

Biologists find four salmon in Rodeo Creek

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RODEO — When biologists Tom Keegan and Anthony Spina took their “electrofisher” — that’s a kind of stun gun for fish — down to Rodeo Creek, it wasn’t just the fish that were stunned.

For once the volts had dispersed, the scientists were electrified to discover they had zapped not only some common fish, such as Sacramento suckers, hitches, fathead minnows and threespine sticklebacks, but also four male Chinook salmon, ready for spawning.

“The salmon were very healthy, very frisky,” Keegan said. “I mean, those guys were full of life — and they’ve been there two weeks.”

The discovery was made during an aquatic study to assess the health of Rodeo Creek. It provided a shot in the arm to R-10’s dream of creating a park and trail along a restored creek. R-10 Committee, Rodeo’s advisory committee on parks and recreation, commissioned the study last month.

The presence of salmon “argues that the creek, if restored, could be an incredibly viable creek,” according to Marta Williams, executive director of the Urban Creeks Council, an advocacy group based in Berkeley.

That notion would bolster any future R-10 attempts to raise money. There are federal and state programs to establish greenbelts as well as a state urban stream restoration grant program. The departments of Forestry and Fish and Game also provide aid.

“We envision a trail going from the Bay to Highway 4,” said Janet Callaghan, a member of R-10’s creek subcommittee, “but we have to do it in phases.”

The Phase One portion of the trail would stretch from Fourth Street to Seventh Street. Callaghan hopes it can be accomplished in three years.

Keegan and Spina conducted the study on Nov. 5, 10 days after the first significant rainfall of the season. They surmise the salmon were lured up the creek by the increased

fresh water runoff.

Urban dwellers want their creeks to be more than concrete-lined storm drains. **14A**

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The salmon, who were in a pool a few feet northwest of Interstate 80, soon recovered from their shock.

In electrofishing, an electrical field disorients the fish, who float to the top. There they are covered with a net just long enough to be counted and measured. The fish never leave the water, and 15 to 20 seconds later they would leave.

The presence of Chinook salmon around San Pablo Bay isn’t surprising.

“The Sacramento River (system) historically was one of the top producers of Chinook salmon,” Spina said.

Even in Rodeo, salmon are not unheard of.

“They’ve been catching salmon between the sanitation plant and Union Oil,” said R-10 vice chairman Ed Sacca.

But salmon in Rodeo Creek is another story.

“For us to find salmon in Rodeo Creek was pretty shocking,” said Pam Peck, the chairperson of R-10’s creek subcommittee. “With the drought, and all the garbage . . .”

Rodeo Creek is better known for discarded shopping carts, bicycle frames, tires and other automotive rubbish than for its water.

Spina cautioned against unwarranted optimism. The fish, which he said probably originated in a state hatchery and don’t know the scent of the water of their birth as wild salmon do, may have simply made a mistake.

“The hatchery fish haven’t had the chance to have the scents imprinted on them,” Spina said. “They stray, they don’t exactly know where they’re supposed to be.”

In any case, it isn’t time to bring your fishing pole.

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