



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

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

- Detailed design, environmental studies, CEQA/permitting, and topographic surveys are under way for Miles 2-3 of habitat enhancement. Two firms, Inter-Fluve 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 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. The four most qualified firms were interviewed and the Water Agency is negotiating a new agreement with the design team led by Cardno (formerly Cardno ENTRIX) for the design of a portion of Miles 4-6, and will also amend the existing agreements with ESA and Inter-Fluve to cover the remaining portions. The amendments to the Inter-Fluve and ESA agreements will generally add areas that were included in their original agreements for Miles 2 and 3, but not advanced beyond the conceptual design level.

### **Fish Monitoring**

The new monitoring season is under way, 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 is entering a new phase of construction that involves installing piles that are sunk into the riverbank to a depth of 50 feet in order to stabilize the fish ladder structure. This phase of construction is expected to last approximately two weeks and work will take place from Monday-Saturday, 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. The equipment required for installing the pipes is a diesel-powered pile driver, which is loud. The Water Agency notified all residents within a two-mile radius of the project that there will be construction noise. A community meeting was held April 23 for interested neighbors. About 17 residents attended and received an update on the project and visited the fish ladder construction site.



*The Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement project*

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

The Water Agency will hold a community meeting on the Russian River Estuary Management project on June 11 at the Monte Rio Community Center. Presentations will include information about the upcoming lagoon management season and preliminary results of the study of the historic Goat Rock State Beach jetty. The meeting will be from 6-8 p.m. at the Monte Rio Community Center, 20488 Highway 116, Monte Rio). The June 11 meeting is the seventh community meeting discussing the estuary since the Biological Opinion was issued.

The latest closure of the river mouth was on April 16th. The presence of neonate (less than 1 week old) harbor seals required cancelling breaching activities to avoid impacting the pups. The river reached a level of 9.7 feet before the mouth opened on April 23.

The 2015 Lagoon Management Period begins on May 15. Water Agency staff are preparing for field monitoring activities, including installation of downstream migrant salmonid traps and water quality monitoring stations. Twice monthly baseline monitoring of seals and other pinnipeds is ongoing.

### **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 April 21, 2015 the Water Agency filed a Temporary Urgency Change Petition with the State Water Resources Control Board to temporarily lower Russian River flows starting May 1 through Oct. 27, 2015. Dry spring conditions have worsened water supply storage levels in Lake Mendocino and existing state mandated in-stream flow requirements do not accurately reflect current hydrologic conditions within the Russian River watershed. Based on Decision 1610, current hydrologic conditions would categorize water supply conditions as normal and therefore instream flows would remain set at 185 cubic feet per second through May 31. Beginning June 1, minimum instream flows would drop to 75 cfs based on the requirements of Decision 1610.

If the TUCP is approved by the State Water Board, Russian River flows would be reduced to:

- Upper Russian River: From 185 cubic-feet-per-second (cfs) to 75 cfs from the confluence of the Russian River's east and west forks to the river's confluence with Dry Creek
- Lower Russian River: From 125 cfs to 85 cfs from the confluence with Dry Creek to the Pacific Ocean

To improve efforts to optimally manage flows in the Russian River, the Water Agency requests that the minimum instream flow requirements be implemented on a 5-day running average of average daily stream flow measurements with instantaneous flows on the Upper Russian River being no less than 65 cfs and on the Lower Russian River being no less than 75cfs.

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

- Planning is under way for the annual spring/summer community meetings regarding the Estuary and Dry Creek. The Estuary meeting is scheduled for June 11 at the Monte Rio Community Center from 6-8 p.m. A date for the Dry Creek meeting is yet to be determined.