

# UP YOUR CREEK!

ALAMEDA CREEK ALLIANCE NEWSLETTER

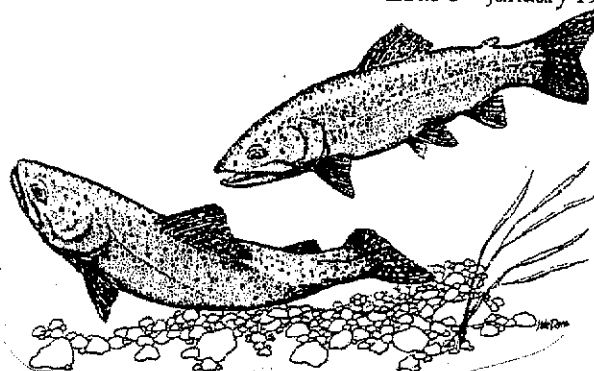
Issue 5 • January 1999

## NEXT ALLIANCE MEETING

**Tuesday, January 26, 7-9 PM**  
**Centerville Public Library**  
**3101 Nicolet Avenue in Fremont**

Directions: From DeCoto Rd. (Hwy. 84) take  
Fremont Blvd. south, turn left on Nicolet.

**We meet the last Tuesday of each month**



## FISH LADDER NEWS

At the January meeting, Gordon Becker will give a talk and slide show on the **Ecology of Steelhead** and his **recommendations for a fish ladder**. A local biologist will talk about the **impacts of cattle grazing in native grasslands and wildlife** and answer questions.

## "LOST" LOCAL STEELHEAD

In December of 1997, when a lone steelhead was found dying in Alameda Creek, a Fish and Game spokesperson called it a "lost" fish, that "strayed up the wrong creek". After 20-60 wild steelhead were netted below the drop structure last March, it became obvious we are not dealing with stray fish. Samples from 10 of the wild steelhead netted and moved over barriers last year were sent to Jennifer Eilsen, a premier fish geneticist at Hopkins Marine Lab in Carmel. The results are in, and our fish are most closely related to populations in Lagunitas Creek in Marin and Ten Mile Creek - in other words, local, wild, central California coast steelhead. These fish are exactly where they belong - in Alameda Creek, where they spawned for millennia before diversions and dams destroyed their run.

Records from the Water District and Fish and Game show that fish runs also occurred in 1974 and 1984. It is possible that native juvenile trout are flushing out occasionally from the upper creek and returning as anadromous steelhead. If barriers are removed or fish ladders built, these fish will be able to reach spawning habitat, and the run will eventually restore itself. To state clearly for the last time: **these are native fish, attempting to return to spawn in their native habitat, and they deserve protection!**

Jeff Miller has been attending the meetings of the **Lower Alameda Creek Ad Hoc Stewardship Committee** as a representative of the Alameda Creek Alliance. This lower watershed stakeholder's group is also attended by representatives from the Alameda County Flood Control District (ACFCD), Alameda County Water District (ACWD), Army Corps of Engineers (ACE), and each of the Tri-Cities.

Federal funding is available through ACE Section 1135 for environmental restoration of previous Corps projects. Construction of fish ladders in the flood control channel, past the concrete drop structure owned by ACFCD and the three inflatable dams owned by ACWD, could be eligible for 75% federal funding under Section 1135. We plan to submit a restoration proposal to the Army Corps through the Stewardship Committee. A first draft of this proposal will be available at the next committee meeting on January 27. The Stewardship Committee meets at 10 AM, in Room 300, at 951 Turner Court in Hayward.

## YOUR LETTERS NEEDED

Write to ACFCD and ACWD and urge them to be the local sponsoring agency for the Section 1135 proposal:

**Don LaBelle**  
**Alameda County Flood Control District**  
**399 Elmhurst**  
**Hayward, CA 94544**

**Board of Directors**  
**Alameda County Water District**  
**43885 South Grimmer Blvd.**  
**Fremont, CA 94538**

## **DEAD KING SALMON FOUND**

A decomposed 30" king salmon was found in the flood control channel Thanksgiving week. This is the third consecutive year that king salmon have been found in the creek. These fish may be strays from the run on the Guadalupe River in San Jose, attempting to re-colonize Alameda Creek

## **SUNOL DEVELOPMENT ALERT**

The proposed **Sunol Valley Agricultural Enhancement Program** now before the Alameda County Planning Commission would re-zone existing ranchland surrounding Sunol to allow subdivisions. The "enhancement" is really a development plan which will create 20-acre "ranchettes", with token vineyards or orchards planted around multi-million dollar homes.

