

# Rescuers save fish — for their hooks

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SOQUEL — A fisherman parted the still waters of a pool on Soquel Creek and threw his net through the sundappled surface, trapping dozens of small steelhead and salmon Sunday afternoon.

It was not poaching, but a rescue mission, as more than 20 volunteers netted about 500 of the fish and transported them downstream to the Capitola Lagoon.

The fish had become trapped in the shallow pools behind the Soquel Grange as the creek began drying up in recent weeks.

"We knew the fish were in these holes, but it wasn't until Saturday evening that someone noticed the (creek) was running dry," said Dennis Young, of the Monterey Bay Salmon and Trout Project.

The volunteers herded the fish into one end of the pools where they were netted and placed in a truck. The fish were released in the Capitola Lagoon.

If not for the rescue, most of the fish would have died, or been eaten by birds and other predators before the summer ended.

"When the water stops running, the temperature (in the pools) rises and the oxygen dissipates," Young said. "You get a narrower and narrower band of oxygen they can live in and they become susceptible to predation."

Most of the remaining pools on the creek are only about three to four feet deep, and fish gathered under fallen branches and along the cut banks in search of cool water and oxygen. They ranged from an inch and a half to nine inches long.

"The fish were highly stressed," Jack Harrell, a volunteer, said. "They were



Volunteers netted about 500 small steelhead and salmon in the Soquel Creek rescue mission.

Dan Coyro/Sentinel

on the surface and bunched up into a ball, hanging there listlessly."

The fish will spend the summer growing in the lagoon before the rains of winter burst the sandbar at the creekmouth, and open a passage to the sea.

When the fingerlings and smolts leave the sheltered lagoon for the sea, another generation of fish will be returning.

Harrell estimates that about 20 of the rescued fish will return to Soquel Creek as adults. They have a good chance of seeing their rescuers again, only next time it may be from the end of a hook.

Harrell said that about 30 percent of the fish were wild fish that had spawned in the creek. The others were planted by the Monterey Bay Salmon and Trout Project, which operates a hatchery to

stock local streams with steelhead and salmon.

"Everybody tries to do something for the environment," Harrell said. "We try to get the fish through the tough spots in drought years to make sure there are fish here in the future."

More fish will be gathered and transported downstream tonight.