



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – August 2, 2021

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 2021.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project



Backwater habitat feature on west side of Dry Creek.

Construction

Hanford ARC, the contractor for Sonoma Water, is constructing the two remaining Phase III project elements during the 2021 in-stream work window from June 15 to October 15. Sonoma Water staff from the Construction Management, Engineering Design, Environmental Compliance, and Surveying groups, as well as the Design Consultant (ESA) are supporting the project construction to keep it running smoothly and ensure it is implemented according to the plans with

minimal environmental impact. The grading and habitat feature installation on the site on the west side of the Creek, a backwater feature, is essentially complete. The site on the east side of the Creek, a flowing side channel, has been excavated down to the groundwater level and will soon be isolated from the mainstem of the creek to allow grading the wetted portion of the channel. Hanford expects to complete construction by mid to late September, in advance of the October 15 in-stream work deadline. During a recent field meeting, Sonoma Water staff were pleasantly surprised to see that a family of foxes has created a den in the bank repair constructed in 2020.



A pair of foxes in the bank repair installed in 2020 watching our construction planning meeting from the opposite side of Dry Creek.

Habitat Monitoring and Maintenance

Sonoma Water environmental staff continue to conduct physical and biological surveys on previously-constructed and maintained sites to quantify the habitat areas and identify changes or maintenance needs. This involves surveying the topography at the site, the bathymetry in the creek channel and habitat features, the velocity and depth of the water, and the location and extent of specific habitat structures such as log jams, pools, and riffles. Sonoma Water staff are finalizing data processing by analyzing and rating habitat quality and quantity, identifying physical changes, and making maps to illustrate results. Habitat monitoring during 2020 found that the greatest amount of optimal habitat occurred in off-channel enhancement sites and in alcove habitat units.

Sonoma Water Engineering and Environmental staff visited the Phase III sites below Westside Road Bridge that were impaired by sediment deposition during the high flows of 2019 to observe site conditions and develop conceptual design options for maintaining the features. The tentative plan is to remove some of the deposited sediments and to reopen the side channels and reconnect them to the mainstem of the creek in a configuration that will discourage sediment entrainment. The team is refining the concepts, and will model the hydraulics, estimate excavation volumes and potential cost, and develop a maintenance plan that will restore the function of these sites. This work will likely occur in 2022. Maintenance work on the Phase III project will use the same source of funds used for Phase II and III construction.

Phases IV - VI

Inter-Fluve, Inc. has completed the bid documents for Phase IV and it will be the first phase to be constructed. The Corps is currently reviewing changes to the right-of-way agreement that were requested by some of the property owners participating in Phase IV and has provided SW with some of their preliminary input. Due to the time required to conduct this review and obtain approval, the start of construction will be delayed. Logs and large wood materials that SW has purchased to construct the habitat structures in the Phase IV project are being delivered to the Corps yard at Warm Springs Dam for use in 2022.

ESA has completed the 99% design submittal for Phase V and construction is scheduled to begin in 2023. Sonoma Water continues advance the right-of-way agreements with Phase V property owners, which involves appraising the value of the easements, meeting with property owner, and addressing property owner questions and concerns. Sonoma Water and Cardno, the design consultant, are addressing final comments from the Corps of Engineers on the 99% design plans and specifications for Phase VI, which is planned to start construction in 2024. The Sonoma Water right-of-way staff and project manager are also working with ESA and Cardno to review the access routes and staging areas for these projects and refine them, if necessary, in time for appraisals.

