



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – April 2015

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 is complete on the Dry Creek Demonstration Project, and the habitat enhancement projects withstood flows above 6,000 cfs resulting from the December 8 atmospheric river. Over the coming months, Water Agency crews are revegetating the disturbed areas of the project site with thousands of native trees, shrubs and grasses.
- Site identification, 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. The 30% designs were submitted by consultants in mid-February and have been reviewed by the Water Agency and other project partners (NOAA/NMFS, CDFW, Corps of Engineers). Water Agency staff are in the process of meeting with landowners to receive input on the 30% designs.
- The Water Agency released an RFQ in late December for design of miles four through six of habitat enhancement. Seven engineering firms submitted Statements of Qualifications, which were scored and ranked by a selection team of Water Agency Staff. Interviews with the four most qualified firms will be completed in early April, and one or more design firms will be selected in the weeks following the interview.

Fish Monitoring

The Water Agency has completed monitoring adult salmonids in the Russian River and have observed over 3,000 salmon and steelhead. These are partial counts as storms in 2014-15, and the installation of the Fish Passage Improvement Project at Mirabel, limited our ability to monitor fish. The new monitoring season is underway, and downstream migrant traps have been installed at Austin Creek, Dutch Bill Creek, Mark West Creek, and at Dry Creek.

Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement

Construction of the Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project illustrates the challenges of working in a river. Construction stalled in early December, when a portion of the coffer dam surrounding the site failed. The contractor repaired the cofferdam, dewatered the site, and resumed work which was then delayed in February due to storms. Construction is underway once again.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

- The 2014 Lagoon Management Period ended on October 15. Between September 18, when the river mouth closed, and November 26, the mouth was open for only four days, when it was breached by the Water Agency. The latest closure was on March 27th. Water levels rose to above 8 feet, when the Water Agency successfully breached the barrier beach.

- Monthly baseline monitoring of seals and other pinnipeds is ongoing.
- Field investigations of the jetty are largely complete. In 2014, monitoring wells were installed and other tests were conducted. 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.
- A training for volunteer pinniped monitors by the Water Agency and Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods was held on February 24.

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 early Fall 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. 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 was the third TUC issued since December 2013. The TUCP expired on February 20 and minimum flows have returned to normal conditions. The Water Agency is closely monitoring releases in order to preserve as much water as possible in Lake Mendocino, and expects to submit another TUC to the State Board this month.

Public Outreach, Reporting & Legislation

- Several WAC/TAC members participated in tours of the Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement projects on February 5th and 20th.
- Planning is underway for the annual spring/summer community meetings regarding the estuary and Dry Creek.
- The Water Agency launched its Salmon Steward program, in recognition of landowners who participate in the Dry Creek habitat enhancement project. Participants receive collateral marketing material, hats and signage.

