

# Anglers without scruples targeting trout

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Trespassing fishermen have killed a significant percentage of Santa Ynez River trout that assorted agencies and groups have labored to protect for the past year.

"It is unfortunate that everyone has put forth so much effort into trying to understand what these fish mean to the overall river habitat and now to have this happen," said Rob Almy, the county's water agency manager.

Other water and wildlife agency staff expressed similar disappointment with the news. A great deal of time, energy and money has been expended, they said, and controversial releases of Lake Cachuma water were made for months to keep the fish alive for an unprecedented scientific study.

Ten trout were taken from a deep pool in the river on Dec. 24 by three men who trespassed across private

and federal property, sources said. They were observed by a federal employee.

One fish was confiscated by the employee. It, along with scale samples from several other fish, was frozen for further scientific study.

Other anglers have trespassed across the same lands to reach the river in recent months, but this case is considered by some to be the biggest hit to the small population of fish present in the river.

The loss of 10 trout is "significant," said Brian Trautwein, president of the Santa Barbara Urban Creeks Council.

Trautwein is formally requesting the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation to press all appropriate charges against the men as a publicly visible example. It is a violation of the state Fish and Game Code to trespass on federal land to fish.

The federal land and the resources within it are held by the bureau. Trespass with intent to de-

grade those resources is a serious crime, Trautwein said.

"In a sense, the men are guilty of more than just trespass. Due to recent media coverage of this issue, the bureau will have to be even more watchful for trespassers and poachers," Trautwein wrote in a memo to the committee overseeing river studies.

Residents along the river, state and federal employees and sheriff's deputies continue to watch for trespassers.

New and tougher fishing regulations on the river take effect March 1. They are intended to help prevent overfishing to protect steelhead trout. Almy said he's disappointed the regulations did not take effect earlier.

Steelhead stocks in rivers and streams south of San Francisco to the Mexican border are at very low levels, according to the state Department of Fish and Game.

## Christmas Eve Trespassers Bag Big Steelhead Trout

□ **Santa Ynez River**—Twas the night before Christmas and all through the house, everybody was enjoying the taste of fresh steelhead trout.

Three fishermen from the Lompoc area were about to clean 10 trout they had caught from the Santa Ynez River below Bradbury Dam when Bureau of Reclamation employee Bruce Jones arrived on the scene. The anglers admitted to catching the fish in an area set aside for state and federal studies trying to determine the remaining extent of a once-plentiful steelhead run.

Since the trout were already dead, Jones took several scale samples to determine if the fish were sea-run steelhead or hatchery-raised fish that are sometimes swept over the dam and downstream. Jones convinced the fishermen to give him one of the smaller fish to be frozen and examined by experts, but they would not let him have the six-pound, 22-inch whopper that looked most like a steelhead. It presumably ended up on the dinner table.

New state regulations that ban all fishing except catch and release between Bradbury Dam and the ocean take effect March 1. Until then, "Hopefully the public will realize that this area is off-limits and an important study area," said Brian Trautwein of the Urban Creeks Council. (AR)