



## Russian River Biological Opinion Update – February, 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 is working to start construction in the summer of 2020 on the last remaining Phase 3 project in Reach 5 approximately five miles upstream from the confluence with the Russian River. Sonoma Water Staff are reviewing the final designs, and preparing the bid package (plans and specifications) that will be advertised to contractors, while also obtaining permits and finalizing the last agreements with property owners. The current plan is to advertise the project to potential bidders in late February or early March. Sonoma Water is also 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. The Army Corps, Sonoma Water and the design consultants are also reviewing the findings of the Value Engineering study conducted in December and will hold a workshop on February 3<sup>rd</sup> to determine how to respond to and incorporate the recommendations.

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

### **Fish Monitoring**

As the spawner survey season continues, our field crews have begun to see more steelhead spawning activity while Coho and Chinook spawning is slowing down. Given the biology of these three species in the Russian, this pattern is expected. Earlier this season we documented multiple adult Coho and Chinook entering newly-created habitat features

along mainstem Dry Creek and we expect adult steelhead to similarly take advantage of conditions afforded by these habitat features as the winter progresses.



***A pair of adult steelhead preparing to spawn in Woods Creek (a tributary to Dry Creek).***

#### **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 Sunday, January 5, 2020, and water surface elevations in the lagoon increased quickly. The barrier beach was artificially breached on Tuesday, January 7, 2020, by which time water levels had risen to 10.03 ft. 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.