Three million trout eggs are quietly incubating at a hatchery and hundreds of trophy trout are safely back in Eagle Lake, thanks to the usual work of the Department of Fish and Game and some unusual work by the Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. Fish and Game said crews from Crystal Lake Hatchery near Burney collected the three million Eagle Lake rainbow trout eggs during a hurried spawning operation at the DFG's Pine Creek Trap in late March and early April. Trout hatched from the eggs will replenish Eagle Lake with fish while supplying trout for dozens of other state waters.

No sooner had the annual spawning procedure ended, said DFG fishery biologist Paul Chappell, than Pine Creek's flow began falling, threatening to strand hundreds of Eagle Lake rainbow that had entered the lower mile of the stream.

"The stream was still loaded with huge fish and the surface area was diminishing rapidly,' Chappell recalled.

"It was drying up right before our eyes," he said.

After weighing and measuring some 1,100 late arriving trophy trout at the trap and hauling them back to the lake, Fish and Game found itself overwhelmed by the number of spawners still in a creek fast losing its flow. Enter CDF.

"Warden Cal Albright made contact with CDF and before we knew it they were on the scene with a conservation crew and helicopter to help rescue those valuable trout," Chappell said.

In a few hours of twilight work on April 5, the CDF airship equipped with a fire fighting water bucket moved more than 1,500 trout from Pine Creek to the center of Eagle Lake. A second CDF crew and DFG personnel using backpack shocking devices rescued another 500 to 700 trout the next day, Chappell said.

Chappell said workers braved icy conditions to carry out the rescue work. He said a combination of the stream's 40-degree temperature and the "prop wash" from the helicopter caused some personnel's clothing to freeze.

"I've never been so cold in my life," he said.

But, the cold took a back seat to CDF's response, according to Chappell.

"If it hadn't been for the heroic efforts of that chopper pilot, his crew and the conservation workers, we would have lost at least 1,500 trophy trout," he said.

As it was, at least 50 Eagle Lake rainbow that the agencies wouldn't reach died in isolated pools of water life in rugged areas of Pine Creek, the DFG said. The lower portion of the creek, fed by sub-par precipitation this year, was dry two days after the fish rescue.