



CCC worker Nikos Lynch checks his chain saw before cutting redwood blocking Clear Creek near Brookdale.



Photos by Pete Amos

# ✓ Fish & Fishing 'Last ditch' effort to save steelhead

## Clearing of streams under way

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**BROOKDALE** — In a more beautiful time, before the Valley was made busy with people, when the streams ran clear, nearly every tributary of the San Lorenzo River was a spawning ground for steelhead trout.

Today, there are few of the feeder-streams that are clear enough and free of debris from devastating storms in the early '80s to allow the ocean-going fish to return home to breed.

One of the streams that has been choked in recent years — Clear Creek that runs from just east of Empire Road to Brookdale — has been impassable for the last four years.

It is being cleared this month through the combined effort of the California Conservation Corps, the California Department of Forestry and the San Lorenzo Valley Water District.

The real work is being done by the young people of the CCC — all hired from the county — who are cutting and hauling the logs and broken limbs out of the creek.

Two major log jams are being cleared one mile south of Brookdale Lodge, about an eighth-of-a-mile off Clear Creek Road.

Fifteen workers from CCC are using the chain saws, sledgehammers and wedges to dismember the logs. It's not an easy job, especially to comply with a special state Fish and Game permit that demands no sawdust get in the stream.

The work crew is headed by Debbie Herrman and one of her workers, the one on the end of the large sledgehammer, is Sophie Martinez of Watsonville.



CCC workers clear debris to allow steelhead to return home to breed.

Martinez stacks the sawed-up redwood, where at the break, the crew burns the wood and toasts marshmallows and bake potatoes. She loves the work. "Everybody should do it," she said.

Forester Bill Ruskin said that the project is one of the "last ditch" efforts to save the breeding grounds of the steelheads. The fish breed in the small creeks along the California coast, swim their way to sea to mature and return to their cradlewaters to spawn the next generation.

Unlike salmon that die after they spawn, steelhead live on and return to breed again.

"The steelhead haven't been up here the past years, but maybe after Clear Creek is cleared again, they will plant it. Or maybe one or two fish will find their way up here and

get it started all over," Ruskin said as he watched over the clearing of the stream.

The steelhead right now are in the lower reaches of the San Lorenzo River and waiting for more rain to swell the river and its nourishing creeks to give them swimming room.

"Another rain of two or three inches could do it," Ruskin said.

The clearing will also help the flow of domestic water through the pipes of the water district, the agency that owns the land.

District worker Al Haynes said it will also cut down on the liability of the district, which already faces one law suit from damages of the 1982 storm that clogged the creek and tore Clear Creek Road apart.

The road was rebuilt with state

Soil Conservation funds and money from the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Ruskin said that along with CCC workers, the California Youth Authority has its wards working to clear other streams in this county and elsewhere.

The forestry department provides administrative leadership and is the agency through which the job is funded. The state provided \$2,500 to pay for administration and to rent hand tools.

The water district is coming up with \$1,100 in further administrative costs and the CCC is providing thousands of dollars in work from its young people.

The work began Wednesday and it will take about one month to complete.