This proposal is the first step toward wholesale development of the Sunol area. If it succeeds, the damage will be irreversible. The rural character of the land surrounding Sunol and critical wildlife habitat in the upper Alameda Creek watershed will suffer. If we kill the zoning change, we can work toward a more lasting solution, perhaps through acquisition of these ranch lands into park land or through strengthening the county General Plan to prevent future development.

Please write to the Planning Commission now before the question moves beyond "if" and into "when" building will be allowed. Write to:

**James Sorensen**  
**Alameda County Planning Director**  
**399 Elmhurst Street**  
**Hayward, CA 94544**

If you have any questions about the proposal or any ideas how to preserve the natural beauty of thisland, contact **Lance Parrow at (925) 862-0620**.

## **MAILING LIST UPDATE**

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO STAY ON THE MAILING LIST TO RECEIVE **UP YOUR CREEK!** AND HAVENOT ATTENDED A RECENT MEETING, PLEASE RETURN THE ENCLOSED POSTCARD, INCLUDE YOUR CORRECT RETURN ADDRESS AND A 20 CENT STAMP.

## **S.F. BAY SAVERS**

The map of the Alameda Creek Watershed was drawn by Patti Balch for the Alameda County Resource Conservation District (ACRCD). It is used in the S.F. Bay Savers watershed education program, which visits 200 fourth grade classrooms in Alameda County each year. S.F. Bay Savers is funded by the Alameda Countywide Clean Water Program and is part of the ACRCD's efforts to enhance and protect the health of local watersheds and the S.F. Bay. **For info. about this program, call Christie Johnson at (925)938-7467 x42.**

## **ACA MISSION STATEMENT**

The Alameda Creek Alliance is a community watershed group dedicated to preserving and restoring the natural ecosystems of the Alameda Creek drainage basin. We are primarily concerned with protecting and improving habitat for local species that are native to the area. Threatened and endangered species are our first priority.

Our initial efforts will be to help restore runs of steelhead trout and salmon attempting to ascend the creek to spawn. Our goal is to ensure self-sustaining runs of these fish. We will work to remove or modify barriers to fish migration and to supply adequate water flows for spawning, rearing and out-migration of juvenile smolts to the Bay.

Once these issues are resolved, we will work to restore and enhance fish habitat, improve water quality and prevent the habitat loss and degradation caused by development, grazing, and channelization of streams....We will monitor the public agencies involved in management of the creek to ensure that they comply with existing environmental laws and protect the public trust, by providing for protection of fish and wildlife.

\*\*\*\*\*  
**Alameda Creek Alliance**

**P.O. Box 192**

**Canyon, CA 94516**

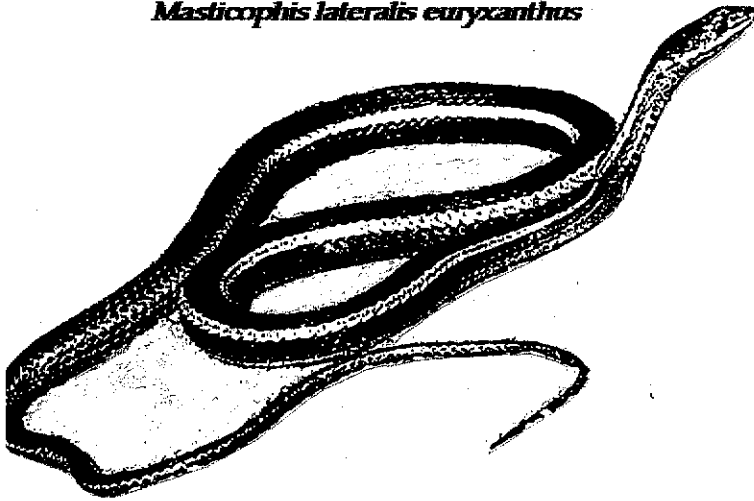
**(510) 845-4675**

**web site: <http://www.formulate.com/alamedaCreek>**  
\*\*\*\*\*

## **MEET YOUR NEIGHBORS**

### **Alameda Whipsnake**

*Masticophis lateralis euryxanthus*



The Alameda whipsnake, also known as the Alameda striped racer, is a rapidly vanishing local species, which only occurs in coastal scrub and chaparral habitats of Contra Costa and Alameda Counties. It is a sooty black color with distinct yellow-orange racing stripe down each side. This slender, extremely fast-moving snake holds its head high off the ground to peer over grass or rocks as it hunts for lizards, small mammals, other snakes and birds. Whipsnakes prefer open-canopy stands and habitats with woody debris and rock outcroppings, and can occupy a home range of 5 to 20 acres.

