



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – January 2019

The Sonoma County Water Agency (Sonoma Water) is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. Below is a brief synopsis of current work. For more detailed information about these activities, please visit www.sonomacountywater.org.

Fish Flow Project

The Fish Flow Habitat and Water Rights Project (Fish Flow) Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) was released on August 19, 2016. The public comment period closed on March 10, 2017. Three public hearings were held (September 9, 2016, in Santa Rosa, November 16, 2016, in Cloverdale, and November 17, 2016, in Guerneville) to obtain public comments on the Draft EIR. Submitted comments fall into a number of categories, but many comments fall into the following general issues:

- Water Quality (e.g. algae and biostimulatory conditions);
- Water Rights (e.g. illegal/unauthorized diversions along Russian River, minimum bypass flow terms in State Water Resources Control Board-issued water right permits);
- Recreation (e.g. lower Russian River recreation and tourism, quantity and quality of river flow for recreation);
- Independent Science Review Panel (ISRP) Report (e.g. consideration of results/recommendations of ISRP report in Draft EIR);
- Proposed Project description and alternatives (e.g. consideration of “adaptive management” in implementation of proposed project).

Sonoma Water staff are addressing issues raised by comments. Staff are also clarifying the next steps for the CEQA process including recirculation of the Draft EIR.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

Construction of habitat enhancements for 2018 has been completed on Reaches 4 and 14 of Dry Creek. The contractor, McCullough Construction, will begin work on the third of the three sites in Reach 14 around the middle of June 2019. Concurrently, Sonoma Water and the Corps of Engineers are moving ahead with Phases IV, V, and VI of the habitat enhancement project, which make up the last three of the six miles required by the Russian River Biological Opinion. The sites included in these phases are located in Reaches 1, 2, 4, 10, and 13 of the 14 reaches of Dry Creek downstream of Warm Springs Dam, with each reach being approximately a mile long. Phase IV includes Reaches 10 and 13, Phase V includes part of Reach 2 and Reach 4, and Phase VI includes Reach 1 and lower Reach 2. The designs for these reaches are at the 30% completion level and the Water Agency is meeting with property owners to obtain comments, answer questions, and explain the process. The 60% design submittal is expected in May of 2019. Construction of these sites will be funded and implemented by the Corps of Engineers. Sonoma Water is the non-federal sponsor for the project and will contribute a 35% cost match. The Corps plans to Construct Phase VI in 2021, Phase V in 2022, and Phase IV in 2023.

Fish Monitoring

We recently completed the 2018 fish population surveys in main stem Dry Creek. These surveys serve objectives of the Coastal Monitoring Program (CMP) and allow us to place fish monitoring results in habitat enhanced areas of Dry Creek into a broader context. During juvenile surveys young coho were observed in eight of the nine sections sampled. Our fish monitoring in the winter includes placement of antennas in newly-created off-channel areas to evaluate whether tagged steelhead and coho are taking advantage of these habitats. CMP surveys for adult salmon

and steelhead redds has begun. To date we have seen several coho and Chinook salmon redds but it is still a bit early for steelhead. These surveys will continue through the spring, usually ending in mid-April. On September 1 we installed video cameras in the fish ladders at the Mirabel inflatable dam. We use these cameras to count adult Chinook, steelhead, and coho that return to the Russian River to spawn. As of December 13 we have observed 1,121 adult Chinook ascending the fish ladders.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

The 2018 season ended on October 15. Staff are working on data analysis and preparation of reports for the prior year management season. The Russian River Estuary closed as a result of formation of a barrier beach on October 15, 2018 and reopened on November 13 following digging of channel by unknown individuals. The river mouth briefly closed again on November 18 and self-breached on November 24 and then closed on December 14 and – after reaching a water surface elevation of 10.9 feet above sea level – self-breached on December 16.

Interim Flow Changes

Water supply conditions are currently *Normal*. A decision about the need to file a petition for interim flow changes – whether it be for drought or Biological Opinion compliance - will be made in a couple of months.



Sonoma Water staff conduct population surveys for juvenile steelhead on the main stem of Dry Creek.