

Animals

Volunteers transfer steelhead to a new home

By DAVID WALLACE

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SWANTON — The annual trek from one pen to a larger one for some 20,000 Scott Creek steelhead trout came a bit earlier this year, thanks to a fourth straight year of drought.

Sunday morning, six volunteers from the Monterey Bay Salmon and Trout Project, a volunteer organization which raises steelhead trout and coho salmon, transferred 20,000 Scott Creek steelhead from their tank at Kingfisher Flat beside Big Creek to a roomier home in Semper Virens Big Basin Reservoir.

"The water level (of Big Creek) has reached an historic low. The

river has never been this low in our memory or in anyone else's," said Carolyn Edwards, one of the organization's volunteer coordinators.

"We move the fish each year when they become too big (for the tanks), but this year it became more urgent because of the drought," she said Friday. "We have to move them quicker and sooner than ever before."

Volunteers said Sunday that the creek water, which is filtered before it enters the tanks, will easily support the 145,000 fish which remain.

"Saturday's rain really helped. It increased the creek's flow," said volunteer Tim Fikes.

By 10:15 a.m., the fish had been

netted and placed in a water-filled, refrigerated container on the back of a truck. They were then driven to Semper Virens Big Basin Reservoir where they were poured through a pipe into a floating 16-by 40-foot pen. The pen, constructed of wood and netting, is 20 feet deep.

"It's anchored in the middle of the lake rather than at the shore to keep animals away, and because the lake is 34 feet deep at the center," said caretaker Dan Carroll. "We're very, very fortunate our lake is still full from spring runoff. The temperature and the dissolved oxygen level are good," he said. "The water is relatively cool for a lake this size from about six feet down. The fish can't tolerate warm

water."

Semper Virens is off limits to the public because it is a public drinking supply.

As the water and waste water treatment supervisor at the reservoir during work hours, Carroll has received the support and encouragement of his superiors for the project, he said.

"This is the third time that I've volunteered to watch the fish on my own time," he said. For now, he will feed them every three days. "By May, when the fish are bigger, I feed them every day and clean the net every three days."

Just like the other group members (except a full-time biologist), Carroll is a volunteer. "We all try

to do what we can to help our environment," he said.

"We work mostly on weekends," said Fikes, who has volunteered for the past year, "occasionally on

weeknights, too."

Edwards said that the group is always looking for more volunteers. The volunteer coordinators may be reached at 423-8480.