



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – July 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 June 15, 2019 McCullough Construction began work on the third of the three sites in Reach 14 on property owned by Gallo Wines.

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. Sonoma Water staff are continuing to collect habitat data in the completed sites after the high flows that occurred in Dry Creek this past winter. Maintenance work to remove accumulated sediment will be required at some sites.



This month 2,000 coho from the conservation hatchery at Warm Springs Dam will be released into habitat enhancement sites throughout Dry Creek. At the Reach 4 site constructed by the Army Corps in 2019, Sonoma Water biologists are conducting an experiment to study the behavior of released hatchery fish using small radio tags.

Sonoma Water and the 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. Sonoma Water is now meeting with participating property owners to obtain comments, answer questions, address concerns, and explain the process. Concurrently, Sonoma Water and the Army Corps are working closely with the engineering design consultants as they refine the designs to address property owner comments and concerns, and adhere to Army Corps' design requirements. These refinements will be included in the 60% design submittal, which is expected in August, 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 share. The Army Corps plans to Construct Phase IV in 2021, Phase V in 2022, and Phase VI in 2023.

Fish Monitoring

During the spring each year, Sonoma Water operates fish traps at five locations in the Russian River Watershed: Dry Creek, the Mirabel Dam, Mark West Creek, Dutch Bill Creek and Austin Creek. These traps are designed to capture fish as they move downstream giving biologists information on salmon and steelhead smolts produced from key locations. Late spring rains, including record rainfall in May, hampered our ability to safely install and operate these traps on a consistent basis this spring. Annual snorkel and electrofishing surveys aimed at assessing juvenile populations residing in streams throughout the watershed began in June and will continue through October and will include assessments of use of newly-created habitat in Dry Creek by juvenile coho salmon and steelhead.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

The 2019 management season began 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 2019 Adaptive Management Plan was completed by May 22, 2019. Biological and water quality monitoring began in May, including fisheries monitoring, deployment of water quality datasondes, grab sampling for nutrient and bacteria monitoring, and invertebrate monitoring. Baseline pinniped monitoring is ongoing. The annual Estuary Management Project Community Meeting is scheduled for August 28, 2019, from 6:00 to 7:30 pm, at the Jenner Community Center.

Interim Flow Changes

Water supply conditions are currently *Normal*. Sonoma Water filed Temporary Urgency Change Petitions (Petitions) with the State Water Resources Control Board 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. On June 20, 2019 an Order Approving Petitions for Temporary Urgency Changes to Permit Terms and Conditions (Order) modifying minimum instream flow requirements was issued. The temporary requirements are to be in place through October 15, 2019. The Petitions were filed as required by the Russian River Biological Opinion issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service in September 2008.

