



## Russian River Biological Opinion Update – April 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. Approximately 3,000 plants were installed in the portion of the project constructed in 2013. Preparation and planning is under way for construction of the remaining three habitat features of the demonstration project.
- 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, were selected to design the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. The 10% conceptual designs should be completed in April.
- Water Agency staff is working closely with the US Army Corps of Engineers on a Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) project that should allow the Corps to contribute funding for a portion of the mile 2-3 phase of Dry Creek Habitat enhancement.

### **Fish Monitoring**

Water Agency staff continues to assess habitat conditions in the upper river and tributaries to determine the status of the migration. The Chinook count is complete, with a total of 3,132. This is a drop from last year's high of 6,697 but is about average for the 13 years the Water Agency has been counting Chinook. Monitoring conducted by the Water Agency and UC Cooperative Extension found an estimated 210 adult hatchery coho. 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**

- Bids for project construction are due on April 29. The seismic upgrade project (not required by the Biological Opinion) is underway and should be completed in May (depending on weather). Major construction on the fish screen/fish ladder project is estimated to begin in summer 2014.

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

- The 2013 Lagoon Management Period began May 15 and ended on October 15. Biological and water quality monitoring is completed for the season.
- The river mouth closed during the night on March 21 and was breached by the Water Agency on March 24.
- A Coastal Development Permit was issued by the California Coastal Commission, allowing field investigations of the jetty to begin. Work was conducted for two weeks in early March, including the installation of monitoring wells, and will resume in July after the pupping season for harbor seals and

other pinnipeds. The purpose of the studies is to determine if and how the jetty impacts the formation of the barrier beach and lagoon water surface elevation.

### **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**

- To slow declines in Lake Mendocino, 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 31<sup>st</sup>, 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, although on March 7, the State Water Board amended the order to include new terms, including a drought action plan (submitted to the State Water Board on 3/28) and an update on activities on water use efficiency due October 31.

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

- The Water Agency is working with contractors through the Sonoma-Marín Saving Water Partnership on an ad campaign messaging: The Drought is on. Turn Water Off.
- Several tours of the Dry Creek Demonstration Project took place recently, including for the board of the Dry Creek Valley Association, for Dr. Mark Schaefer, Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Conservation and Management for NOAA and for The Nature Conservancy (California) legislative team.
- A community meeting is scheduled for Monday, May 12 in Dry Creek and plans are underway for a Jenner community meeting to discuss estuary activities this summer.



**Mirabel Seismic Upgrade Project**