



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – April 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.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

Easement agreements have been signed with six property owners for work in 2016 and right-of-way staff are busy securing agreements for construction in 2017. Planning has also been initiated for Miles 4-6. Three engineering design firms (Inter-Fluve, ESA, and Cardno) met with staff from the Water Agency, US Army Corps of Engineers, US Fish and Wildlife Service, NMFS, and California Dept. of Fish and Wildlife to kick-off the Mile 4-6 engineering design process on February 25. The US Army Corps is using information from both the Mile 2-3 and Mile 4-6 efforts 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 be completed this spring and will recommend reaches in Miles 2 and 3 that are eligible for less than \$10 million dollars in total federal funding. 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.

The Water Agency has been working with NOAA's NMFS on a programmatic Dry Creek Safe Harbor Agreement (SHA) that would provide extra protection to landowners participating in the Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project. The SHA was signed on March 3 and staff from NMFS and the Water Agency are meeting with property owners to discuss enrollment in the Safe Harbor Program

Fish Monitoring

During the week of March 29, Water Agency biologists began operating traps to capture downstream migrating juvenile salmonids in several Russian River tributaries. The downstream migrant trapping season typically extends through early summer.

Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement

Construction has stopped and started several times during the winter, as the river has risen and fallen. It is anticipated that construction will end in late spring, with the project officially complete sometime in the fall.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

- The 2015 Lagoon Management Period ended on October 15. The Water Agency did not have an opportunity to implement an outlet channel during the management period. Since the management period ended, the estuary has closed four times. Dangerous beach conditions during a closure in December prevented the Water Agency from breaching the sand bar and water levels rose to approximately 12 feet, inundating the Jenner Visitors Center and briefly interrupting traffic on Highway 1. The estuary self-breached on December 12.
- Baseline monitoring of harbor seals and other pinnipeds is conducted regularly and prior, during and after every artificial breaching. Water quality monitoring at datasonde stations has ended

for the season. The Annual Pinniped Monitoring Volunteer Training is scheduled for April 5 and 6. Please spread the word, as volunteer numbers are low.

- Field investigations of the jetty are complete. The purpose of the studies are to determine if and how the jetty impacts the formation of the barrier beach and lagoon water surface elevation. Consultants completed a draft report which is currently being review by the relevant resource agencies. A final report is expected to be released in April.

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 Summer 2016.

Interim Flow Changes

The most recent Temporary Urgency Change Petition expired on October 27. PG&E filed another variance with FERC to reduce flows in order to perform major maintenance on its penstock. The Water Agency will file a Temporary Urgency Change Petition (TUCP) with the State Water Board in order to comply with the Biological Opinion.

Public Outreach, Reporting & Legislation

- The annual Public Policy Facilitating committee meeting was held on March 3. A total of about 80 people attended either the PPFC meeting or the Safe Harbor Agreement signing ceremony.
- The annual Estuary Community Meeting will be held on April 20, 6-8 p.m. at the Monte Rio Community Center.



Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project, early March.