



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – August 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.

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

Sonoma Water began construction in July 2020 on the last remaining Phase 3 project in Reach 5, which is approximately five miles upstream from the confluence with the Russian River. A notice to proceed was issued to Hanford ARC of Petaluma on July 14. Hanford is mobilizing equipment to the site and instream construction will begin in August. Hanford also began performing maintenance activities on existing projects during the week of July 27.

Sonoma Water and the Army Corps continue to make progress on Phases IV - VI of the habitat enhancement project. While designs advance from the 90 to 99% phase, Sonoma Water right-of-way staff are hard at work negotiating easements with property owners. Sonoma Water and Corps staff are developing the formal Project Partnership Agreement (PPA) that will describe the financial terms, roles, and responsibilities of the Corps led construction effort.

Fish Monitoring

With juvenile downstream migrant trapping coming to a close for the season, our attention turns to sampling young coho salmon and steelhead as they rear in tributaries, including Dry Creek, throughout the summer. Team of biologists are already at work counting fish in myriad small streams throughout the watershed using mask and snorkel and electrofishing equipment.

In Dry Creek, Sonoma Water biologists are partnering with biologists and consultants from the Army Corps to experiment with new acoustic telemetry tags that may reveal how young fish are using habitat restoration features. During the months of July and August, the team will tag up to 100 small steelhead and record their movements through a network of 30 datalogging receivers equipped with underwater hydrophones. Each tiny tag implanted in the fish transmits an identification code every few seconds that can be detected by multiple hydrophones – allowing the location of fish to be triangulated.



Steelhead swim past recently installed monitoring equipment in Dry Creek

Russian River Estuary Management Project

The 2020 management season began on May 15 and ends on October 15. The river mouth is currently open. The 2020 Adaptive Management Plan was finalized in May. Staff continue biological and water quality, including fisheries and water quality monitoring. Monthly seining monitoring has been modified due to COVID-19 and is focused on monitoring habitat conditions for juvenile steelhead.

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. Recently, however, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission issued a variance for the operation of PG&E's Potter Valley Project. The change in operation is 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 have 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 Orders were issued by the State Water Board on July 28, 2020.

A press release on the Petitions can be found here: <https://www.sonomawater.org/news/post/9340/>