The whipsnake was listed as a federally threatened species in 1997, since there are only five significant snake populations left. Two of these are in the Alameda Creek watershed - the Sunol-Cedar Mountain and the Hayward-Pleasanton Ridge populations. The main threats to the habitat of the Alameda whipsnake are urban development and associated impacts due to increased numbers of people, inappropriate grazing practices, and alteration of suitable habitat from fire suppression.

The potential for genetic interchange between the Sunol-Cedar and the Hayward-Pleasanton populations depends on the ability of snakes to disperse along Alameda Creek and cross under Hwy. 680, or under the highway at Scott's Corner along Vallecitos Creek. These dispersal routes may be threatened by proposed gravel quarry expansions in Sunol Valley.

Whipsnake populations in Dublin and Pleasanton are threatened by housing developments and associated human impacts. Snake populations on San Francisco Water Dept. land and on East Bay Regional Park land in Sunol and Ohlone Wildernesses, along upper Alameda Creek, and around Del Valle, are subject to impacts from improper grazing practices. Livestock grazing that significantly reduces or eliminates shrub and grass cover can be detrimental to this snake. Whipsnakes avoid such open areas because of the increased danger from predators and the lack of prey.

### **California Red-legged Frog**

*Rana aurora draytonii*



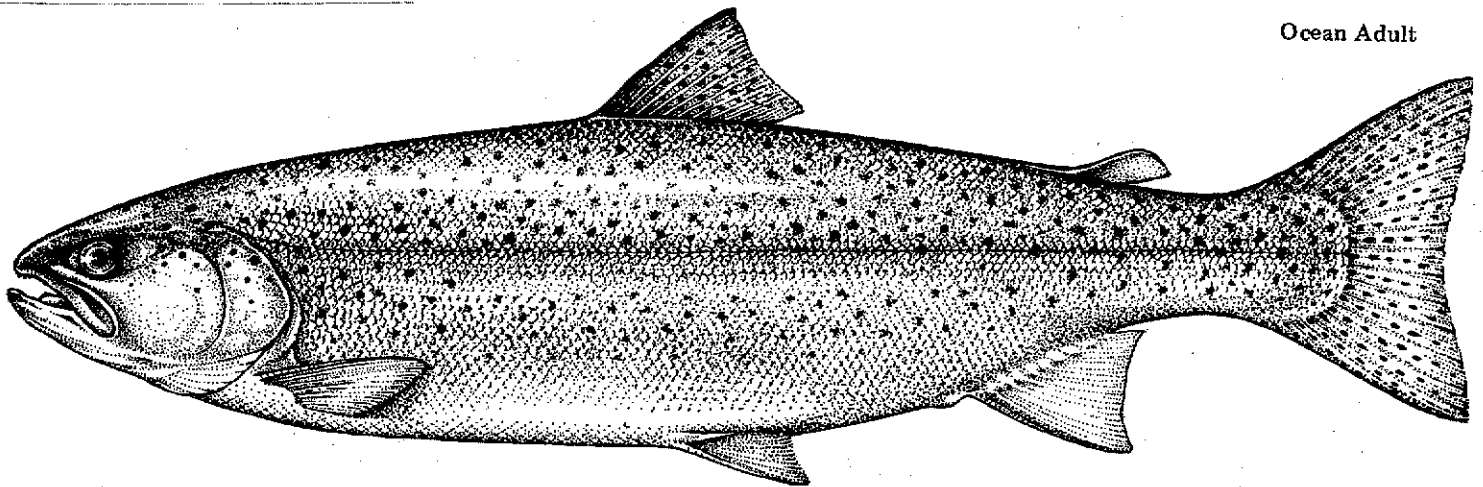
The celebrated Calaveras jumping frog of Mark Twain fame is none other than the California red-legged frog. It is the largest native frog in the western U.S., ranging from 1 1/2 to 5 inches in length. The abdomen and hind legs of adults are largely red. It is found primarily in wetlands and streams in coastal drainages of central California.

