



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – December 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.

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 the focus is on revegetation. Approximately 3,000 plants will be installed this fall/winter.
- 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 in the upper river to determine the status of the migration. As of November 25, approximately 2,350 fish have been counted at Mirabel. Water Agency staff is 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 this fall.

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. The seismic upgrade project (not required by the Biological Opinion) will be underway in January and should take two months to complete. Major construction on the fish screen/fish ladder project is estimated to begin in June 2014.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

- 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 river mouth closed on October 21 and was breached on November 7. This Lagoon Management Period began on May 15 and ended on October 15.
- 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 November 25, storage in Lake Mendocino was approximately 31,933 acre-feet.

Public Outreach, Reporting & Legislation

- Two tours of the Dry Creek project site were held for WAC/TAC members on Friday, November 15 and Friday, November 22. The second tour was followed by a coho release event coordinated the US Army Corps of Engineers and the Water Agency. About 60 people attended the event, which included the release of 2,000 coho into the Corps and Water Agency's habitat enhancement sites.
- 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. The draft legislation is currently in conference to work out the differences between the House and Senate bills.

