



## **Russian River Biological Opinion Update – October 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 Project**

- Water Agency Staff are performing the implementation and effectiveness monitoring of habitat features constructed for the Dry Creek Mile 1 Demonstration Project
- The draft Environmental Impact Report for miles two through six of habitat enhancement was released on July 11. A public hearing was held on August 11. Comments were due by 5 p.m. August 24, and were received from Caltrans, the Russian River Watershed Protection Committee, and one landowner in the project area. It is anticipated that the final EIR will go to Water Agency Board of Directors for approval on November 10, 2015.
- Site identification, environmental studies and topographic surveys are nearly complete for the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. Two firms, Interfluve and ESA, are designing the second and third miles of habitat enhancement, respectively.
- The Water Agency and Regulatory Agencies have provided comments on the Mile 2 60% designs, and Inter-Fluve is incorporating them into the 90% design. The Water Agency and Regulatory Agencies are currently reviewing the Mile 3 60% designs. Water Agency staff are in the process of meeting with landowners to receive input on the 60% designs.
- Three firms were selected for design of miles four through six of habitat enhancement: Interfluve, ESA and Cardno. The Water Agency is currently identifying potential project sites and negotiating design contracts with each firm.

### **Fish Monitoring**

In March, downstream migrant traps were installed at Austin Creek, Dutch Bill Creek, Mark West Creek, and at Dry Creek. All traps have now been removed. Regular beach seining at multiple locations throughout the Russian River estuary is nearing completion for the season.

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

Construction of the Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project is proceeding, with construction anticipated to be complete by the end of the year. A temporary (coffer) dam was installed at Wohler Bridge to create a backwater pool in order to meet projected summer water demands. The dam will be removed before the end of October.

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

- The 2015 Lagoon Management Period ends on October 15. The barrier beach closed again on September 8 and remains closed as of September 30. The beach north of the jetty cannot be accessed by heavy equipment due to the low beach height adjacent to the jetty, so the Water Agency is unable to implement an outlet channel or artificially breach the barrier beach. Baseline pinniped monitoring is

conducted regularly. Water quality monitoring is ongoing, including weekly sampling for nutrients and bacteria, as well as algae monitoring at incremental changes in water surface elevations within the closed estuary/lagoon. Fisheries seining and invertebrate sampling is also continuing through the end of the management season.

- Field investigations of the jetty are 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. Consultants are currently analyzing data and preparing a report, which is expected to be released this fall.

### **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 Winter 2015-16.

### **Interim Flow Changes**

On May 1, the State Water Resources Quality Control Board issued a Temporary Urgency Change Order for Russian River flows. The change was requested by the Water Agency to preserve water in Lake Mendocino. Within a few days of the order being issued, the Water Agency was informed by PG&E of its pending request to reduce diversions from the Eel River through its Potter Valley Project, as a result of the drought. The reduction represents a loss of about 30-100 acre-feet of water per day. To preserve water in the lake, the Water Agency went back to the State Water Board to request additional reductions in releases from Lake Mendocino; on June 17, the State Water Board issued an amendment to the TUC. As a result, the minimum flow requirement in the upper river is 25 cfs and 50 cfs in the lower river.

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

- Several WAC and TAC members viewed construction of the fishway improvement project on Wednesday, August 26.
- The annual Dry Creek Community meeting will be held on January 14 at 6:00 p.m.
- In October an informational flyer will be sent to Dry Creek residents updating them on the project.



*Russian River estuary, September 29. The jetty prevents equipment from accessing the northern section of the beach to create an outlet channel.*