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## OUR OPINION



NEWS-PRESS FILE

This paved tunnel under Las Canoas Road is one of more than 500 barriers steelhead face in South Coast creeks.

# The steelhead keep waiting

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Unrealistic? Hardly. Hard work? Certainly.

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studied. The worse are culverts — concrete tunnels — built under Highway 101 and railroad tracks. The cost to replace one culvert could be between \$7 million to \$8 million, says one estimate.

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Yet there's reason to be optimistic about the steelhead's return.

Emphasize creative solutions to helping the fish navigate the obstacles. Focus on creeks with the most potential.

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Humans in Southern California didn't fish out this oceangoing form of rainbow trout. Instead, people erected so many obstacles in the steelhead's historic waterways that the fish often could no longer swim up stream to spawning grounds. Dams, road crossings, tunnels, pipes and concrete channels block the steelhead's path.

The result: The government lists steelhead as an endangered species in Southern California.

Endangered -- but not gone.

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A study by the nonprofit Conception Coast Project maps out the obstacles in the way of making that a reality. The Santa Barbara group's survey of 30 streams and tributaries from Jalama Beach to the Rincon found at least 500 barriers to steelhead passage. People created most of the them.

Impediments block all but 45 miles of 170 miles of streams studied. The worse are culverts -- concrete tunnels -- built under Highway 101 and railroad tracks. The cost to replace one culvert could be between \$7 million to \$8 million, says one estimate.

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Research, based on the quantity and quality of upstream habitats, indicates that Carpinteria Creek ranks at the top for long-term restoration work. Culverts don't block the steelhead's path on the 101 or the railroad tracks. The creek flows year-round.

Also ranked as top long-term priorities by the study: Mission Creek in Santa Barbara, Rincon Creek in Carpinteria, San Jose Creek in Goleta and El Capitan Creek on the Gaviota coast.

The Conception Coast Project's study details the obstacles to the steelhead's recovery. Now quick action is needed to remove those barriers. This endangered species doesn't have the luxury of waiting.

Funding for the steelhead study came from the California Department of Fish and Game and private foundations including the Wendy P. McCaw Foundation. Mrs. McCaw is the owner of the News-Press.