



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – December 2016

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.

Fish Flow Project

On August 19, the Water Agency released the Environmental Impact Report for the Fish Habitat Flows and Water Rights Project. Open House workshops were held on August 22 (Cloverdale) and on August 24 (Monte Rio) and a public hearing was held on September 13, in Santa Rosa.

In response to public comments, Directors Carrillo and Gore proposed that the public comment period be extended and additional hearings be added. The Board of Directors approved an item to extend the Fish Flow Project Draft EIR public comment period to February 14, 2017 (a total of 180 days) and added public hearings in Cloverdale (November 16) and Guerneville (November 17). About 20 members of the public attended the Cloverdale hearing and there was one verbal comment. Approximately 120 people attended the Guerneville hearing, and there were 25 verbal comments.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

- Miles 2 and 3: In-stream construction is complete for the season on 0.6 miles of creek downstream of the Truett Hurst Winery and on a 0.3 mile reach downstream of the Westside Road Bridge. Water Agency Staff are working with property owners to finalize designs and right-of-way agreements for remaining Mile 2 and 3 sites planned for construction in 2017.
- Miles 4-6: Planning, preliminary field investigation and design are under way for Miles 4 - 6.
- The US Army Corps is using information from Mile 2-6 to complete two feasibility studies that should pave the way for federal funding. The first Army Corps study under the Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) will help complete Miles 2 and 3. A draft CAP study was recently completed and recommends Army Corps construction of reach 4a (total length 0.4 miles) at a total federal cost of \$3.28 million. The second Army Corps effort for Mile 4-6 planning, called a General Investigation (GI) Ecosystem Restoration study, has less funding restrictions and should be completed by 2018.

Fish Monitoring

As of November 19, a total of 989 Chinook salmon have been counted at the Mirabel Inflatable Dam, evidence the recently completed Russian River Fish Ladder is working as intended and providing incredible images of migrating fish. This number will be updated as fisheries staff review the video and verify the counts. Mirabel Dam was deflated for the season on November 20. Without the dam in place, fish cannot be counted in the fish ladder.

It is important to note that the number of observed fish does not represent the total number of fish migrating past the dam. Given the data gaps due to recent storms and non-operation of the east-side fish ladder video system this season, it's very difficult to compare this year's counts to previous seasons. Our current count at Mirabel could easily be 50-100% off the actual number of fish that have passed through the ladder.

Water Agency biologists continue to record adult fish entering Dry Creek and are currently performing spawning ground surveys in Dry Creek and tributary streams throughout the lower Russian River watershed.

Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement

Construction activities are complete. Testing is ongoing on the new screens; and interpretive signs are being designed for the viewing gallery. An opening ceremony and tour was held on November 2 for elected officials and others involved in the project.

A public event was held on Saturday, November 19 and 98 people attended (despite the rainy weather). Event attendees came almost entirely from Sonoma County, but represented many different cities and towns within the county. Almost everyone saw Chinook salmon in the ladder. We will schedule similar events next season.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

- The 2016 Lagoon Management Period began on May 15 and ended on October 15.
- During the 2016 management season, the mouth of the Russian River closed five times:
 - May 31: An outlet channel was implemented on June 7, but scoured open later that day.
 - June 15: An outlet channel was implemented on June 27, which scoured open that evening.
 - July 1: The estuary self-breached on July 12.
 - September 11: The estuary self-breached on September 30.
 - October 12: Water Agency artificially breached the barrier beach on October 20.
- During the past two years, studies were conducted to determine if and how the historic Goat Rock State Park jetty impacts the formation of the barrier beach and lagoon water surface elevation. Comments have been received on the draft report, and a final report will be released in the fall.

Interim Flow Changes

The Water Agency filed a Temporary Urgency Change Petition (TUCP) with the State Water Board in order to comply with the Biological Opinion flow requirements. The State Water Board issued a TUC order in May, and the order ended in October. Reports are due in April.

Public Outreach, Reporting & Legislation

- Signage was installed for a high-visibility Dry Creek habitat enhancement project at Truett Hurst.
- Outreach continues to be focused on the Fish Flow Draft EIR, including publicizing the availability of the document, community workshops and hearings.
- The ribbon cutting and official opening of Russian River Fish Ladder and Viewing Gallery took place on November 2. Due to public demand to see the project, a November 19 open house was held for the 200+ people on the tour waiting list. Nearly 100 people attended, despite very rainy weather.



Russian River Fish Ladder and Viewing Gallery ribbon cutting, November 2, 2016.