Habitat loss and alteration, over-collecting (for eating!) and introduction of non-native predators (introduced bullfrogs are a major predator) led to the red-legged frog's decline in the early to mid-1900s. Urbanization, stream channelization, reservoir construction, over-grazing and prolonged drought have decimated the frog to the point where it was declared a federally threatened species in 1996. This amphibian has been eliminated from 70% of its former range.

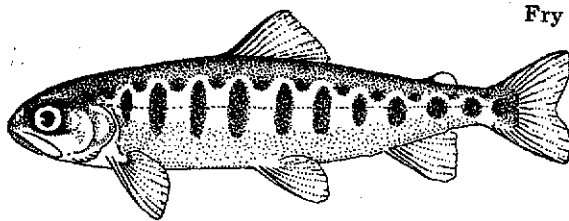
Red-legged frogs persist in the Alameda Creek watershed in the Del Valle area, upper Alameda Creek, and along Pleasanton Ridge.

# Steelhead Trout

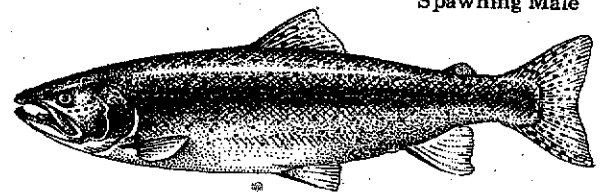
*Oncorhynchus mykiss*



Ocean Adult



Fry



Spawning Male

Steelhead trout can be found from southern California to the Alaska Panhandle, with the major spawning grounds centered between northern Oregon and northern British Columbia, in coastal rivers and streams, as well as tributaries to major river systems. The Guadalupe River and San Francisquito Creek support steelhead runs in the south S.F. Bay, and Lagunitas Creek in Marin and several streams in San Mateo county support coastal runs.

After spawning, many adult steelhead trout go back to the sea and some (between 30-60%) return to fresh water after recuperation to spawn a second time - unlike Pacific salmon which die after their first and only spawning.

Young steelhead live for one or two (occasionally three) full years in fresh water before traveling to the sea as "smolts". This migration takes place in spring. Normally, two or more summers are spent in the Pacific Ocean before the fish seek their spawning streams at the age of four or five years.

Steelhead trout can remain in fresh water as resident, or "rainbow" trout - the fish are genetically identical, but never leave the stream environment. Offspring of rainbow

trout can become anadromous (ocean going) - which may be what is occurring in Alameda Creek, and offspring of steelhead trout can stay in the stream as resident fish.

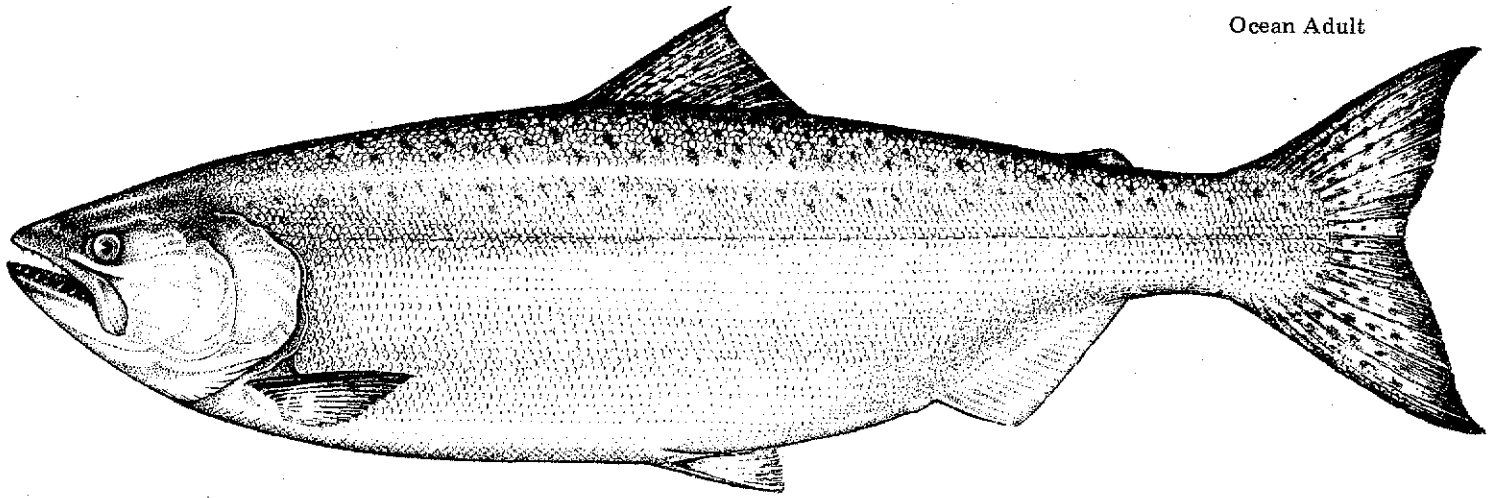
Mature steelhead usually weigh eight to nine pounds, but sometimes reach 36 pounds. The steelhead in Alameda Creek weighed five to seven pounds.

