



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – January 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 will be revegetating the disturbed areas of the project site with thousands of native trees, shrubs and grasses.
- 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, are designing the second and third miles of habitat enhancement. Ten-percent designs have been completed and presented to the property owners for feedback. Each design consultant has been given over 1.25 miles of habitat enhancements to advance to 30% design.
- The Water Agency signed a memorandum of understanding with the US Army Corps of Engineers for a Continuing Authorities Program (CAP) project that should allow the Corps to contribute funding for a portion of the mile 2-3 phase of Dry Creek Habitat enhancement.

Fish Monitoring

It has been a challenging season to count the migrating adult salmon and steelhead. With the inflatable dam down during the Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project construction, adult fish were monitored in Dry Creek and at the Healdsburg Dam fish ladder using video and sonar technology. With the river mouth closed for most of October and November, returns were low, although several fish were counted following the November 17 estuary breaching. The Healdsburg camera and the sonar technology were removed before the December 8 storm, and turbid water quality has made it difficult to identify fish videoed at the Dry Creek location. The partial count total count to date from Dry Creek and Healdsburg stands at 1,333 Chinook salmon, 18 coho salmon, and 25 steelhead.

Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement

Construction of the Mirabel Fish Passage Improvement Project stalled in early December, when a portion of the coffer dam surrounding the site failed. The contractor is waiting for the river level to drop before attempting to repair the cofferdam. Once a fix has been completed, the contractor will resume dewatering activities so that construction activities may resume. It is anticipated that construction will resume by mid-January.

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. It has remained open since the November 26 breaching.

- Downstream migrant fish sampling is underway at Austin Creek and with an antenna at Duncans Mills that can read passive integrated transponders (PIT) tags. Monthly baseline monitoring of seals and other pinnipeds is ongoing.
- Field investigations of the jetty continue. 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.

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 Summer 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 (minimum flows are based on a five day running average) until water levels in Lake Mendocino reach 68,400 feet or 180 days (whichever is reached first). 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 is the third TUC issued since December 2013.

Public Outreach, Reporting & Legislation

- Due to heavy rains in December, the Water Agency and contractors put a temporary hold on the Sonoma-Marin Saving Water Partnership on an ad campaign messaging: There's a Drought on. Turn the Water Off.
- The annual meeting of the Public Policy Facilitating Committee to review progress on implementation of the Biological Opinion will be held 9-noon, Wednesday, January 28 at the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors Chambers.
- Tours of the Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement project are scheduled for WAC/TAC members on February 5th (1:00--5:00 p.m.) and February 20 (8 a.m. – noon).



Backwater, Dry Creek Demonstration Project, December 8, 2014