



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 selected Hanford ARC through a public bid process earlier in 2020 and they began construction of the last remaining Phase III project in July. The project is located approximately five miles upstream from the confluence with the Russian River. Despite a one-week delay due to the required evacuations for the Walbridge fire, Hanford has completed all of the work in the active flow of the creek associated with one of the primary project elements, and removed the temporary flow diversion and dewatering measures. They are now currently well-positioned to finish the remaining work that must be completed in 2020 in compliance with the in-stream work window ending October 15th. 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, under a separate contract, has also completed maintenance activities on two previously-constructed projects and is close to finishing maintenance on a third project. This maintenance work involves removing sediment deposited during the sustained flood flows that occurred in February and March of 2019 and implementing adaptive management measures to improve project performance and resilience 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 are 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. 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

With visual surveys in small streams now completed, efforts have shifted to sampling with electrofishing equipment so that young Coho salmon and steelhead can be individually marked. Marking fish with PIT tags will allow Sonoma Water to detect when they leave their natal streams for the Russian River and ultimately the ocean.

In August three habitat enhancement sites and three un-enhanced main channel sites in Dry Creek were sampled for juvenile steelhead and Coho. This sampling will allow Sonoma Water to calculate a density estimate to compare between locations and across years. In addition, a sub-sample of the juvenile steelhead observed were equipped with PIT tags. Sonoma Water will be able to document the use of enhanced areas by these fish with stationary antenna arrays at these newly enhance locations.

Sonoma Water also operates a fish counting station at a seasonal dam on the Russian River at our Mirabel fish ladder facility. Video cameras were installed in the west fish ladder on September 1, and in the east fish ladder on September 3, 2020. Sonoma Water has reviewed video through September 15, 2020 for video recorded in the west ladder and through September 24, 2020 for video recorded in the east ladder. To date, seven steelhead and two salmonids that could not be identified to species have been observed.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

The 2020 management season began on May 15 and ends on October 15. The river mouth closed on September 28 and water surface elevation in the lagoon is currently anticipated to rise slowly. Sonoma Water staff have not scheduled a beach management action and are continuing to monitor conditions. 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.



The mouth of the Russian River closed on September 28. Sonoma Water staff have not scheduled a beach management activity but will continue to monitor conditions.

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 Orders (Orders) were issued by the State Water Board on July 28, 2020. We will operate under the Orders through approximately the end of the year. A press release on the Petitions can be found here: <https://www.sonomawater.org/news/post/9340/>. The Orders can be found here: <https://www.sonomawater.org/tucp>