

Working to Preserve and Protect the Environment

Approximately one-half of the District's expenditures fund programs to meet federal and state regulations for the protection of threatened species such as the Carmel River steelhead and California red-legged frog; to protect Carmel River banks against erosion; and to monitor ground and surface water levels throughout the District. These activities are outlined in detail in the District's Mitigation Program, developed to ensure that environmental damage caused by water extractions is corrected. All these programs are funded from a user fee paid by customers in the Cal-Am and Seaside Municipal water distribution service areas.

Focusing on Protection of the Carmel River Steelhead

The Carmel River steelhead population has increased over the past nine years. In spite of progress made on the Carmel River, steelhead are listed as a threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act in many areas of California, including the Carmel River.

Fishery programs focus on maintaining a healthy environment for steelhead spawning and rearing as they migrate up the Carmel River and back down to the ocean. District staff coordinate with Cal-Am and the California Department of Fish and Game to control the amount of water released from reservoirs and pumped from wells so that adequate river flow is maintained for fish throughout most of the year.

★Fish Rescue Operations Minimal in 1998


Ample rainfall in 1998 produced adequate streamflow in the Carmel River throughout most of the year so that fish rescue operations were minimal. Between June and December 1998, District staff conducted three fish rescue operations, capturing and transporting a total of 3,198 steelhead from the lower Carmel River. This is 84 percent less than the number of fish that were rescued in 1997. The fish were gathered from drying reaches of the river and released into more favorable upstream habitats.

The District has applied for a federal permit to continue steelhead rescue operations. One possibility under consideration by the National Marine Fisheries Service, is to designate the District as its agent on the Carmel River responsible for "salvage" operations such as fish rescues.

★Steelhead Population on the Increase

The steelhead population is steadily recovering from the impacts of the 1987-91 drought. The automatic fish counter located at the fish ladder at San Clemente Dam recorded 861 adult steelhead passing over the dam between December 1997 and May 1998, the highest count since 1975. District biologists are committed to ensuring the resurgence of a viable, self-sustaining steelhead population.

In October 1998, District staff conducted a survey of juvenile steelhead below Los Padres Dam. In general, the juvenile steelhead population has increased over the last 10 years. However, overall population



This large adult Carmel River steelhead was netted by District staff as it passed over the San Clemente Dam. It was measured and then released. The adult steelhead population is on the rise. In 1998, 861 adult steelhead passed over the San Clemente Dam.