



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – May 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 in 2016 for public comments. 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 working on revisions in anticipation of recirculating the Draft EIR. Staff are also working on outreach materials to improve communication and understanding of key topics related to the Fish Flow Project.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

On April 22, 2019 the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Army Corps) and Sonoma Water hosted a ribbon-cutting celebration and a Design Agreement signing ceremony at the site of the completed Reach 4 on Dry Creek. The event was attended by more than 100 guests, including Brigadier General Kimberly Colloton from the Army Corps, and Congressman Jared Huffman. The event was also hosted by the property owner, Ferrari-Carano Winery & Vineyards, who have been supporters and partners in the project. The event marked the completion of Reach 4 under the Army Corps CAP program, which brings the habitat enhancement total to more than three miles of the six miles required under the Biological Opinion. The Design Agreement signing allows the two agencies to continue to work together to complete the remaining three miles of the 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. Sonoma Water staff are also working to complete the final designs and permitting for the last remaining Phase III project work in Reach 5, which is expected to be constructed in 2020. Concurrently, Sonoma Water and Army Corps 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. A 30% design workshop was held January 29 with staff from Sonoma Water, the Army Corps, NMFS, Cal Fish & Wildlife, and three engineering consulting firms. The 60% design submittal is expected in August-of 2019. Construction of these sites will be funded and implemented by the Army Corps. Sonoma Water is the non-federal sponsor for the project and will contribute a 35% cost match. The Army Corps plans to Construct Phase VI in 2021, Phase V in 2022, and Phase IV in 2023.



Representatives from resource agencies, landowners, Army Corps of Engineers, and Sonoma Water marked the completion of Reach 4, and the halfway mark of the Dry Creek Project, with a ribbon-cutting ceremony on April 22, 2019.

Fish Monitoring

Despite exceptionally high wintertime flows early in 2019 due to storm events, Sonoma Water was able to place antennas in newly created off-channel habitats along mainstem Dry Creek before the storms hit. Results continue to show that young coho salmon and steelhead are taking advantage of these habitats thus highlighting their importance in protecting young salmonids from high flows. Sonoma Water uses video cameras in the fish ladders at the Mirabel inflatable dam to count adult salmonids returning to the Russian River to spawn. Results from this effort in 2018 revealed that the number of adult Chinook ascending the ladders was lower than average. Population levels of Chinook fluctuate naturally and in large part are driven by survival conditions in the ocean. Surveys for adult coho salmon and steelhead occurred throughout several tributaries in the basin and showed an increasing trend in both the number of coho and steelhead redds (a redd is the “nest” that fish build to incubate their eggs).

Russian River Estuary Management Project

The 2019 management season begins on May 15 and ends on October 15. Staff are working on data analysis and preparation of reports for the prior year management season. The draft 2019 Adaptive Management Plan was submitted to the resource agencies for public review on April 1, 2019. Sonoma Water's consultants are currently responding to the comments and the final AMP is anticipated to be completed by May 15, 2019. Biological and water quality monitoring will begin in May, including fisheries monitoring, deployment of datasondes, and invertebrate monitoring. Baseline pinniped monitoring is ongoing. The April beach topographic survey was rescheduled to early May (so there will be two in May) due to the presence of neonate (pups less than 1 week old) on the beach.

Interim Flow Changes

Water supply conditions are currently *Normal*. Sonoma Water submitted a Petition for Temporary Urgency Change to modify the minimum instream flow requirements for the Russian River as established by Decision 1610 for Permits 12947 A, 12949, 12950 and 16596 on April 23, 2019. The petition was submitted as required by the Russian River Biological Opinion issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service in September 2008.