

100,000 that won't get away

By GUY LASNIER

Dave Streig greeted his new charges Monday. All 102,895 of them.

Streig is a board member of the Monterey Bay Salmon and Trout Project and chairman of its advisory board. His charges are fingerling steelhead trout.

Their new home is a 200-foot artificial stream called a raceway, built by members of the project on Big Creek north of Davenport. The fish arrived Monday at about 1 p.m. in two state Department of Fish and Game trucks from a hatchery in Yountville.

Though only two or three inches long now, under the care of project members they will grow to smolt size — six to 12 inches — by March and will be released in rivers and streams in the Monterey Bay Area.

Project members built the raceway on the site of a trout hatchery the state abandoned in 1940 after winter storms destroyed it. With hundreds of hours of volunteer labor and \$32,000 of donated funds, the members repaired the original dam that diverts water from

the creek and laid 1,300 feet of eight-inch PVC pipe to carry water to the raceway. Concrete lined with vinyl forms the raceway.

In February, 65 steelhead were trapped in the Carmel River, including a record-size 7-year-old male — 37 inches and 21 pounds. Fish and game officials stripped the eggs from the fish and raised them at a hatchery in Yountville.

Approximately 197,000 eggs were taken, 120,000 hatched and 102,000 survived to be transported back to the Monterey Bay area. The trapped fish were returned to the river.

The Monterey Bay Salmon and Trout Project seeks to rejuvenate the fish stock in area rivers and streams after many years of decline caused by siltation, pollution and overfishing. In the early 1900s, 200,000 salmon and steelhead would run up the San Lorenzo River to spawn. By the late 1970s, the number had dropped to fewer than 1,000, said Jack Harrell, a project member and conserva-

tion director of the Santa Cruz Flycatchers.

The project is supported by sportsmen's clubs and service groups throughout northern Monterey County and Santa Cruz County, which have donated money and countless hours of members' time. Monterey County's parks department gave \$6,000 and Santa Cruz County's kicked in \$2,000, Streig said.

Two members of families that trace their roots in the area to the 1860s were instrumental in getting the Big Creek facility built.

Streig, a fifth-generation Pajaro Valley resident, and Bud McCrary, owner of Big Creek Lumber Co. and the fifth generation of his family to live in the area, watched Monday as the fish flowed from state trucks into the raceway.

McCrary, whose father worked on the original fish hatchery as an apprentice carpenter in 1927, said he and his brother, Frank, wanted to do

something about the declining fish population but "didn't know how to go about it" until Dave Streig came along in May.

Streig, who holds a master's degree in fisheries management, found records of the old state hatchery during his search for a suitable spot to raise fish and proposed the idea to the McCrarys.

"Big Creek is ideal," Streig said. "The water temperature is perfect, 54 degrees, and the dam was already there." A deal was signed on May 27. Work began the next day when Bud used a Big Creek Lumber bulldozer to carve a spot for the raceway.

The salmon and trout project, which now has 360 members, began in 1976 after the state Fish and Game Department was allowed to work with non-profit groups to help manage and operate facilities to rear salmon and steelhead.

For the past few years project volunteers have stocked

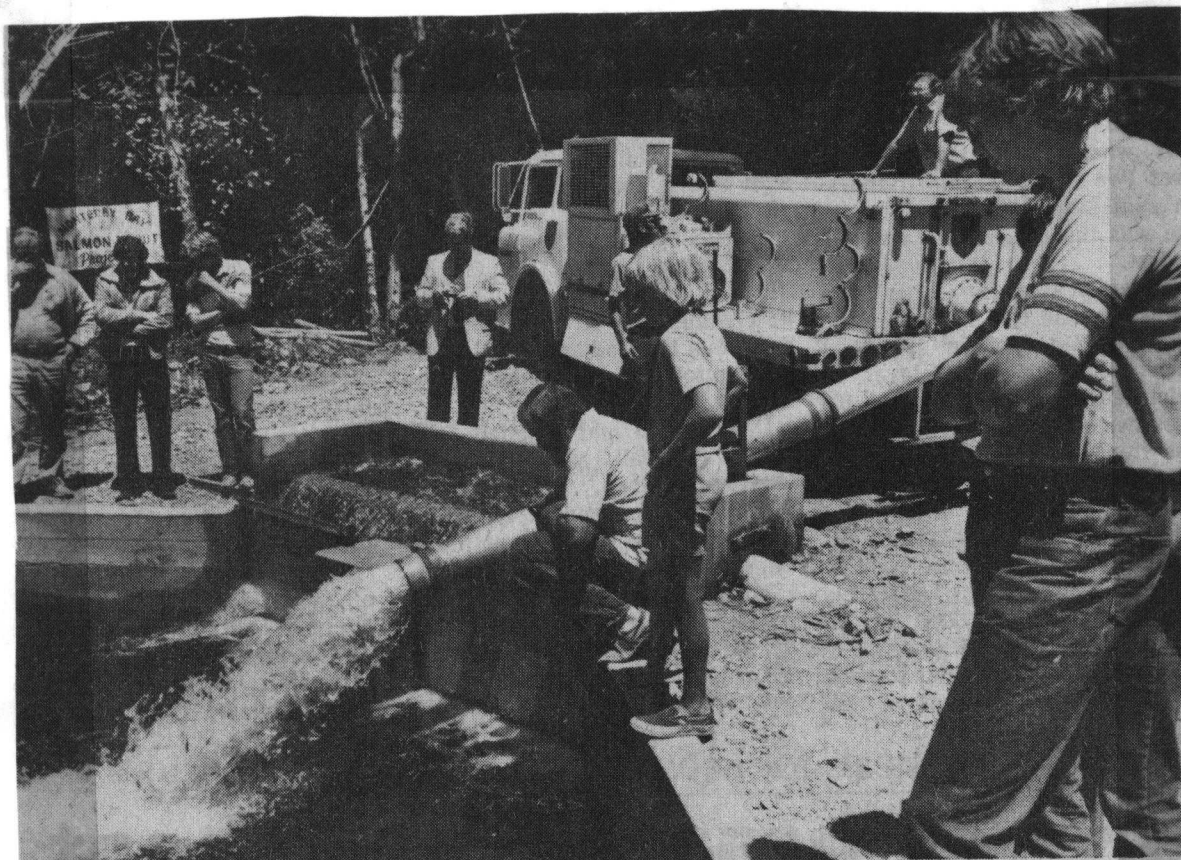
area rivers and streams with fish hatched by Fish and Game. They planted 23,000 steelhead in the Pajaro River last year and 17,000 the year before.

