

# The Splash

Newsletter of Friends of San Leandro Creek



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## When is a Steelhead a Rainbow? by Laurey Hemenway

In 1855, an anonymous fisherman pulled several brightly colored and unfamiliar fish out of Redwood Creek in the upper San Leandro Creek watershed. The mysterious fish eventually found their way to Dr. W.P. Gibbons, founder of the California Academy of Sciences, who discovered that they were an entirely different species of trout not found east of the Sierra Nevada. This new species was eventually named *Oncorhynchus mykiss*, and is more commonly known as the rainbow trout—which is also known as the steelhead trout.

Hiking among the towering redwoods along San Leandro creek's steep and verdant banks, it's easy to picture the legions of ambitious trout that struggled upstream in more abundant days. Recently arrived from their oceanic peregrinations, they felt the timeless pull of genetics that guided them toward their spawning grounds to perpetuate their species in the same stream where they were born several years before. Then in 1875 something inconceivable happened that would literally alter the course of the

lives of these multi-hued salmonids—a dam was built.

Chabot Dam trapped the waters of upper San Leandro Creek, and its tributaries, which include Redwood, Indian, Buckhorn, Grass Valley, and Moraga creeks, along with the trout. These creeks were further obstructed in 1926 with the completion of Upper San Leandro Reservoir. Contained in the upper reaches of the watershed, these steelhead trout were physically and genetically isolated from other trout of the same species. The rainbow trout was born out of

### Inside this issue:

Rainbow Trout	1
Volunteer	1
Polystyrene Problem	2
Trout Terminology	2
Environmental Forum	2
Meetings	4
Watershed Program	4

## Member & Volunteer Activities

**Creek Monitoring** will resume when it starts raining. We'll keep you posted. In the meantime, catch our testing demos at the member meetings.

(see back of this issue for meeting dates)



The second hike in our **Watershed Hike** series is at Redwood Regional Park on January 3, 2009, 10am - 3pm. For more information check out our website at [fslc.org](http://fslc.org) or call 510-577-6069.




Fishway in Redwood Creek where rainbow trout were first discovered in 1855.

*continued on page 3*

## The Polystyrene Problem

Polystyrene, also known as Styro-foam, is one of the most widely used kinds of plastic. That's right, polystyrene is a petroleum product! It is not biodegradable and it is difficult to recycle. When it is recycled it most likely ends up as fillers in other plastics or items that cannot be recycled.

So why is this notorious pollutant so widely used? It is very cheap to make, lightweight and extremely moldable, so it can be made into any shape. Unfortunately, its environmental costs are very high.

Each year almost 400,000 tons of polystyrene foam are produced in California, 150,000 tons of which are used in food service for a usage time of just a few minutes. It is the ultimate example of throw away packaging. 

According to the California Department of Transportation, polystyrene foam is the second most abundant litter item collected in storm drains. Once in the environment, it enters waterways where it becomes one of the principal components of marine debris.

What can you do to keep this harmful pollutant out of our waterways, oceans and landfills? Purchase products packaged in recyclable or reusable containers. Ask your favorite restaurants and eateries to switch to more earth friendly take-home containers. And for shipping, use compostable packaging peanuts. 

## Friends of San Leandro Creek present the Environmental Forum

Saturday February 21, 2009

10:00am - 12:00pm

Marina Community Center

15301 Wicks Blvd, San Leandro

You are invited to participate in an informative discussion of the state of natural resources in San Leandro and the East Bay. Panelists from all levels of government will provide information on current issues that affect the San Leandro Creek and its watershed. A question and answer period will follow the presentations.

### Invited guest panelists include:

*Senator Ellen Corbett*

*Assemblymember Mary Hayashi*

*Alameda County Supervisor Alice Lai-Bitker*

*Mayor Tony Santos*

*Wil Bruhns, State Water Board,  
Bay-Delta team*



## Trout Terminology



**Anadromous** -fish hatched in freshwater that migrate to the ocean to mature and return to freshwater to spawn.

**Spawn**-the act of reproduction in fishes.

**Smolt** -an immature or young fish that has adapted to the marine environment.

**Fishway** - also known as a fish ladder, a device made up of a series of stepped pools that enable adult fish to migrate upstream past dams.

