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup has proposed a tiered approach to steelhead habitat restoration, with the principal target of providing flows for the reach between upper Sunol Valley and the Little Yosemite area. Other areas of interest include mainstem Alameda Creek upstream of Little Yosemite, and various tributaries.

The SFPUC is studying stream flows required for downstream juvenile steelhead passage between the Alameda Creek Diversion Dam and the confluence of Alameda Creek with Arroyo de la Laguna in lower Sunol Valley. The study identified 7 critical fish passage sites, mostly in the Sunol Valley. Preliminary results indicate that passage conditions meeting minimum criteria would occur at 6 sites at flows of 35 cfs. The remaining location, between the Sunol Pump Station and the PG&E gasoline crossing, required 100 cfs to meet passage criteria.

The SFPUC has indicated it may be possible to have flow releases from Calaveras Reservoir for fish rearing in upper Alameda Creek in place by 2006, with the caveat that water may not be available due to current Calaveras Dam operating restrictions mandated by the state Division of Dam Safety.

SCIENTIFIC STUDIES

Steelhead Migration Studies

The Alameda County Flood Control District will apply for a 2 year interim permit to collect adult steelhead at the BART weir starting next winter as part of a proposed fish migration study. The study will radio tag and move adult fish upstream to lower Stonybrook Creek and will also install a smolt trap in lower Stonybrook Creek to monitor

potential downstream migration of juvenile trout.

Water Temperature and Habitat Studies

The Alameda County Water District has published 2 years of fish passage and water temperature studies between Niles Canyon and Little Yosemite. High summer water temperatures are thought to be one of the limiting factors for suitable steelhead habitat in the watershed. The SFPUC has published aquatic resource monitoring reports for 2000 and 2001 which describe fish populations and habitat in Alameda Creek from the Sunol Water Treatment Plant upstream to Little Yosemite. Future study areas will include Alameda Creek upstream to Camp Ohlone. The results of these investigations will help inform restoration planning. The reports can be viewed on the web at www.cemar.org

Reservoir Fish Surveys

ACA volunteers are assisting in the 3rd year of fish trapping for population surveys of landlocked steelhead/rainbow trout above Calaveras and San Antonio Reservoirs this spring. If you are interested in volunteering for fish surveys next year contact Brian Sak of the SFPUC at (925) 862-5734 or bsak@puc.sf.ca.us.

Fish Supplementation Planning

The Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup has published a draft report on steelhead supplementation alternatives, outlining possible strategies for "jump starting" the Alameda Creek steelhead run once fish passage barriers are addressed. The report can be viewed at www.cemar.org.

LAND USE PLANNING

SFPUC Habitat Conservation Plan

The SFPUC will hold its 2nd public meeting on the upcoming Alameda Watershed Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) on June 10, from 6:30-9 PM at the Dublin Public Library, 200 Civic Plaza, in Dublin. The completed HCP will be a long-term conservation plan for land use and biological planning on SFPUC lands. The initial comments of the ACA can be found on our web site under "Alerts." For more info on the HCP visit sfwater.org/main.cfm/MC_ID/4/MSC_ID/88

Sunol/Ohlone Cattle Grazing Controversy

The East Bay Regional Park District (EBRPD) has not yet responded to public comments on proposed a Land Use Plan (LUP) for Sunol and Ohlone Parks. Local environmental and flyfishing groups proposed an alternative management plan in August 2003 emphasizing restoration of wilderness values and phasing out commercial cattle grazing in the parks. The EBRPD ignored this input and has refused to conduct an Environmental Impact Report on the LUP, instead publishing a widely criticized initial study in September 2003. A public hearing scheduled for December 2003 was postponed to allow the EBRPD to respond to a "large volume of comments." The EBRPD is expected to approve the plan with no significant change in cattle grazing practices despite numerous comments from the public and a strongly worded letter from the Regional Water Quality Control Board about the inadequacy of their environmental review process.

Sunol Gravel Quarry Appeal

Save Our Sunol and the ACA filed an appeal in March 2004 with the state Court of Appeals over the lawsuit against the proposed SFPUC gravel quarry north of Hwy. 680 in Sunol. We lost the lawsuit when Alameda County Superior Court Judge Sabraw ruled in October 2003 that the quarry could proceed, despite voter approval of Measure D, which specifically prohibited this quarry. The appeal will likely be heard this fall. SOS and ACA sent a letter to the S. F. Board of Supervisors requesting that the Mission Valley Rock Company not be allowed to excavate the site until the appeal is heard.

Sunol Compost Facility

The Alameda County Waste Management Authority (ACWMA) has proposed locating a large composting facility west of the Sunol gravel quarries off Andrade Road. The ACWMA will release a draft EIR in summer 2004 with a comment period and public hearings. For more info contact Brain Mathews of ACWMA at (510) 614-1699 or bmathews@stopwaste.org.

ENDANGERED SPECIES IN THE WATERSHED

Steelhead Sightings

A 14-inch fish believed to be an adult steelhead was sighted in lower Alameda Creek at the Fremont BART weir in late February. This is the 7th consecutive winter that adult steelhead have been documented attempting to ascend the BART weir in lower Alameda Creek.

Raptor Deaths at Altamont Wind Farms

Wind turbines at Altamont Pass are killing extraordinary numbers of birds of prey, including golden eagles, burrowing owls, red-tailed hawks, kestrels, falcons, and other species. For more info visit www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/programs/bdes/altamont/altamont.html

State Protection Denied for Burrowing Owls

The CA Dept. of Fish and Game suppressed a biological report recommending the western burrowing owl be considered for protection under the CA Endangered Species Act. The CA Fish and Game Commission voted in December not to accept a state listing petition for the species. Significant owl colonies remain in the watershed in Pleasanton, Livermore, and at Altamont Pass. For more info visit www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/species

Tiger Salamander Petitioned for Protection

In January 2004 a coalition of environmental groups petitioned for CA Endangered Species Act listing of the California tiger salamander. This amphibian requires seasonal ponds for successful breeding and spends the majority of the year in underground refuges, primarily small mammal burrows, in grassland or oak woodland habitat. The core area for the entire species is the Livermore Valley. For more info visit www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/species

Protection Sought for Lampreys

In January 2004 conservation groups filed notice of intent to sue the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for failing to process a petition to list 4 west coast lamprey species, including the Pacific lamprey, which spawns in Alameda Creek in Sunol Regional Wilderness, and the river lamprey, which has been extirpated. For more info visit www.biologicaldiversity.org/swcbd/species