
Creek soon to be safe for steelhead

By Matt Carter
STAFF WRITER

Herald 3/2/00

PLEASANTON — It may be more than two years before work gets under way to remove obstacles that prevent the Central Coast steelhead from returning from the ocean to spawn in Alameda Creek.

But in a little more than two weeks, much of the Alameda Creek watershed will already be protected under federal law as habitat critical to the threatened fish's survival.

As of March 17, the National Marine Fisheries Service will consider streams in the watershed where the steelhead have traditionally spawned to

Please see **Trout**, NEWS-9

Trout: Impact on business yet to be felt

Continued from NEWS-1

be critical habitat — all the way upstream to Chabot Dam and the Calaveras, Crystal Springs, Del Valle and San Antonio reservoirs.

While small populations of landlocked rainbow trout believed to be capable of breeding Central Coast steelhead now live in the watershed, they do not enjoy the same protections afforded steelhead.

Projects near the streams requiring federal permits will be subject to a review under the Endangered Species Act, even if the projects would not result in immediate harm to steelhead trout.

The impact of these and other federal rules on activities ranging from construction and cattle grazing to gravel mining and flood control remains to be seen, members of a multi-agency committee studying ways to manage the Alameda Creek Watershed were told Wednesday.

Another federal ruling taking effect

March 17 extends protections for endangered species to the threatened Central Coast steelhead. But those protections don't apply to landlocked rainbow trout in the watershed believed to be capable of producing ocean-going steelhead.

"I personally don't think it will be a huge impact on anybody," said Pete Alexander, a fisheries specialist for the East Bay Regional Park District. "The doors will still be open to development, it will just have to be more environmentally sensitive. You'll have to recreate habitat somewhere else, maybe at a 2- or 3-to-1 ratio."

Darren Greenwood, representing the city of Livermore on the Alameda Creek Watershed Management Program steering committee, had deeper reservations.

If environmental groups use the new protections to insist that no new sources of pollution reach the creek, he said, they could affect projects which, although not near the creek, produce wastewater that flows to it.

A study funded by Alameda County and the California Coastal Conservancy and released in January found that building fish ladders around barriers in lower Alameda Creek could give steelhead access to 20 miles of potential spawning grounds.

If the project is undertaken, steelhead might again travel through Pleasanton in the Arroyo de la Laguna and Arroyo del Valle and through Livermore in the Arroyo Mochio.

Laura Kilgour, a water resources biologist with the Alameda County Flood Control and Water Conservation District said the agency is hoping to meet a September deadline to apply for up to \$5 million for the project from the Army Corps of Engineers. The corps would then need two to three years to study the feasibility of the project.

"The problems are far from insurmountable," Kilgour said. "If everything goes well in the future, they will be able to come up through Alameda Creek and complete their life cycle."