



## Russian River Biological Opinion Update – January, 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 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**

Sonoma Water staff are making final refinements to the habitat project and access routes, and obtaining permits 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 for next year to restore full function to sites that accumulated sediment during extended high flows.

Sonoma Water and the Army Corps are moving ahead with Phases IV - 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 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. The 60% design package was submitted on August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2019 and included engineering drawings, cost estimates, hydraulic modeling files and results, and design reports. The design consultants are currently addressing comments received from the 60% Design Review Meeting and reviews by the Corps, Sonoma Water and the Permitting Agencies.

As part of their design process, the Corps is required to conduct a value engineering workshop where a third party consultant evaluates the project and makes recommendations for making it more cost effective. The workshop was held December 9–11 at the Sonoma Water offices, with most of the first day devoted to project summaries and site visits. HDR was the design firm contracted to perform the value engineering assessment. HDR will submit a report summarizing their findings in the coming weeks. The Army Corps and Sonoma Water will then review the findings and reconvene the value engineering team in an implementation workshop to determine how to incorporate the suggestions.

Meanwhile, Sonoma Water continues to meet with participating property owners to present the 60% designs, obtain comments, answer questions, address concerns, and explain the process.

### **Fish Monitoring**

The underwater video monitoring season at Mirabel aimed at counting adult Chinook salmon as they migrate upstream to spawn has wrapped up for the 2019 season. Attention has now turned to efforts to survey where, when and hopefully how many salmon and steelhead spawn in the Russian River and tributaries.



***An image of a female adult Chinook salmon spawning near one of the mainstem Dry Creek enhancement sites.***

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

The 2019 management season began on May 15 and ended on October 15. There was a single closure during the management season, which ended in a self-breach. The 2019 Adaptive Management Plan was completed by May 22, 2019. Biological and water quality monitoring began in May and concluded in October, including fisheries monitoring, deployment of water quality datasondes, grab sampling for nutrient and bacteria monitoring, and invertebrate monitoring. Weekly baseline pinniped monitoring is ongoing. The annual community meeting was held in Jenner on August 28, 2019, and was attended by approximately 30 people.

The river mouth closed on Thursday, November 21 and water surface elevations in the lagoon increased quickly due to the combination of rain, large waves breaking over the beach, and high tides. The barrier beach self-breached on Thursday, November 28. The estuary is currently open.

### **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. The June 20, 2019 Order Approving Petitions for Temporary Urgency Changes to Permit Terms and Conditions (Order) expired on October 15, 2019. Several reports required by the Order will be prepared and filed with the state in 2020. The Petitions were filed as required by the Russian River Biological Opinion issued by the National Marine Fisheries Service in September 2008.