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Dead fish

MAR 2 1994

in Corralitos creeks baffle investigators

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The death of 2,000 fish in Browns Valley and Corralitos creeks this weekend has investigators baffled.

"We're not any closer to finding a source (of contamination) than we were Monday" when the dead fish — many of them juvenile steelhead — were found, Lt. Dennis Baldwin of the state Department of Fish and Game said this morning.

The contamination apparently began in upper Browns Valley Creek, Baldwin said, and extends downstream at least as far as Varni Road.

It's not unusual for investigators to have initial trouble in identifying the source of contamination,

Baldwin said. A visual inspection yesterday revealed no obvious sources, he said.

Samples of the water and fish have been sent to the state lab, Baldwin said. It could be a week to a month before test results are back, he said.

There are any number of possible causes, Baldwin said, including spills of pesticides, chlorine, or dumping of chemicals from drug labs. There have been several cases in the county where streams have been contaminated by dumping of materials from drug labs, he said.

The contamination "appears to be one toxic discharge," said Keith Anderson, a fisheries biologist for Fish and Game.

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The chemical not only killed the steelhead, but smaller fish such as sculpins and sticklebacks as well, Anderson said. MAR 2 1994

Baldwin said no live gilled fish have been found in the contaminated area since the dead fish were discovered.

Salmon and steelhead hatch in fresh water, then move to the ocean. They return to their home creeks to spawn.

Baldwin said he had hopes that the juvenile steelhead in Browns Valley and Corralitos creeks would have made it to sea.

There is no indication that any fish were killed in the Pajaro River, Anderson said.