

# Steelhead periled by silt

fish  
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SCOTTS VALLEY — An untold number of fish and other aquatic life may perish in Bean Creek, Zayante Creek and part of the San Lorenzo River as a result of silt which was washed into the waterways during a cleanup operation at Kaiser Sand and Gravel Wednesday.

"The damage is pretty substantial," Fish and Game Warden Laurel Ulrich said Thursday. "The silt is a mixture of water and sand but it's pretty deleterious to fish life."

The silt flowed at least five miles from Bean Creek to Zayante and then along the San Lorenzo River. Ulrich said the silt had traveled downriver at least as far as Henry Cowell State Park.

The silt settles into coarser gravel along the riverbeds where salmon and steelhead trout lay their eggs, clogging them and killing the fish and eggs, Ulrich said.

"The silt gets in their gills, too, and they can't breathe," Ulrich said.

The silt came from a percolating pool alongside Conference Drive which collects sand that's washed off a roadway at the Kaiser Plant. "A couple of times a year the pond gets full of silt," said Kaiser Manager Bob August. "When we were cleaning it, the silt went into a culvert that went under the road."

The silt then washed down an embankment and into Bean Creek.

The Fish and Game Department was alerted by local resident William Edwards, who saw the silt washing down the embankment and the creek's water turn color. "All of a sudden the water went super gray," Edwards said.

Edwards said he had contacted Kaiser before to tell them about silt pouring into the creek. "Our biggest complaint is that this is an ongoing thing," Edwards said. "No matter what we do to plead with Kaiser, it keeps happening."

But August said, "As soon as we were made aware of (the problem), we took care of it." Ulrich said Kaiser had immediately stopped its cleaning operation and plans to block the culvert.

But none of those actions will help the waterways now. In fact, according to Ulrich, there is little that can be done to alleviate the situation.

"When you get that much sediment there's nothing you can really do to flush it out," Ulrich said. "It's something that nature's going to have to correct itself."

Ulrich said the silt would be lifted up and washed out to sea by a high

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flow in the creeks. Unfortunately, as a dry winter ends, there is little hope for a high flow in the creeks for months to come.

"There's just nothing you can do," Ulrich said. "It's pretty futile, especially when you're talking about several miles."

"It's very possible there will be some type of charges filed," Ulrich said. "Even though it wasn't intentional, what we usually ask for is habitat restoration."

"But it never completely corrects the damage that's been done," Ulrich said.