



## Russian River Biological Opinion Update – November 2013

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](http://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 focuses on habitat downstream of Lambert Bridge. Features include bank stabilizations, a large backwater with constructed log jams, large wood habitat features, and boulder clusters in the creek channel.
- 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.
- The Water Agency, National Marine Fisheries Service, Department of Fish & Wildlife 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 2013.

### Fish Monitoring

Chinook are being monitored on their fall migration upstream. Water Agency staff is conducting dive surveys and assessing habitat conditions downstream of Mirabel, to determine the status of the migration. As of October 31, approximately 103 fish have been counted at Mirabel. On October 25, Water Agency staff met with the National Marine Fisheries Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife to discuss the status of the migration and plans for reservoir releases this fall. The resource agencies concurred with fish passage flow recommendations developed by Water Agency biologists and engineers. All parties will convene to review the current status of reservoir storage and fish migration after 1,000 fish have been counted at Mirabel.



### **Tributary Habitat Enhancement Projects**

Habitat monitoring was conducted in Grape Creek this fall.

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

- The 90% design is ongoing; the Water Agency Board has adopted the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration; and major construction is estimated to begin in June 2014.

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

- At its August meeting, the California Coastal Commission unanimously approved the Water Agency's applications to conduct lagoon management activities and physical studies of the jetty, as required by the Biological Opinion.
- 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 mouth of the river closed on September 24 - with water levels nearing 8 feet, the barrier beach was breached by Water Agency staff, opening the river mouth on October 15. This was the third closure since the Lagoon Management Period began on May 15. The first closure, in mid-May, lasted for nearly two weeks until the estuary breached on its own. The second closure lasted for nearly a month, with the river mouth closing on June 7 and breaching on its own on July 3. The river mouth closed on October 21 and is currently closed.
- 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 order in late April and flows were reduced beginning on May 1. The minimum flow requirements in the upper river were based on the rapid decline in Lake Mendocino levels and differ from the minimum flows required in the Biological Opinion. Minimum flow requirements in the order were 75 cfs in the upper river and 85 cfs in the lower river. The order expired on October 28. When the order expired the minimum flow levels changed to 75 cfs in the upper river and 125 cfs in the lower river. As of October 28, storage in Lake Mendocino was approximately 35,800 acre-feet.
- More than 1,100 people have signed up for the 20 Gallon Challenge, a Sonoma Marin Saving Water Partnership paid media campaign to increase voluntary conservation. People who took the pledge are eligible to win one of five monthly prizes, including front-load washing machines, high-efficiency toilets, and landscaping or graywater system design. So far, winners have included residents of Santa Rosa, Forestville and Cotati.

### **Public Outreach, Reporting & Legislation**

- Dry Creek site tours for WAC/TAC members are scheduled for Friday, November 15 and Friday, November 22.
- Water Agency staff met with Friends of Villa Grande board members to discuss the Russian River Estuary lagoon management plan.
- 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.