

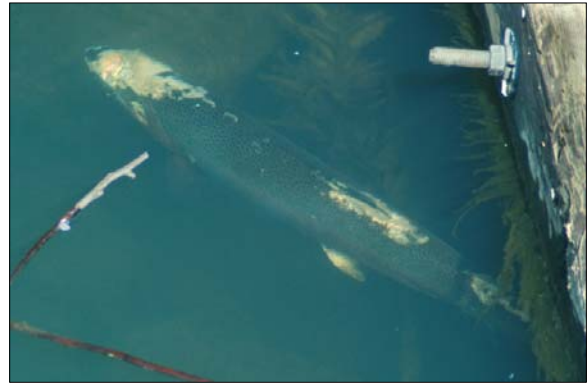
Stopped in Her Tracks by a Dam

2003

In the fall steelhead wait in the estuary of Corte Madera Creek for decreased salinity, signaling that there is enough fresh water in the creeks to begin spawning. The first part of the journey is simple. The water is deep and cloudy, which makes it difficult for predators to see her and no obstacles block her way. The steelhead goes under the Bon Air Road bridge, past Creekside Park, and suddenly the water becomes faster, sometimes too fast to swim against, even for a strong swimmer. She has encountered the concrete channel, a one-mile long flood control channel that is the first major physical obstacle to spawning salmon. Almost all salmon are stopped by this barrier, but this steelhead is healthy, fat, and aggressive, so she makes it upstream to the end of the concrete channel and successfully navigates the fish ladder into the natural stream in Ross.

After resting in deep pools to regain her strength, she continues upstream. This steelhead is trying to return to Sleepy Hollow Creek, so she turns right near Drake High School and works her way into Sleepy Hollow. After she makes her way over two partial barriers where Fawn Drive and Deer Hollow Road cross Sleepy Hollow Creek, she reaches the base of a dam alongside Raven Road. This dam, built to form a stock pond for a dairy, is a total barrier to migrating steelhead. There are a few gravel beds below Raven dam where she might spawn, but the dam prevents her from reaching approximately a half mile of the best spawning gravels in Sleepy Hollow.

The owner of Raven Dam, Bruce Baum, contacted Friends a few years ago for assistance in removing the dam. There were several site visits and discussions with experts, Marin County officials, and regulatory agencies and slowly a consensus developed that we should proceed with efforts to obtain funding to replace the dam with a series of stepped weirs that steelhead could jump easily. The project would also include work by the County Department of Public Works to improve culverts and bank stability along Raven Road. We jumped into action when Bud Abbott, a fisheries biologist, offered to write most of a proposal to be submitted to American Rivers –NOAA. We have also submitted a preliminary proposal to the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation and have been invited to submit a full proposal in March 2003. We are looking for funding for design and engineering. When construction has been completed, there will be lots of opportunities for volunteers to plant native riparian vegetation, install a drip irrigation system to help the plants through the first three years as they become established, monitor the vegetation, and survey for fish upstream of the new weirs.



A steelhead with a fungal disease rests at the Ross fish ladder

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