



## Russian River Biological Opinion Update – December 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](http://www.sonomacountywater.org).

### **Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement and Demonstration Project**

- Hanford Applied Restoration & Conservation, out of Sonoma, has completed construction. Over the coming months, Water Agency crews will be revegetating the disturbed areas of the project site with thousands of native trees, shrubs and grasses.
- 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, are designing the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. Ten-percent designs have been completed and presented to the property owners for feedback. Each design consultant has been given over 1.25 miles of habitat enhancements to advance to 30% design.
- The Water Agency signed a memorandum of understanding with the US Army Corps of Engineers for 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**

Traps are checked daily. Water Agency biologists are gathering information about adult salmon and steelhead as they return to spawn in the Russian River. Water Agency staff are regularly consulting with the National Marine Fisheries Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife regarding the status of the migration and plans for reservoir releases. With the inflatable dam down during the Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project construction, the return of adult fish are being monitored in Dry Creek and at the Healdsburg Dam fish ladder using video and sonar technology. With the river mouth closed, returns have been low, although several fish were counted following the November 17 estuary breaching. To date, about 400 Chinook have been counted.

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

Construction of the Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project is underway. Installation of the dewatering wells is complete, tieback installation and site excavation is ongoing, and demolition of existing structure is anticipated in two weeks. A tour of the site was offered to WAC and TAC members in mid-November. Nine representatives of the WAC/TAC attended.

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

- The 2014 Lagoon Management Period ended on October 15. Since September 18, when the river mouth closed, the mouth has been open for four days: From October 22 (when it was breached by Water Agency staff) to October 24 and from November 17 (breached by staff) to November 19. As of November 25, the mouth remained closed with water levels rising slowly. Downstream migrant fish

sampling is underway at Austin Creek and with an antenna at Duncans Mills that can read passive integrated transponders (PIT) tags. Monthly baseline monitoring of seals and other pinnipeds is ongoing.

- Field investigations of the jetty continue. Work was conducted in early March, including the installation of monitoring wells, and resumed during the summer. 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 Summer 2015.

### **Interim Flow Changes**

On August 25, the State Water Resources Control Board issued a new order, allowing minimum flows to be reduced to 50 cfs in the upper river and 60 cfs in the lower river (minimum flows are based on a five day running average). The Water Agency and the Mendocino County Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District requested these changes to preserve water in Lake Mendocino for water supply and for the fall Chinook run. Due to the drought, this is the third TUC issued since December 2013. The Water Agency staff consult regularly with resource agencies and upper river users regarding Lake Mendocino conditions.

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

- The Water Agency continues to work with contractors through the Sonoma-Marín Saving Water Partnership on an ad campaign messaging: There's a Drought on. Turn the Water Off.
- A tour of the Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project took place on November 14.
- Tours of the Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement project are scheduled for WAC/TAC members on February 5<sup>th</sup> (1:00--5:00 p.m.) and February 20 (8 a.m. – noon).



*Completed bank stabilization, Dry Creek Demonstration Project, November 2014*