

# Getting fishy



JON WEIAND/SENTINEL

**Biologist Don Alley speaks to a group about the San Lorenzo river in Santa Cruz on Saturday.**

## Biologist talks fish, desal and environmental impact

By CALVIN MEN

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SANTA CRUZ — Biologist Don Alley wants people to bridge the connection between the health of local salmon species and the health of the river.

"Although Santa Cruz is a liberal culture and they seem to be enlightened in so many ways,

I think there's a disconnect between the fish and their use of water," said Alley, a biologist who has monitored fish populations and habitat conditions in central California watersheds and lagoons for decades.

Alley led a group of more than 50 people along the San Lorenzo River Saturday afternoon, lecturing about two salmon species — steelhead and coho — and their life cycle in the river.

Meeting at the pedestrian bridge near downtown Santa Cruz, Alley took the group on a stroll through San Lorenzo park

for several hours. He talked about a wide swath of salmon-related subjects, from the swimming abilities of the steelhead to its ability to survive in saltwater and freshwater to how the dwindling water resource affects them.

"Any time we divert water or create erosion, we're having a negative impact on fish," he told the crowd.

The city of Santa Cruz has been studying seawater desalination for several years as a potential new water supply source. But the city, which gets the largest share of its water from the riv-

er, has suspended the pursuit of desal while a public-led task force investigates alternatives.

"If you got more water from desalination, it stimulates more water use," he said. The solution would be to change people's water use habits, he said.

He also said that there is a potential for a stronger impact this year because of the drought conditions. Diverting too much water eventually results in the inability of fish to get in and migrate to the San Lorenzo

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gorge, he said.

Shortly before the lecture, the group initially met at Calvary Episcopal Church to learn the history of the San Lorenzo River. The events are tied to an event series put on by the Common Ground Center, a UC Santa Cruz-based organization focused on environmental regeneration among other things.

"The ultimate goal is to create community conversation and community decision making around our shared future of the watershed," said Dave Shaw, co-founder of Common Ground. "So we have a water abundant future and not a water scarce future."

Leslie Ingram, 61, of San-



**Biologist Don Alley speaks to a group on the banks of the San Lorenzo River in Santa Cruz on Saturday.**

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ta Cruz, came to the lecture because she has a strong interest in the city's desalination plans.

"I'm against the desalination and I want to learn and have a better understanding to make an informed decision," Ingram said.

Brock Doman, director of the Water Institute for Occidental Arts & Ecology Center, said getting the perspective of the watershed from a fish's perspective was important.

"How can we adjust what we're doing as humans to take care of the property we're trying to protect but do it in a way that actually understands the perspective of the steelhead," Doman said.

Sentinel reporter J.M. Brown contributed to this report.

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