Steelhead spawn in late winter or spring in both large and small streams. They may enter fresh water shortly before the eggs are deposited or they may arrive weeks or months before the spawning act. In a given water course, the timing of steelhead runs usually follow an established pattern year after year. Winter, spring and summer runs can sometimes be distinguished.

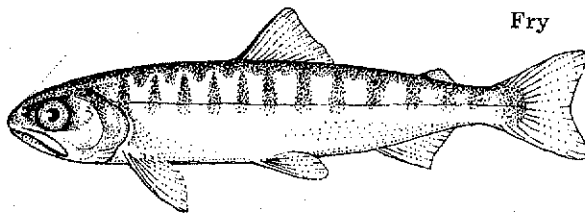
Steelhead runs of 20-60 fish have been documented in March of 1998, in 1984, and three runs in 1974, the year the second ACWD inflatable dam was built. Local fishermen netted and hand carried individual steelhead over the dams throughout the 1980s. 150 juvenile steelhead, or "fry" were raised from eggs rescued in March of 1998, and were released in good condition in upper Alameda Creek in Sunol Regional Wilderness.

# Chinook Salmon

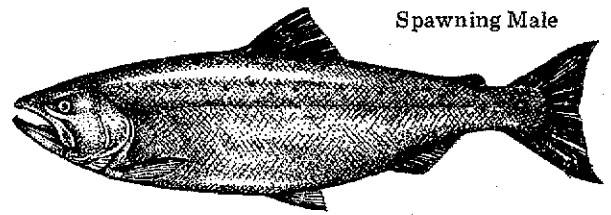
*Oncorhynchus tshawytscha*



Ocean Adult



Fry



Spawning Male

Chinook salmon, often called "king" salmon when they exceed 30 pounds, spawn in large rivers from California to Alaska. The Sacramento and Eel Rivers supported the largest numbers of chinook in central California, before dams and water diversions decimated the runs. In the south S.F. Bay, the Guadalupe River currently has an annual run of 500-1000 returning adult chinook.

After hatching, chinook remain in fresh water for varying lengths of time depending upon water temperature. In southern areas, some migrate after three months in fresh water while others may remain for up to a year. Chinook are known to migrate vast distances in salt water and are found sparsely distributed throughout the Pacific Ocean from California to the Gulf of Alaska.