**Natal stream** -the stream where a trout is hatched.

continued from page 1

## When is a Steelhead a Rainbow?

this isolated population that is still genetically steelhead trout.

In fact, The rainbow trout in upper San Leandro Creek have been isolated for so long that they are directly related to the steelhead that successfully ran upstream from the ocean before the placement of Chabot Dam.

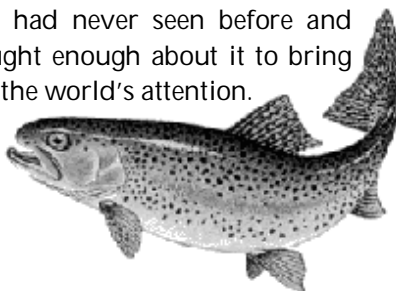
So what is the difference between steelhead and rainbow trout? Basically, it is access to the ocean. When a steelhead cannot complete its mission of swimming out to the ocean before coming back to its **natal stream** to **spawn** it becomes a rainbow trout. It is unclear whether a rainbow trout's **anadromy** is a truly genetic adaptation or simply an opportunistic behavior. It seems that any stock of rainbow trout is capable of migrating, or at least adapting to sea water, if the need or opportunity arises. This ability to live either life helps this species adapt to unpredictable environmental conditions

Until steelhead migrate to the ocean, there is no way to tell them apart from a rainbow. They both appear as greenish, silvery fish with many black spots on the tail fins and back with a pink or reddish lateral band. As the steelhead matures and gets ready for the seagoing part of its life, it experiences a transformation that includes color changes and tolerance for saltwater. These changes result

in a more pointed head and the fading of the reddish lateral band. Steelhead also grow larger than rainbows weighing up to 55 pounds and measuring 45 inches in length. In contrast, rainbow trout max out at about eight pounds and 30 inches.

The rainbow trout in San Leandro Creek are part of the central California coast steelhead population. A once plentiful population that suffered depletion with the placement of dams which cut off access to the ocean. Federally listed as a threatened species since 1997, over the past ten years steelhead conservation and restoration has been receiving increased attention at all levels from federal to local. The National Marine Fisheries Service has developed rules to protect "critical habitat" by determining the streams or sections of streams where steelhead reside that are essential to the survival of the species. Many East Bay creeks, including San Leandro Creek, are part of this critical habitat.

You can still go to the site where rainbow trout were first discovered in 1855. In Redwood Regional Park, the **Fishway** Interpretive site marks the spot where 153 years ago someone just happened to notice a glint of color they had never seen before and thought enough about it to bring it to the world's attention.



### Our Membership

Every member is vital to support the work of FSLC!

Student	\$1.00
Individual	\$5.00
Family	\$15.00
Non-Profit Corp.	\$25.00
Business	\$100.00

When you become a member of Friends of San Leandro Creek you are actively supporting our ongoing Watershed Education program and events like the Watershed Festival, creek cleanups, and restoration and monitoring of the creek.

Please renew or become a member by sending your name, address, e-mail address, and dues to our mailing address: P.O. Box 202, San Leandro, CA 94577

### Officers

and

#### Board of Directors:

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### The San Leandro Creek Watershed Awareness Program

is a comprehensive watershed education program funded by Alameda County Flood Control and Conservation District, with additional support from the City of San Leandro and implemented by Friends of San Leandro Creek. Thank you to the following for your continued support: Alameda County Industries, Alameda County Public Works, Robert and Lois C. Braddock Charitable Foundation, Pacific Gas and Electric Company, and FSLC Members and Volunteers.



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you.



## Our Meetings

Meetings are held at 7:00PM on the second Tuesday of every other month at the San Leandro Library, 300 Estudillo Avenue. Everyone is welcome to attend! Check out [www.fslc.org](http://www.fslc.org) to confirm meeting dates and find out what topics will be discussed.

2009 Meeting Dates
February 10
April 14
June 9
August 11
October 13

