



## **Russian River Biological Opinion Update – October 2012**

The Sonoma County Water Agency is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. To better communicate the progress and timeline of this work, the Water Agency has provided the below outline of project updates. For more detailed information about these activities, please visit [www.sonomacountywater.org](http://www.sonomacountywater.org).

### **Dry Creek Demonstration Project**

- Construction is progressing rapidly at the Quivira Vineyards and Winery segment of the demonstration project. This component includes (1) a 300-foot long backwater channel, (2) placement of approximately 15 large wood structures composed of nearly 130 large logs, root wads and 560 tons of boulders, and (3) removal of invasive plant species and replanting with native species. These changes will provide much needed winter refuge habitat for young endangered coho and steelhead salmon.
- Large redwood/Douglas fir trees and trees with root wads are being delivered to a storage site near Warms Springs Dam.
- Right-of-way negotiations are underway with landowners for the remainder of the project.

### **Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement**

- The Water Agency, National Marine Fisheries Service, Department of Fish & Game and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are working with consultants, ESSA, to develop clear success measures for habitat enhancement. The plan should be completed in 2012.

### **Tributary Fish Passage and Habitat Enhancement Projects**

- The Grape Creek passage project (creating fish passage through a box culvert) construction began this month. Sotoyome Resource Conservation District is managing the project for the Water Agency. In preparation for construction, fish were rescued from two small pools up- and downstream of the project. Several juvenile coho and steelhead were safely relocated.
- Construction on the Wallace Creek project (the final tributary project) is awaiting agreement from one landowner for a small construction easement.
- During the summer season, thousands of juvenile steelhead and coho were counted and released in migrant traps in the Russian River, at Mirabel, in Dry Creek, Mark West Creek and Dutch Bill Creek. Final counts will be available later this year.

### **Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement**

- The comment period closed on August 24th for a Notice of Preparation for the environmental analysis. Comments were received from the State Water Resources Control Board, California Department of Fish and Game, and the State Lands Commission
- The Water Agency received a \$255,000 California Department of Fish and Game Fishery Restoration Grant for design of the project. A second 65% design review meeting occurred on August 30<sup>th</sup> which reflected changes to the site plan.
- The **Department of Fish and Game's** Peer Review Committee met on September 26<sup>th</sup> to discuss and score the project for its applicability for grant funds . The grant announcement is expected in early 2013.

### **Russian River Estuary Management Project**

- The Biological Opinion requires the Water Agency to study the jetty to determine if and how it impacts the formation of the sand bar (barrier beach) and lagoon water surface elevation. Several technical studies analyzing the jetty will begin later this fall, pending the receipt of a permit from the California Coastal Commission.
- A settlement, signed by both parties, is pending court approval in the lawsuit filed by the Russian River Watershed Protection Committee challenging the Estuary Management Project final Environmental Impact Report.
- A three-year general lease was received from the State Lands Commission for the estuary management project.
- The 2012 biological and water quality monitoring is ongoing through the Lagoon Management Period (which ends on October 15).

### **Fish Flow Project**

Work is occurring internally on the preparation of the draft Environmental Impact Report for the Fish Habitat Flows and Water Rights Project.

- EIR Schedule
  - Release Draft EIR in late 2012
  - Release Final EIR in summer 2013
  - BO requires Board to certify Final EIR by September 24, 2013.

The EIR will be prepared by Water Agency staff, with assistance from consultants on some areas of impact analysis.

### **Interim Flow Changes**

- The State Water Resources Board issued a 2012 Temporary Urgency Change order on May 2, lowering minimum flows from May 2 through October 15. The order requires fisheries reports, water quality monitoring and recognizes the continuing efforts by the contractors and Water Agency with regard to water use efficiency.

### **Public Outreach**

- An outreach campaign (postcards, signage, updated web page) on the Dry Creek habitat enhancement demonstration project is ongoing.
- Water Agency staff is working with the Corps on a groundbreaking ceremony for the Corps' habitat enhancement pilot project. The event is tentatively scheduled for mid-October.