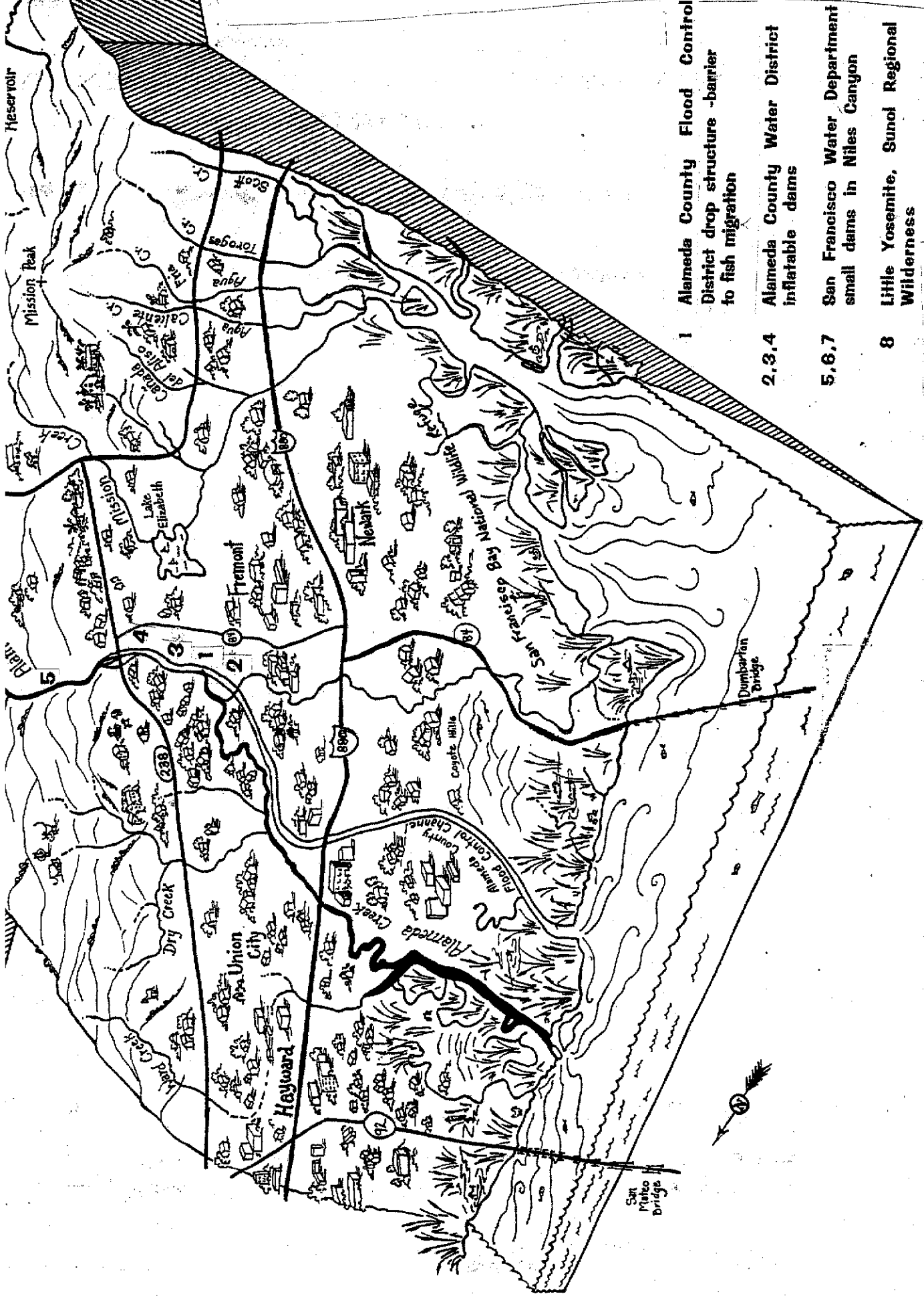
The age of chinook adults returning to spawn varies from two to seven years. Three, four, and five-year old fish are most

common in southern streams, while five and six year old fish are more abundant farther north. Many river systems have more than one stock of chinook; some rivers have spring, fall and winter runs.

At full growth, chinook salmon vary between five to 30 pounds and may reach 58 inches in length. The world record chinook is 126 pounds.