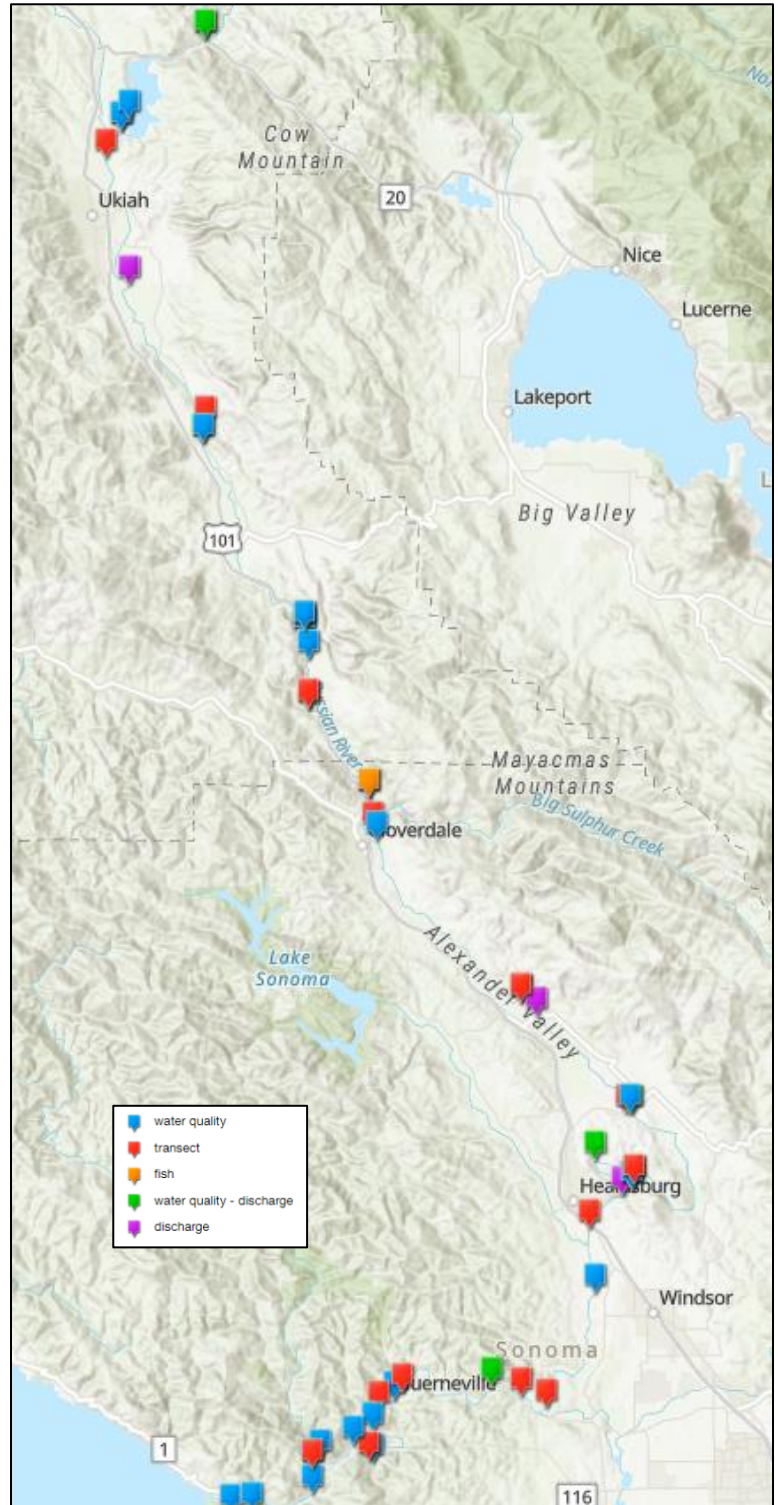
ESA, the design consultant for Phases III and V, has completed field studies on an additional site immediately upstream of the Phase III site currently under construction in Reach 5. They submitted the 30% design package on June 25th. Sonoma Water is reviewing the design as we wait for a pre-design submittal from Adobe Associates, Inc. for a feature required for construction access. Once we have the all the materials, Sonoma Water staff will meet with the property owners for their input. Sonoma Water is advancing this work independently of the work being cost-shared with the Corps using the same source of funds as Phases I, II, and III. It builds on a relationship developed with a property owner during the Phase III project and will provide habitat that may be needed to fully meet the 6 miles required by the Biological Opinion in the event that any planned projects fall through.

Fish Monitoring

Because of the ongoing drought, Sonoma Water is undertaking monitoring aimed at documenting its effects on fish populations and their habitat (i.e., water quality and physical conditions) in the mainstem of the Russian River and Russian River Estuary. Related water quality monitoring in Lake Mendocino helps us understand how changes in Lake Mendocino as the drought progresses affect aquatic conditions downstream. Collectively, we are monitoring fish populations at five sites, water quality at 23 sites (not including USGS gage sites) and physical conditions at eight sites (see map at right).

In the case of water quality monitoring, data are collected either continuously with electronic datasondes or at intervals through grab sampling. Physical monitoring is conducted bi-weekly while fish sampling will be repeated less frequently depending on the target species and life stages present in the river.

As the year progresses, data collection of additional physical and fish data is planned for sites further downstream. Data we collect are reported to resource agencies weekly so that managers are well-informed with timely information.



Russian River Estuary Management Project

The mouth of the Russian River is open. Baseline, weekly pinniped monitoring and water quality and biological monitoring is ongoing. Water quality monitoring data can be viewed as it becomes available in the weekly water quality status report: <https://www.sonomawater.org/tucp>

Interim Flow Changes

On May 11, 2021, Sonoma Water filed Temporary Urgency Change Petitions (Petitions) to request a reduction in minimum instream flow requirements for the Lower Russian River and the Upper Russian River. This is in response to very low storage levels at both Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma. An Order approving the Petitions was approved on June 14, 2021. The Order includes a number of monitoring and reporting requirements. In addition, it requires Sonoma Water to reduce its Russian River diversions by 20 percent for the term of the Order compared to the same period in 2020 through the term of the Order in an additional effort to preserve storage at Lake Sonoma. The Order was implemented immediately and expires in December of 2021.



This photo of Lake Mendocino was taken in May of 2021.