

## Agency set to fix fish ladder

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STOCKTON - Everyone knows fish need water.

But too much of it can cause damage that is detrimental to fish.

In the spring, rapid snow-melt sent torrents of water down the Calaveras River, ripping away sections of a temporary ladder used by migratory fish to wriggle past the Bellota weir.

Stockton East Water District, which taps the Calaveras for water for much of Stockton and surrounding farmland, plans to spend about \$75,000 next month to fix the ladder. That will be just in time for fall-run salmon to swim upriver and spawn.

Stockton East has long drawn heat for its management of the Calaveras. Some of the criticism is focused on the weir, near Linden; it poses an obstacle to fish during low flows when they cannot reach the ladder, as well as during high flows when they cannot find it.

But the district's flood repair plans are drawing kudos from one critic.

John Raine of the Calaveras River Steering Committee said replacing the ladder - combined with releasing appropriate amounts of water from upstream New Hogan Dam - should aid salmon in their journey.

"You've got to be fair when it comes to parceling out blame," Raine said.

Stockton East has worked with the state Department of Fish and Game for years on ways to protect Calaveras fish, said Kevin Kauffman, the district's general manager.

A galvanized steel ladder was installed over the weir. Temporary 2-foot dams were built to create pools allowing fish to splash over the obstruction.

"We thought we had a pretty good system," Kauffman said.

Officials believed the ladder was strong enough to withstand flows all winter. But flows of 9,500 cubic feet per second - about double the normal winter flow and enough to fill an Olympic-size swimming pool in 10 seconds - tore the ladder loose from its anchors and lodged it in the mud at the base of the weir.

Along with rebuilding the ladder, crews will scoop up 1,000 tons of gravel and place it in spawning areas near New Hogan Dam. Salmon are born in rivers, but live most of their lives in the ocean. Then they return to freshwater streams, where they need clean gravel to lay their eggs.

The gravel will cost an additional \$25,000, Kauffman said. Work begins the second week in October.

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