



## Russian River Biological Opinion Update – November 2020

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, 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 currently working on revisions in anticipation of recirculating the Draft EIR in spring 2021.

### **Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project**

Hanford ARC, the contractor hired by Sonoma Water to construct the remaining Phase III sites, is nearly finished with construction of the elements that must be completed in 2020. Despite a one-week delay due to the mandatory evacuations for the Walbridge fire, Hanford has completed all of the work near the active flow of the creek and is now focused on activities well above the water level. Although it is after the instream work window that ended on October 15, the Environmental staff at Sonoma Water are obtaining extensions from the RWQCB and CADFW to allow Hanford to keep working if the weather forecast is dry. Hanford is scheduled to finish and demobilize by November 3. Construction of the two remaining Phase III project elements is planned for the 2021 in-stream work window from June 15 to October 15.

Hanford has also completed the maintenance activities on three previously-constructed projects under a separate contract. This work involved removing sediment deposited during the sustained flood flows that occurred in February and March of 2019 and restoring the inflow by reopening the upstream connection with the main channel. The sites now provide as much or more habitat than when initially constructed and will hopefully be more resilient in the future.

As the construction of the final elements of Phases I through III nears completion, Sonoma Water and the Army Corps of Engineers continue to make progress on Phases IV - VI of the habitat enhancement project. Sonoma Water right-of-way staff remain hard at work negotiating easements with property owners, while Sonoma Water and the Corps review the 99% design documents and prepare the bid package that will be advertised by the Corps for the Phase IV sites, which are grouped in two reaches of Dry Creek: one approximately one mile downstream and another two miles upstream of Yoakim Bridge. The bid package will likely include a base project of sites for construction in 2021 with the option to construct the remaining sites in 2021 or in 2022. Sonoma Water and Corps staff are also developing the formal Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) that will describe the financial terms, roles, and responsibilities of the Corps-led construction effort.

### **Fish Monitoring**

This time of year, our monitoring focus turns toward the adult life stage of salmon and steelhead. We are off to a bit of a slow start with our Chinook salmon underwater video monitoring at the Mirabel dam fish ladders: only 14 Chinook salmon thus far. The main reason for this slow start, however, is because the mouth of the Russian River has been closed since late September. Now that the mouth is open, we expect to see increases in the number of upstream migrating adult Chinook.

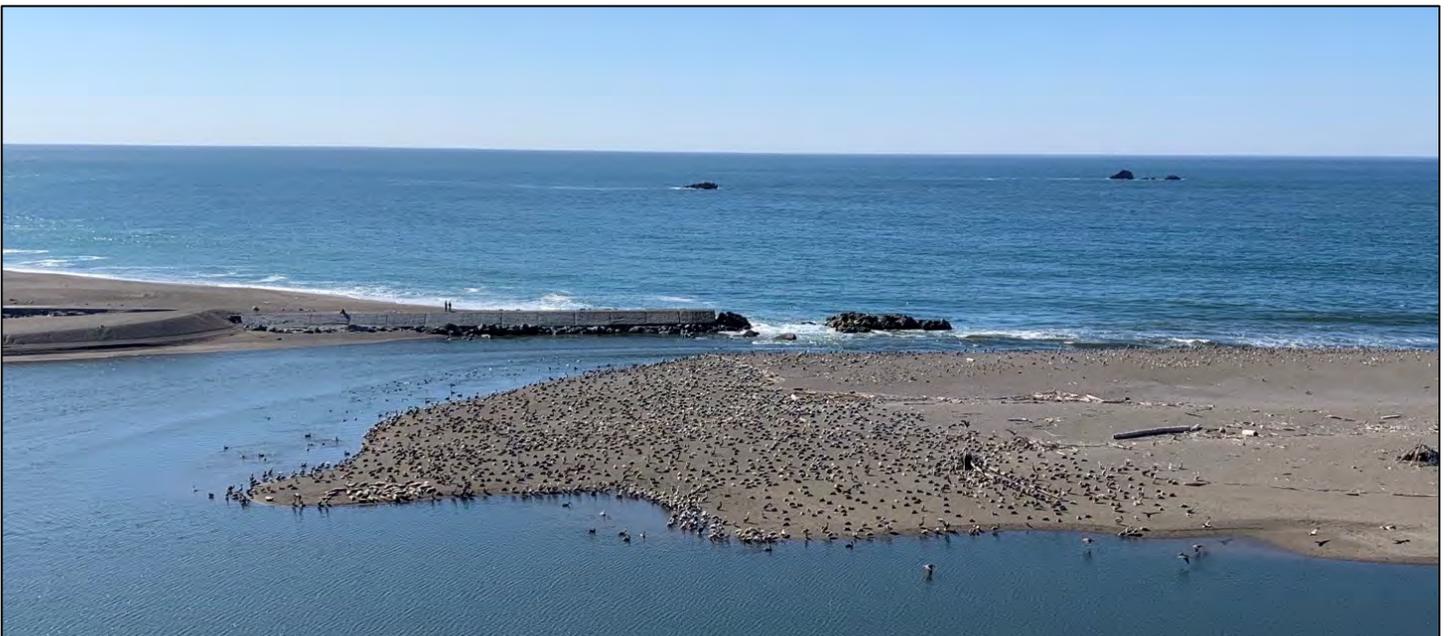
Provided much needed rain comes, we expect to begin spawner surveys soon. Those surveys consist of counting and geo-locating redds (the nests in which salmon and steelhead deposit their eggs). Our focus will begin with Chinook spawner surveys in the early part of the season then transition to surveys that focus on finding coho and steelhead redds.



*First adult Chinook of 2020! (9/29/2020)*

### **Russian River Estuary Management Project**

The 2020 management season began on May 15 and ended on October 15. The river mouth closed on September 28, self-breached on October 26, and is currently open. The 2020 Adaptive Management Plan was finalized in May. Baseline, weekly pinniped monitoring is ongoing and the remaining biological monitoring has concluded for the season.



*The mouth of the Russian River self-breached on October 26, 2020.*

### **Interim Flow Changes**

Water supply conditions are currently *Dry*. Normally, under *Dry* conditions, Sonoma Water would not be filing 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. In the spring, however, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission issued a variance for the operation of PG&E's Potter Valley Project. The change in operation was expected to result in limited transfers of water through the hydroelectric project this summer and adversely impact water storage levels in Lake Mendocino. Sonoma Water staff modelled the expected changes and, based on that work, prepared a supporting technical memo and Petitions. The

Petitions were filed on June 8, 2020. The Temporary Urgency Change Order (Order) was issued by the State Water Board on July 28, 2020. We will operate under the terms of the Order through December 27 when it expires. A press release on the Petitions can be found here: <https://www.sonomawater.org/news/post/9340/>. The Order can be found here: <https://www.sonomawater.org/tucp>