



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – February 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.

Dry Creek Demonstration Project

- The Dry Creek Demonstration Project reached the 90% design level at the end of October. Discussions with landowners regarding right-of-way and construction are ongoing, and permitting applications to regulatory agencies have been submitted.
- In November, the Water Agency Board of Directors approved the demonstration project, the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration environmental document and right-of-way process.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Study

- In December, InterFluve submitted the Draft Conceptual Design Report for the Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement draft feasibility study. This report presents conceptual designs for potential habitat improvements areas beyond the 1-mile demonstration project. The report will be finalized when official comments from NMFS are addressed.
- 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

- Construction on the Crane Creek and Willow Creek Fish Passage Enhancement Projects are complete. Crane Creek is a tributary to Dry Creek located near the one-mile Demonstration Project. Willow Creek flows directly into the estuary near Bridgehaven. The Crane Creek project involved creating and enhancing pools to give steelhead and coho greater access to spawning habitat. The Willow Creek project involved replacing several plugged/collapsed side-by-side culverts with a bridge.
- A dedication of Willow Creek bridge was held in mid-December and was attended by the directors of the California Department of Fish and Game and California State Parks.
- Wild juvenile coho were found in both Crane and Willow Creeks during surveys this past summer. Low numbers of wild juvenile coho were also found in Dry Creek during Water Agency summer surveys. Fish monitoring activities have been completed for the season.

Wohler Pond Modification Project

- The project – which decommissioned infiltration ponds near Wohler Bridge – was completed in September. Historically, when flooding occurred in the area, the ponds would trap fish when the water receded. The purpose of the project was to remove any impediments so that future fish entrapment will not occur.

Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement

- The Water Agency received a \$255,000 California Department of Fish and Game Fishery Restoration Grant for design of the project. Consultant (HDR Engineering) has completed the 30% design, which was received in November.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

- On January 26, a three-year general lease was received from the State Lands Commission for the estuary management project.
- The Estuary Management Project final Environmental Impact Report was certified in August and the Board of Directors approved the project. On September 16, a lawsuit was filed by the Russian River Watershed Protection Committee challenging the EIR.
- 2011 monitoring activities took place throughout the summer, including the fyke net placed in the estuary, rotary screw traps installed at the mouths of three creeks that drain into the estuary, invertebrate monitoring and seining and water quality monitoring. Monitoring was completed for the season in mid-October.
- Seal (and other pinniped) monitoring is ongoing.
- The estuary remained open during the 2011 lagoon management period (May 15 – 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 summer 2012
 - Release Final EIR in summer 2013
 - BO requires Board to certify Final EIR by September 24, 2013
 - EIR will be prepared by Water Agency staff, with assistance from consultants on some areas of impact analysis.

Interim Flow Changes

- The 2011 Temporary Urgency Change order from the State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) ended on October 15. The order required weekly fisheries reports, water quality monitoring and for the contractors to require their irrigation customers to “achieve a maximum applied water allowance of 60 percent ETo.”
- The term for the Agency’s fisheries monitoring requirements under the TUC expired on November 15, but video monitoring of adult salmon and steelhead returns will continue until high river flow necessitates deflation of Mirabel Dam or when the adult coho run appears to tapering off. As of January 17, 3,119 Chinook and 616 steelhead (75 percent identified as hatchery) were counted at the Mirabel dam. Images that appear to be coho are reviewed by multiple biologists. Because of the additional review process, coho tallies are not as up to date as Chinook and steelhead. As of January 1, 124 coho were counted.
- Reports for the 2011 TUC will be submitted to the State Water Board by March 31, 2012.
- Pursuant to the Biological Opinion requirements, the Water Agency is preparing to submit to the State Board a temporary urgency change request for 2012.

Public Outreach

- The annual Public Policy Facilitating Committee meeting will be held 9 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Thursday, February 9 in the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors Chambers.