



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – August 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 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. Habitat data collection is continuing 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.



In July, 2,000 coho from the conservation hatchery at Warm Springs Dam were 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 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 to 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 this month. 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

Fish trapping is coming to a close for the season. Because of high winter flows and late rains, 2019 was an unusual year – relatively few Chinook salmon smolts were captured in Dry Creek and at the Mirabel fish traps on the mainstem of the Russian River, yet daily catches of juvenile steelhead were somewhat higher than average. Annual snorkel and electrofishing surveys to assess juvenile populations in watershed streams 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. 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.

On July 18, the estuary closed and –as of July 31 – remains closed, with water surface elevation at 8.1 feet. Based on recent beach topographic survey results, forecasted tides, wave conditions and lagoon water surface elevations, a self-breach is anticipated to occur over the weekend. Staff have coordinated with resource agency staff and will tentatively schedule implementation of outlet channel activities for Monday, August 5, if a self-breach does not occur. This could change based on conditions on Monday and further consultation with resource agencies. The public will be notified, and harbor seals and other pinnipeds will be monitored.

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 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.