

# Steelhead fanatics head for Niles park

## 2nd annual festival celebrates trout

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FREMONT — Organizers of the second annual Fremont Steelhead Festival and Watershed Awareness Fair say there will be plenty to celebrate today at Niles Community Park.

The event begins at 9 a.m. with the Alameda Creek "Spawning" Run, a 10-kilometer fun run and walk that will start half an hour later from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. There will be chances to learn about the steelhead restoration effort and to enjoy music, food and fly-fishing lessons.

This summer, East Bay Regional Park District officials hope Gov. Gray Davis will be on hand for an Aug. 7 ceremony kicking off the demolition of two small dams at the Sunol Regional Wilderness.

In some respects, Fremont's ground zero in the battle to remove barriers to fish and

restore a self-sustaining steelhead run.

The dams, constructed in the 1970s, were built to back up Alameda Creek into wading pools for swimmers. Those who have pushed for their removal say it would be the first concrete step to restore spawning runs of ocean-going steelhead trout to the creek.

As Alameda Creek makes its way down to San Francisco Bay, there are other larger barriers to fish that must come down or be circumvented before steelhead again swim upstream through Fremont, Sunol, Pleasanton and Livermore.

With a group of federal, state and local agencies working together to eliminate those barriers, some are concerned about what their destruction will mean to drinking water supplies.

The Alameda County Water District, which supplies water to more than 300,000 people in Fremont, Newark and Union City gets 15 percent of its water from

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the Alameda Creek watershed. The district operates three inflatable dams on Alameda Creek that divert water to the Quarry Lakes, where it percolates down to groundwater basins.

If those dams are removed, there could be an effect on the amount of water the district has on reserve.

But Eric Cartwright, the senior water resources planner for the district, said the district is among the groups working to restore steelhead to the creek. Though water supply is a concern, Cartwright said the district is excited at the prospect of getting the steelhead back in the creek. "Water supply is an issue," Cartwright said, "but it's one that we're tracking very closely."

Studies are still being conducted, he said, to determine what the impact of dam destruction will be on residents' water supplies.

"It's something we're definitely keeping in mind," he said.

Although steelhead have trouble getting over those dams, an even bigger obstacle is a concrete weir that protects the bridge carrying BART trains over Alameda Creek from erosion. Genetic tests show steelhead that have been carried over the barriers by hand are members of the same population that gained federal protection four years ago.

So the Water District and other agencies that have formed a workgroup to bring the steelhead back have applied to the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for a \$5 million grant. The money, together with an additional \$1.7 million from local agencies, would be used to build two fish ladders and install screens to stop fish from being sucked up at four locations where water is drawn from the creek.

The fish ladders — which resemble gently ascending stairs with water flowing over them — would allow steelhead and even salmon to power

themselves around the BART weir and two of the inflatable dams.

The project must vie with others for federal dollars, but the Corps likes the idea enough that it's spending \$10,000 to study it further.

"It looks good — the only thing is we're competing for funds," said Jeff Miller, a spokesman for the Alameda Creek Alliance and one of the restoration effort's biggest boosters. "Presuming that goes through, then we'd be competing with other projects in the region for a full-blown ecosystem restoration report."

That report will cost between \$500,000 and \$600,000, so there is some question whether money will be available if the Corps budget is cut by Congress, Miller said.

As for the third inflatable dam, steelhead can get sometimes get over it if there is enough water flowing in the creek. If money were no object, the agencies studying steelhead restoration would prefer to build another fish ladder around the third dam and screens for three more water intakes.

The next obstacles are two dams in Niles Canyon. The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission is looking for money to remove the dams, which date back to the turn of the century. Although the dams are no longer functioning, they are old enough to be considered historic structures, adding to the difficulty of removing them.

Under the most optimistic timetables, new fish ladders would be up and old dams would be out by 2003, reopening an estimated 20 miles of spawning grounds to steelhead and perhaps even salmon.

Miller said while most of the fish are expected to head for sites in the southern Alameda Creek watershed, some fish may also head north through Pleasanton and Livermore. The fish would travel through Pleasanton in the Arroyo de la Laguna and Arroyo del Valle and through Livermore in the Arroyo Mochó.