

Steelhead return could curb trout fishing in creek

By Kristin Butler
STAFF WRITER

FREMONT — Fishermen could lose their chance to angle in Alameda Creek, thanks to a recent effort to bring steelhead trout back to the popular waterway.

If the steelhead make a serious comeback, the state will have to stop stocking the creek with rainbow trout, according to biologists. These smaller fish would compete with the wild steelhead for food and eat their young, and could also spread disease to their wild cousins.

But local fishermen would then be deprived of rainbow trout. And they won't be able to catch the wild steelhead for many years because the threatened species is protected.

Despite their potential loss, many local fishermen say the chance to see a wild fish return to its home would far outweigh the loss of their local fishing ground.

"I would give up my right to fish there if they could improve the natural habitat and bring the steelhead back," said Dan Rose, 55, who was raised in Union City and is president of the local fishing group called the Skippers Club. "I am hoping in the long run my grandkids will be able to fish there like I did."

Environmentalists have fought to bring the ocean-going steelhead trout back to its former spawning grounds upstream in Alameda Creek for more than a year. The fish are barred from reaching their old

destination by concrete weirs and inflatable dams, and their habitat has been damaged by pesticides and channel alterations.

Since November, more than a dozen steelhead have been spotted in the creek, contradicting the earlier belief that the fish had vanished from the area 20 years ago.

The Alameda Creek Alliance recently transported eight steelhead past a concrete weir to upstream spawning grounds. It hopes to build a fish ladder to help other fish make the journey.

Local fishermen say they support these efforts to bring steelhead back to the creek. A true sportsman welcomes the return of a threatened species and is willing to accept what that may mean to his hobby, they said.

"The fishermen are excited," said Casey Martin, a 37-year-old fisherman who has lived in Fremont and Union City all his life. "We are willing to go through the effort to give the steelhead a chance to spawn; this is a long time coming."

Fishermen are not to blame for the destruction of fish populations, said fellow Skippers member Harry James, a 57-year-old fisherman from Newark.

A representative from the Alameda Creek Alliance will meet with the Skippers Club to talk about steelhead at the club's next meeting, at 7:30 p.m. Sunday at Marie Callender's at the Hub.