The rebuilding work on the fish farm facility at Big Creek cost \$32,000, Streig said. To keep and feed the young steelhead will cost an additional \$32,000 each year.

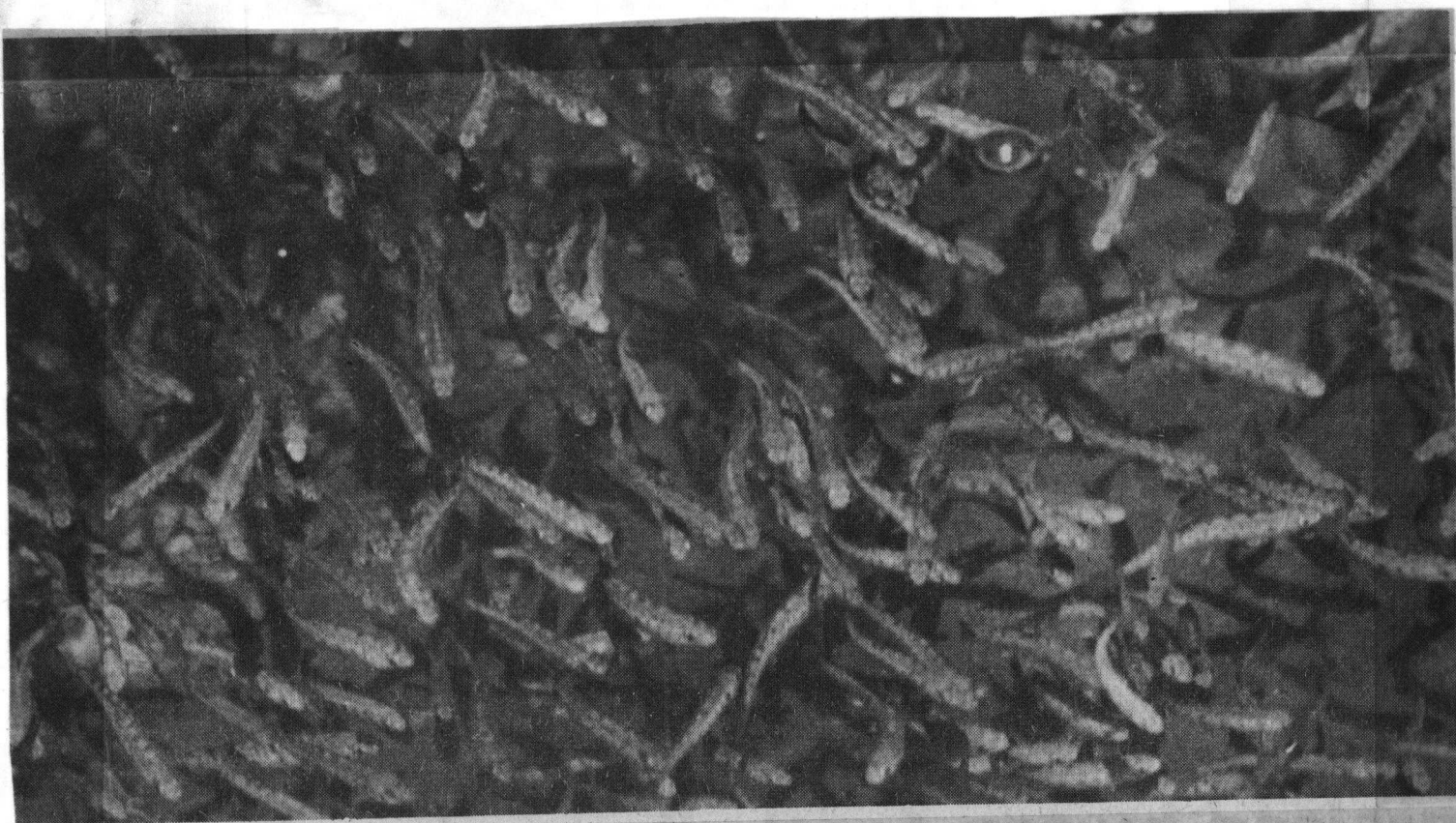
"We're broke right now," Streig said. "We need more money to keep going."

More work also needs to be done, he said. Automatic fish feeders will be installed over the raceway and netting will be strung overhead to keep diving birds such as kingfishers from carrying off the growing fish.

Streig said the fish eat 22 pounds of food per day, an amount that will grow to well over 100 pounds per day as the fish grow. Seven tons of fish food will remain stacked under tarps in the Big Creek Lumber parking lot until a storage shed can be built at the raceway site.



Dave Streig (squatting) watches the first steelhead flow into the Big Creek fish-raising facility north of Davenport.



100,000 fingerling steelhead adjust to new surroundings.

Photos by Sam Vestal