



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – January 2014

The Sonoma County Water Agency is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. The following project updates provide a brief synopsis of current work. For more detailed information about these activities, please visit www.sonomacountywater.org.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement and Demonstration Project

- Construction of the remainder of the one-mile demonstration project is underway. Hanford Applied Restoration & Conservation, out of Sonoma, is constructing the project. This summer's work is complete and the focus is on revegetation. Approximately 3,000 plants will be installed this fall/winter. Planning is under way for construction of the remaining three habitat features of the demonstration project in 2015.
- Construction is complete on the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers habitat enhancement project, on Corps property immediately below Warm Springs Dam. The Water Agency is partnering with the Corps on a grant application to provide signage and public access to the site.
- Site identification, outreach to landowners, preliminary environmental studies and topographic surveys are underway for the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. Two firms, Interfluve and ESA PWA, have been selected to design the second and third miles of habitat enhancement.
- An adaptive management plan, developed in conjunction with National Marine Fisheries Service, Department of Fish & Wildlife and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, has been completed.

Fish Monitoring

Chinook and coho are being monitored on their fall migration upstream. Water Agency staff is conducting dive surveys and assessing habitat conditions in the upper river to determine the status of the migration. As of December 25th, 2859 Chinook were counted at Mirabel. It is estimated that more than 50 coho have been captured on Water Agency video, but verification is required before the number can be finalized. Water Agency staff are regularly consulting with National Marine Fisheries Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife regarding the status of the migration and plans for reservoir releases.

Tributary Habitat Enhancement Projects

Habitat monitoring was conducted in Grape Creek this fall.

Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement

- The 99% design is complete and currently under review. The Water Agency plans to advertise this project for bids on January 30th. The seismic upgrade project (not required by the Biological Opinion) is slated to begin in late January and should take two months to complete. Major construction on the fish screen/fish ladder project is estimated to begin in June 2014.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

- The 2013 Lagoon Management Period began May 15 and ended on October 15. Biological monitoring is completed for the season, while water quality monitoring continues.

- The river mouth closed on December 16, self-breached on December 21 and then high swells closed the mouth again on December 25. The Water Agency breached the mouth on January 2nd when water levels reached 7.7 feet.
- A study of the jetty is underway. The purpose of the study is to determine if and how the jetty impacts the formation of the barrier beach and lagoon water surface elevation. While the historic assessment component of the study was completed at the end of 2012, field investigations were postponed until all permits were acquired.

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. The EIR is being prepared by Water Agency staff, with assistance from consultants on some areas of impact analysis. A draft EIR is anticipated to be released in 2014.

Interim Flow Changes

- The State Water Resources Control Board issued the 2013 Temporary Urgency Change (TUC) order in late April and flows were reduced beginning on May 1, based on the rapid decline in Lake Mendocino levels (and differing from the minimum flows required in the Biological Opinion). The May 2013 TUC slowed the decline, but the lack of fall rain has resulted in lake levels continuing to drop. To further slow declines, on December 19, the Water Agency petitioned the State Water Board to allow the Water Agency to use Lake Mendocino storage levels to determine water supply conditions in the upper river. On December 31st, the State Water Board issued the new TUC order granting the Water Agency's request. As of January 1, under the new TUC, the minimum flow in the upper Russian River is 25 cfs. The period of the order is January 1- May 29, 2014.

Public Outreach, Reporting & Legislation

- The Water Agency is working with contractors through the Sonoma-Marin Saving Water Partnership on an ad campaign messaging: The Drought is on. Turn Water Off.
- Language authorizing the Corps to conduct habitat enhancement in Dry Creek is contained in the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA) approved by the House in October. The Senate passed its version WRDA, also with language that supports the Dry Creek project, in June 2013. The draft legislation is currently in conference to work out the differences between the House and Senate bills.



Lake Mendocino, December 15th 2013