

HISTORIC HATCHING OF TROUT IN ALAMEDA CREEK TRIBUTARY

May be Offspring of Steelhead Trout Pair



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Fremont, CA – Hundreds of young trout hatched this week in Stonybrook Creek in the Alameda Creek watershed, possibly the offspring of a historic pair of steelhead trout. A steelhead pair dubbed “Bonnie and Clyde” were given a helping hand upstream in late February past barriers in lower Alameda Creek and radio tagged to monitor their movements. They swam together up Niles Canyon to Stonybrook Creek, where they were exhibiting spawning behavior in early March. On Monday hundreds of trout fry were observed in the creek reach where the steelhead pair likely spawned and are still holding.

“If the young trout are confirmed to be offspring of steelhead rather than resident rainbow trout, this will mark the first natural reproduction of steelhead trout in the Alameda Creek watershed since the mid-1960s,” said Jeff Miller, Director of the Alameda Creek Alliance. “Restoration projects underway could allow steelhead and salmon to swim freely to spawning areas in Alameda Creek within a few years.”

Trout eggs typically hatch within 30 to 45 days into what are known as alevins, tiny fragile fish that live off their attached yolk sacks. About 4 weeks later the young trout (known as fry) emerge from the gravels where they were spawned and begin to feed. The proud parents are thought to be Bonnie (a female steelhead 27 inches long and 8.5 pounds) and Clyde (a male 28 inches and 8 pounds), who were initially observed in the Alameda Creek flood control channel in Fremont on February 25th attempting to jump the BART weir, an impassable fish barrier. They were netted on February 26th, fitted with radio tags, and moved upstream into Niles Canyon. Alameda Creek Alliance volunteers will help East Bay Regional Park District fisheries biologists monitor the trout over the summer and fall.

In 1999 a female steelhead named “Stella” was rescued at the BART weir and later swam into Stonybrook Creek, where she possibly spawned with resident rainbow trout. Stonybrook Creek has almost two miles of suitable habitat for spawning and rearing of trout and steelhead, but several road crossing culverts create migration problems in the lower creek. CalTrans has committed to replace a culvert at the bottom of Stonybrook Creek with a free span bridge. In 2005 Alameda County completed conceptual designs for modifying or removing two culverts for fish passage in lower Stonybrook Creek.

Since 1997 the Alameda Creek Alliance has documented ocean-run steelhead in lower Alameda Creek each winter. Construction of a fish ladder is planned at the BART weir and an adjacent rubber dam by 2010, so steelhead can migrate on their own past the barrier. Since steelhead were listed as a federally threatened species in 1997, the Alameda Creek Alliance has been advocating for restoration projects to allow fish to reach spawning habitat in and above the Sunol Valley and Sunol Regional Park. Fifteen local, state, and federal agencies are cooperating on Alameda Creek fish passage projects, including dam

removals and construction of fish ladders and fish screens. These projects will make up to 20 miles of Alameda Creek and its tributaries accessible to ocean-run fish for the first time in over 50 years.

Until fish passage projects are completed, fisheries biologists and volunteers under permits from the California Department of Fish and Game and the National Marine Fisheries Service move blocked or stranded fish from the Alameda Creek flood control channel to suitable habitat upstream, and track them with radio transmitters to learn more about their migration and habitat needs. The Alameda County Water District (ACWD) and Alameda County Flood Control District are moving forward with four fish passage projects in the lower creek, including the fish ladder at the BART weir, removing ACWD's lower rubber dam, and installing fish screens at several water diversions.

Steelhead and salmon are anadromous fish, living out their adult lives in the ocean and migrating up fresh water streams and rivers to spawn. Construction of dams, water diversions, modifications to the Alameda Creek streambed, and urbanization made it impossible for steelhead to migrate upstream, eliminated access to spawning areas, and reduced suitable habitat. As a result, steelhead have been absent from Alameda Creek and its tributaries for several decades.

Seventeen public agencies signed an agreement in 2006 to collaborate on studies of stream flows and fish habitat needed for the Alameda Creek steelhead restoration. The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) recently began environmental review for capital improvement projects to the San Francisco water supply system, including nine projects along Alameda Creek in the Sunol Valley. The largest is the Calaveras Dam Replacement Project, to rebuild the seismically vulnerable Calaveras Dam. The Alameda Creek Alliance is pushing for the project to include minimum flow releases from Calaveras Reservoir to help spawning, rearing and migration of steelhead in Alameda Creek below the dam, and the removal of the Alameda Diversion Dam from upper Alameda Creek.

The SFPUC dismissed consideration of steelhead trout restoration in the programmatic environmental review for retrofits to San Francisco's water system. A draft Environmental Impact Report for the dam replacement project is due out this summer. The SFPUC is proposing other water supply projects in Sunol Valley that could further harm fish and wildlife in Alameda Creek. The failure to include stream restoration as part of the Calaveras Dam rebuild, and controversial SFPUC proposals to divert more water from Alameda Creek could unnecessarily jeopardize the schedule for water system upgrades.

The non-profit Alameda Creek Alliance formed in 1997 after steelhead trout in the Central California Coast were listed as a threatened species. The Alliance, an organization of 1,500 members, works to restore Alameda Creek and its native fish populations.