



Bill Lovejoy/Sentinel

An angler tries his luck along the banks of the San Lorenzo River Friday morning as steelhead season opened for local streams.

Steelhead season gets off to a slow start

Steelhead spots

■ Aptos Creek, from the creek mouth to the bridge two miles up Aptos Creek Road.

■ Soquel Creek, from the mouth to the confluence of east and west branches.

■ San Lorenzo River, from the mouth to the Lomond Street Bridge.

■ Scott Creek, from the mouth to the confluence of Big Creek.

■ Waddell Creek, from the mouth to the Highway 1 bridge.

■ Pajaro River, from the mouth to the Santa Clara County line.

Fishing is allowed on the first day of the season, the last day of the season Feb. 28, on California legal holidays, as well as on Wednesdays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Only barbless hooks allowed.

Source: California Department of Fish and Game.

Water levels thought to be too low for fish to navigate

By **BRIAN SEALS**
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Thousands of men in California left their wives Friday morning — it was the start of steelhead fishing season.

Overcast skies and heavy rains earlier in the week should have been a sign of good fishing to come.

But some fishermen said the bites were few on the San Lorenzo River just north of the city of Santa Cruz.

"I think the water level is too low," said Doug Flora as he and two comrades walked back from the river.

The trio said they had caught a few, but were headed to the lower river in hopes of finding deeper water and more fish.

"Maybe we just don't know how to fish," Flora said with a laugh.

Most fishermen said the going was slow

Friday morning. Normally, rain before the season would be good because it would raise water levels in the streams allowing the fish to navigate through the waterway easily. Ernie Kinzli of Ernie's Casting Pond in Soquel said the rain didn't raise water levels enough and that on the San Lorenzo, the precipitation made the water murky.

"We need two or three more like the last one," Kinzli said of the rain. "It's pretty sad. Just pray for more rain."

He said fishermen were reporting catching two- to three-pounders.

"They might have been exaggerating about the three-pounders," he quipped.

Steelhead are protected, but fishermen can keep one hatchery fish on the San Lorenzo. After that, as at other streams in the county, the fish must be released.

That could change any moment, though. Lt. Dennis Baldwin of the state Fish and Game Department said federal regulators are reviewing rules. An emergency closure of the season is possible, he said.

For now, fishermen are reveling in the

thrill of the fishing, not the eating. Fishing lore calls the steelhead the "fish of a thousand casts" because of the creature's elusiveness.

Fisherman Rod Neigum came from Pacifica to fish the San Lorenzo River and said he prefers the "fight" of the steelhead to salmon.

"They jump out of the water like a missile," he said while unloading gear from his truck at a trailhead off Highway 9.

The fish can grow to 30 inches and sometimes resemble a rainbow trout.

Along the mountainous roads in Santa Cruz County, trailhead parking lots were packed with trucks carrying rods and reels. Even though most of the fish will get thrown back, fishermen say it's the best way to spend a day.

"There's nothing like fishing in the redwoods," Neigum said. "Even if I don't catch one, it's OK."

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