



# ***UP YOUR CREEK!***

ALAMEDA CREEK ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER Issue 23 • Winter 2006-2007



Dying chinook salmon at BART weir December 13

## **ALAMEDA CREEK ALLIANCE**

*Protecting and restoring the natural ecosystems  
of the Alameda Creek watershed*



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### **Fall Run Chinook Salmon in Alameda Creek**

A small fall run of chinook salmon was documented in lower Alameda Creek, with four sightings of multiple salmon from November 15 through December 21. At least six chinook salmon at a time (one over 20 pounds) were reported on two occasions at different locations in the Alameda Creek flood control channel between DeCoto Road and the BART weir. A large dying chinook salmon was later found and photographed stranded on the cement apron below the BART weir. Another salmonid was seen attempting to excavate a redd in gravel below the BART weir.

Alameda Creek has the potential to host the largest chinook salmon run of any Bay Area tributary to San Francisco Bay. When fish passage projects are completed, chinook, or "kings" will have access to many miles of suitable spawning and rearing habitat in the watershed. Fall run chinook salmon ascend rivers and larger streams in the fall to spawn (we see adults in lower Alameda Creek from October through early January, with most sightings around Thanksgiving and early December), rear quickly, and turn to smolts and leave the creek for the ocean the following spring. Chinook will be successful in Alameda Creek because their young hatch and emigrate quickly, so that young chinook do not need to rear in the stream over the dry summer months.

King salmon up to 48 inches long and more than 20 pounds in weight have been documented in lower Alameda Creek in 1996, 1997, 2000, 2004 and 2006. We know the Ohlone Indians once fished for chinook in the south bay, and based on excavations of shell mounds near Alameda Creek, chinook were plentiful before 600 AD. Alameda Creek has lost its native coho and chinook salmon runs, but kings are increasingly returning to the south bay due to hatchery production, and as a result of a restored chinook run and successful spawning and rearing in the Guadalupe River in San Jose.

## Agencies Begin Study of Stream Flows for Steelhead Restoration

Seventeen public agencies and nonprofit organizations signed a historic formal agreement in October to collaborate on studies of stream flows and fish habitat needed for restoration of steelhead trout to Alameda Creek. The agencies signed a Memorandum of Understanding to conduct jointly-funded studies of how much water might be needed at critical times to support a viable steelhead population - while also considering other native fish and wildlife and minimizing potential impacts to drinking water supplies. The \$240,000 technical study will be conducted in two phases by an independent consultant.

Contributions of \$30,000 each were approved by the S.F. Public Utilities Commission, Zone 7 Water Agency, Alameda County Water District and Pacific Gas and Electric Company. The \$120,000 from these four agencies will be matched by the CA State Coastal Conservancy, for a total of \$240,000. Other participating organizations include the Alameda County Flood Control District, Alameda County Resource Conservation District, Alameda Creek Alliance, American Rivers, CA Dept. of Fish and Game, East Bay Regional Park District, National Marine Fisheries Service, Natural Resources Defense Council, S.F. Regional Water Quality Control Board, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup will conduct a program of cooperative peer-reviewed stream flow studies through 2008 to determine the range, timing, duration, frequency, and location of the water flows needed to restore a steelhead fishery in the Alameda Creek watershed, while considering the flow and habitat needs of other cold water native fish such as chinook salmon and Pacific lamprey, and warm water native fish. The experienced and respected consulting firm of McBain & Trush has been chosen to conduct the first phase of work, and biologists and consultants with Alameda Creek water agencies and state and federal regulatory agencies will assist with investigations and studies, and peer-review results and reports. The Oakland consulting firm Center for Ecosystem Management And Restoration, which has facilitated the Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup since 1999, will manage the project.



*Alameda Creek Alliance Director Jeff Miller and SFPUC General Manager Susan Leal signing historic Alameda Creek flows study agreement*

## PG&E Gas Pipeline Crossing

With the removal of Niles and Sunol Dams, the next major fish migration barrier upstream of the flood control channel is a cement armored PG&E gas pipeline crossing of Alameda Creek in the Sunol Valley. This crossing likely poses a barrier for upstream fish migration at most water flows. PG&E is working to identify potential alternatives for fish passage projects at this site and has pledged to make the crossing passable to fish.



*PG&E Sunol Pipeline Crossing*

## 2007: Year to Fix the BART Weir?

The Alameda Creek Alliance sent a letter in December requesting that the Alameda County Flood Control District (ACFCD) commit to an aggressive schedule to identify, design, permit, fund and complete a fish passage project for migratory fish at the BART weir in lower Alameda Creek. The BART weir is a structure owned by the ACFCD that each year blocks federally listed steelhead trout as well as chinook salmon attempting to migrate upstream in Alameda Creek.



*BART Weir Looking Upstream*

The ACFCD has been a leading participant in the Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup and has put considerable effort toward investigating fish passage at the BART weir. However, progress has been slow and the structure remains in violation of state and federal wildlife protection laws by preventing adult steelhead and salmon from moving upstream to complete their life cycle. After 9 years of efforts by the Alameda Creek Alliance, we still do not have fish passage at this critical structure, which requires annual rescue efforts for stranded and blocked fish.