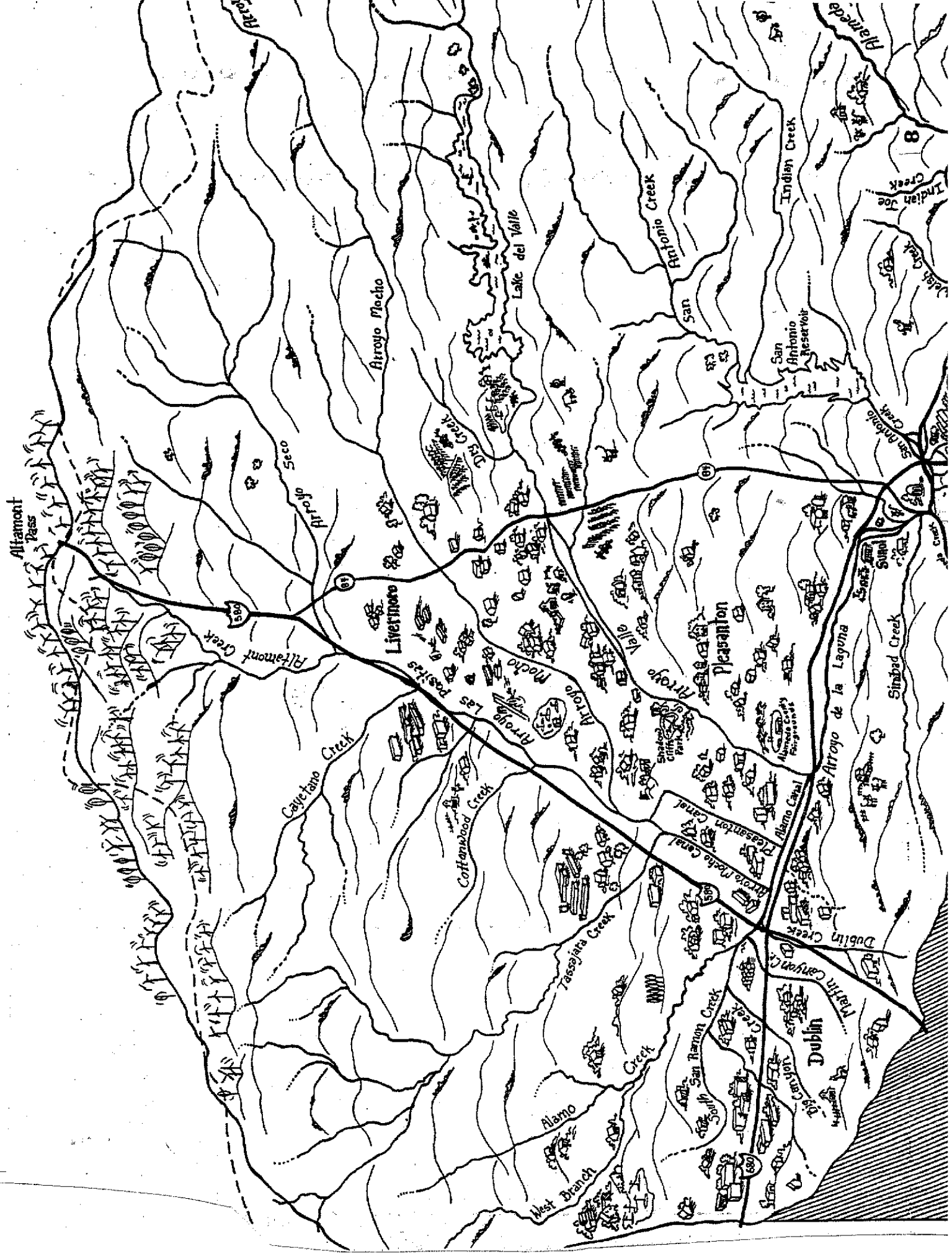
25 Chinook salmon were found dying in rapidly drying puddles in Alameda Creek below the drop structure in November of 1996. Most of these fish were rescued by East Bay Regional Park biologists and moved upstream. It is unknown whether any of these fish successfully spawned.

One dying and two dead chinook were found in the Alameda Creek flood control channel in November 1997 and one dead chinook was found in November 1998.



- 1 Alameda County Flood Control District drop structure -barrier to fish migration
- 2,3,4 Alameda County Water District inflatable dams
- 5,6,7 San Francisco Water Department small dams in Niles Canyon
- 8 Little Yosemite, Sunol Regional Wilderness

# ALAMEDA CREEK WATERSHED



Altamont Pass

Altamont Creek

Cayetano Creek

Cottonwood Creek

Tasajera Creek

Alamo

West Branch

Arroyo Mocho

Livermore

Arroyo Las Pintas

Nocho

Arroyo

Pleasanton

Dublin

Arroyo de la Laguna

Dublin Creek

Alamo Canal

San Antonio

San Antonio Reservoir

San Antonio

San Antonio Creek

Indian Creek

Indian Joe Creek

Val Creek

Hameda

8

San Antonio

San Antonio

San Antonio

San Antonio

San Antonio

San Antonio

San Antonio

San Antonio

San Antonio