



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – March 2013

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 Demonstration Project

- Construction is completed at the Quivira Vineyards and Winery segment of the demonstration project, which consists primarily of a 300-foot long backwater channel. During the large storms in late November, the backwater channel (which provides much needed winter refuge habitat for young endangered coho and steelhead salmon) filled up and overtopped as designed. Antennas installed to track fish recorded hundreds of detections from fish taking refuge in the channel indicating that fish spent considerable time there.
- Construction bidding and right-of-way negotiations are underway for the remainder of the one-mile demonstration project. The construction bid was advertised on February 7, and the pre-bid site visits were conducted on the 19th and 21st of February.
- Staking of the construction limits for all sites, and work to clear vegetation from the site of a large backwater pool feature on the Amista Winery property below Lambert Bridge were completed by in late January.
- Construction of the majority of the remainder of the one-mile demonstration reach will occur this summer.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement

- Site identification, outreach to landowners and design consultant selection is underway for the second and third miles of habitat enhancement.
- The Water Agency, National Marine Fisheries Service, Department of Fish & Wildlife and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are working with consultants, ESSA, to develop clear success measures for habitat enhancement. The plan should be completed in early 2013.

Tributary Fish Passage and Habitat Enhancement Projects

- The Grape Creek passage project (creating fish passage through a box culvert) construction is complete. Sotoyome Resource Conservation District is managing the project for the Water Agency.
- Construction on the Wallace Creek project (the final tributary project) has been stalled due to lack of easement with one landowner. Other options are being pursued.

- During the summer season, thousands of juvenile steelhead and coho were counted and released in migrant traps in the Russian River, at Mirabel, in Dry Creek, Mark West Creek and Dutch Bill Creek. See chart on the following page for last season's estimates!

Mirabel Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement

- The Water Agency received a \$1.2 million grant from California Department of Fish and Wildlife Fishery Restoration Grant for project construction. This follows a \$255,000 grant for project design.
- The 90% design is ongoing. On January 29, the Water Agency Board adopted the Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration.
- The inflatable dam was lowered November 21-23. While final numbers are being verified, the Chinook salmon count is in excess of 6,700 breaking previous records.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

- The 2012 Lagoon Management Period ended on October 15. The estuary closed briefly during the 2012 management period, but there were no opportunities to implement the outlet channel. Biological and water quality monitoring took place throughout the Lagoon Management Period.
- A study of the jetty is underway. The purpose of the study is to determine if and how it impacts the formation of the sand bar (barrier beach) and lagoon water surface elevation. While the historic component of the study was completed at the end of 2012, field investigations have been stalled, due to a lack of permit from the California Coastal Commission.

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 2013.

Interim Flow Changes

- The 2012 Temporary Urgency Change order period ended on October 15. Work is underway to prepare the fisheries, water quality and water use efficiency reports required under the order.

Public Outreach & Reporting

- Staff is working with Quivira to identify a date for the WAC/TAC (possibly the morning of April 3) to tour the demonstration project.
- The annual Biological Opinion Report (required by NMFS) was released in late 2012.