The ACFCD has helped each winter in rescuing steelhead stranded below the weir and is currently evaluating potential fish passage projects at the site. In December the agency published the *Alternatives Evaluation Report -- Lower Alameda Creek/BART Weir Fish Passage Assessment*, which evaluated the feasibility of four potential fish passage projects at the barrier and ranked these alternatives.

We requested that the ACFCD promptly pick a preferred alternative for providing fish passage in the flood control channel, in coordination with the Alameda Creek Fisheries Restoration Workgroup and other affected agencies. We requested that the ACFCD complete engineering and design work, and begin environmental review for the project by August 2007, the 10-year anniversary of both the threatened listing for steelhead trout and of the Alameda Creek Alliance's efforts to restore them to Alameda Creek. We asked that the ACFCD commit to a schedule for funding and completing the project by 2008 or 2009.



*Aerial View of the BART Weir and Middle Rubber Dam*

The ACFCD has verbally committed to prioritizing and funding this project and stated their intent to complete a fish passage project as soon as possible. The project must be coordinated with fish passage at the Alameda County Water District's middle inflatable rubber dam just upstream of the BART weir, and must be compatible with ACWD water supply operations. We will be meeting with the ACFCD and Alameda County in February to discuss implementation, schedule and funding for the project.

## Alameda Creek Fish Rescue This Year



*ACA Volunteers at BART Weir*

The Alameda Creek Alliance, East Bay Regional Park District and Alameda County Flood Control District have put in a request to state and federal regulatory agencies for a permit to rescue steelhead trout blocked at the BART weir in lower Alameda Creek this winter. The proposal is to move rescued fish into lower Niles Canyon, radio tag and track the movements of all adult fish, and extensively monitor upstream reaches for any potential spawning activity.

Now that Niles and Sunol Dams have been removed, fish moved into Niles Canyon will have

access to much more potential habitat than in previous years, including stream reaches in lower Stonybrook Creek, Alameda Creek in Niles Canyon, Alameda Creek in the lower Sunol Valley up to the PG&E gas pipeline crossing, lower Arroyo de la Laguna up to the Castlewood drop structure, Sinbad Creek in Sunol, and San Antonio Creek in the Sunol Valley below Turner Dam. We hope to get the permit for fish rescue and monitoring by the end of January.



*Releasing Rescued Steelhead Upstream*

### **Volunteers Needed for Steelhead Monitoring This Winter**

If we get a permit to rescue and move steelhead trout from the Alameda Creek flood control channel this winter, we will need volunteers to help monitor likely spawning sites and potential fish passage barriers upstream of the release site in Niles Canyon. Volunteers are needed to help SFPUC and EBRPD biologists visually monitor likely stream reaches and potential migration barriers. These observations will take place following the descending hydrograph of storms when moved steelhead are most likely to spawn and when creek flow and turbidity allow visual observations.

Volunteers are also needed to monitor lower Alameda Creek below the BART weir this winter for steelhead migrating in from the Bay. Stream reaches with potential spawning sites above the BART weir that will need to be monitored include:

- Lower Stonybrook Creek
- Alameda Creek in Niles Canyon
- Alameda Creek in the lower Sunol Valley
- Lower Arroyo de la Laguna in Pleasanton
- Sinbad Creek in Sunol
- San Antonio Creek in the Sunol Valley below Turner Dam

We will also need volunteers to monitor potential migration barriers in these stream reaches such as the PG&E gas pipeline crossing and the Castlewood drop structure.

To volunteer to monitor a portion of one of these stream reaches, contact Diana Brumbaugh, ACA Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator, at [alamedavolunteer@yahoo.com](mailto:alamedavolunteer@yahoo.com) or by phone at (510) 794-4252.

## SFPUC Alameda Watershed Habitat Conservation Plan

After a year and a half break, the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission in December revived its proposed Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) for projects, maintenance, and operations in the upper Alameda Creek Watershed. The HCP will be a long-term conservation plan for land use and biological planning on SFPUC lands, resulting in a permit allowing the SFPUC to legally "take" or harm endangered and sensitive species, in exchange for conservation measures intended to protect the species and their habitats. The SFPUC is refining the list of species and activities covered under the HCP and the methodology for assessing potential impacts. The SFPUC plans to present a draft conservation strategy for the HCP this spring. More information about the HCP and the planning process can be found at [www.alamedacreek.org](http://www.alamedacreek.org) – click on "Action Alerts."

### Stonybrook Creek Cleanup



Thank you to the more than one dozen volunteers who came out to clean trash out of Stonybrook Creek in October. Stonybrook Creek is an important refugia for native rainbow trout and contains potential spawning and rearing habitat for steelhead trout.

### Membership Appeal

Please support the Alameda Creek Alliance by becoming a member or renewing your membership. Your support allows us to be an effective voice for creek restoration and protection of native species and their habitats in the Alameda Creek watershed.

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#### ACA Membership Form

Enclosed is \$15 or more for a one year membership. Checks payable to Alameda Creek Alliance.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Send me a free bumper sticker

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Send me a free watershed map

City \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

\$15 Fry     \$25 Parr

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

\$50 Smolt     \$100 Spawner

E-mail \_\_\_\_\_

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