



ARIC CRABB — Staff

Members of the Alameda Creek Alliance work to catch a steelhead trout trapped in Alameda Creek.

Activists say San Francisco ignoring steelhead in creek

By Matt Carter
STAFF WRITER

PLEASANTON — First it was dust. Now it's fish.

San Francisco's long-term plans for managing its huge landholdings in the East Bay won't pass muster with environmental regulators because they ignore steelhead trout with federal protections, activists say.

The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission's 36,000 acres in the Alameda Creek watershed includes the land surrounding the San Antonio and Calaveras reservoirs. The watershed is part a system of 11 reservoirs in the Bay Area and the Sierra Nevada that San Francisco uses to supply drinking water to 2.4 million customers.

San Francisco PUC officials held public hearings in Pleasanton and San Francisco this week to accept comments on a report that outlines the environmental impacts of their 20-year plan for managing the Alameda Creek watershed.

In Pleasanton on Tuesday, Sunol residents continued to voice their opposition to one aspect of the plan — an expansion of gravel mining operations near the unincorporated town.

Sunol's only elected body, the Sunol Glen School Board

passed a resolution in 1997 denouncing the plan as a threat to children with asthma and other respiratory problems because of the dust it would produce.

But those charges didn't hold up in courts, where an activist group's challenges of the county's Environmental Impact Report for the project were rejected in 1997. The group, Save Our Sunol, has not given up its opposition, President Patricia Stillman told San Francisco officials.

San Francisco officials like the project because it gives them more revenue from mining companies and will boost their capacity to store water when mining is completed in 2035. Altogether, the six water storage pits the mining would create would store 63,200 acre feet of water — enough to supply a city the size of Pleasanton for nearly four years.

But first the San Francisco PUC's five commissioners must certify that the Environmental Impact Report for the Alameda Watershed Management Plan is complete. And that certification must be able to survive in court.

But the Alameda Watershed Management Plan is about more than just mining.

San Francisco's EIR states

there is a "low potential" that the Central Coast steelhead — an ocean-going rainbow trout listed as threatened in 1997 — can travel upstream to city-owned land.

Alameda Creek Alliance's Jeff Miller agrees that the steelhead's ability to reach historic spawning grounds is blocked by a flood-control dam where Bay Area Rapid Transit train tracks cross Alameda Creek in Fremont.

But a new report funded by Alameda County and the Coastal Conservancy is optimistic that, by helping the fish around the dam and other barriers, steelhead could be restored to the watershed.

Copies of the draft EIR for the Alameda Watershed Management Plan are available for review at the Fremont, Livermore, Milpitas and Pleasanton libraries. Written comments will be accepted until 5 p.m. Monday, Jan. 31. Address comments to Hillary E. Gitebman and mail to the San Francisco Planning Department, 1600 Mission St., San Francisco, CA 94103-2414. Or fax to (415) 558-6496.