



## Russian River Biological Opinion Update – September 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](http://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**

Work is essentially completed on the third of the three sites in Reach 14 (approximately one mile downstream from Warm Springs Dam) on property owned by Gallo Wines. Sonoma Water staff are completing the final designs and permitting for the last remaining Phase 3 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. Sonoma Water is planning maintenance work to restore full function to sites that accumulated sediment during extended high flows.



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 4-6 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 worked with the engineering design consultants to refine the designs to address property owner concerns, and adhere to Army Corps' design requirements. These refinements were included in the 60% design submittal, delivered on August 30<sup>th</sup>, which includes engineering drawings, costs estimates and design report. The Army Corps and Sonoma Water will review the 60% submittal, and solicit comments from permitting agencies and property owners. The Corps will also conduct a value engineering workshop in October. Construction 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 4 in 2021, Phase 5 in 2022, and Phase 6 in 2023.

### **Fish Monitoring**

Fish trapping has ended 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.

On July 18, the estuary closed and remained closed through August 3, when it self-breached (although neighbors reported that some kayakers might have given it some help). Water surface elevations reached 8.56 feet.

The annual Estuary Management Project Community Meeting was held on August 28 in Jenner. About 25 people attended to hear presentations about the estuary management plan, and what Sonoma Water has learned from estuary fish, invertebrate, pinniped and water quality surveys.

### **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.