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FISH & FISHING

Fish ladder to aid spawning in valley

By Terri Morgan
Special to the Mercury News

County planners are custom designing a fish ladder that will give steelhead trout migrating through local waterways in the San Lorenzo Valley access to 11 miles of spawning grounds in Zayante Creek.

The Quail Hollow fishway will give the fish a boost up a six-foot-high waterfall that is crippling access to better quality waters in the upper creek. Located where Quail Hollow Road intersects Zayante Creek, the waterfall prevents up to 80 percent of migrating steelhead from continuing upstream. The ladder is scheduled to be installed by summer.

"We're wrestling with the design now," said Dave Hope, senior resource planner for

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Santa Cruz County.

Funded by a grant from the California Department of Fish and Game, the \$34,000 Quail Hollow fishway project is being managed by the county's fisheries enhancement program. Designed to help restore dwindling populations of steelhead and salmon in Santa Cruz County rivers, creeks and streams, the 12-year-old program has been responsible for installing fish ladders in five other wa-

terways, including Lompico, Love, and Clear creeks, which all feed into the San Lorenzo River.

Historically, the San Lorenzo River and its tributaries were spawning grounds for about 20,000 steelhead and 10,000 salmon each year. But those waters, once considered among the most productive in the state, have been fouled by sewage and choked with sediment during the past 30 years.

Those factors, combined with reduced water flows because of drought and development, led to the virtual extinction of local salmon and nearly eliminated the steelhead population in county waterways. Hope said efforts to re-establish local salmon populations with hatchery fish have met with little success.

One of the first steps for workers in the enhancement program was to assess the condition of more than 770 miles of streams, creeks and rivers in the county.

"We walked every stream," said Hope. "Our best bang for our buck now is to open all streams for migration."

Most of the artificial barriers have been taken care of, Hope said, and the project will be targeting natural barriers next.