



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – October 4, 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 2022.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

Fish Hatchery

Due to drought conditions thorough the Russian River watershed and dry or intermittent flow in many tributaries, the coho salmon conservation hatchery program at Warm Springs Dam has been releasing more fish than usual into Dry Creek this year. During the week of September 20, 10,000 juvenile fish were released into four habitat enhancement sites and another 10,000 fish will be released in October. With more than 3 miles of successful habitat enhancements constructed, the stream has become an essential component of coho recovery efforts in the watershed and a critical refuge during the drought.



Photo shows view looking upstream at newly installed mainstem boulder fields. Outlet of river right side channel (Stromberg property) visible in middle-left of photo. Wood structures at inlet to the side channel on river left (Gros-Balthazard property) visible in middle-right of photo. Photo taken September 8, 2021.

Construction

Hanford ARC, the contractor for Sonoma Water, is wrapping up the construction of the two remaining Phase III project elements. They have finished all of the work in the creek and riparian areas, and are cleaning up and resurfacing the access roads and staging areas, installing any remaining features, getting signed acceptance letters from property owners, and demobilizing.



Photo shows view looking downstream at rock slope protection area (Boaz property) constructed in 2020 visible in background in upper left of photo. Inlet to river left side channel (Gros-Balthazard property) visible in foreground on the left in the photo. River right side channel (Stromberg property) on the far side of the trees in the center of the photo. Photo taken September 15, 2021.

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 collecting topographic data and imagery with drones, surveying the topography and the underwater bathymetry, measuring the velocity and depth of the water, and recording the location and extent of specific habitat structures such as log jams, pools, and riffles.

Phases IV – VI

Inter-Fluve, Inc. has completed the bid documents for Phase IV, which is planned for construction in summer 2022. The Corps is still reviewing changes to the right-of-way agreement that were requested by some of the participating property owners, and has provided SW with some of their preliminary input. 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.

ESA and Cardno have completed the 99% design submittals for Phases V and VI, respectively. Construction of Phase V is scheduled to begin in summer 2023 and Phase VI in 2024. Phase V right-of-way appraisals are complete, and Sonoma Water is preparing to present right-of-way offers to the property owners for review in the coming months. The Sonoma Water right-of-way staff and project manager are also working with Cardno and the Phase VI property owners to review and refine the access routes and staging areas for these projects.



Photo shows view of lower end (outlet) of creek left (Gros-Balthazard property) side channel, looking upstream. Side channel is on the right side of the photo. Mainstem of Dry Creek and the rock slope protection (Boaz property) on the left side of this photo. Photo taken September 15, 2021.

ESA, the design consultant for Phases III and V, has completed field studies and submitted the 30% design package for an additional site immediately upstream of the Phase III site currently under construction in Reach 5. Additionally, Adobe Associates, Inc. has submitted a planning-level cost estimate for a tributary crossing that may be required for construction access. Sonoma Water reviewed the designs and held the internal design review meeting on September 9. Sonoma Water staff is now scheduling meetings with the property owners and regulatory agencies for their input. Work at this site builds on a relationship developed with a property owner during the Phase III project.

Fish Monitoring

As reported in the previous update, September 1 marked the beginning of our underwater video system operation that we use to obtain annual counts of upstream migrating adult salmon and steelhead. Thus far in 2021, we have seen one hatchery-origin steelhead adult and no Chinook. However, given the early date and low river flows this is not surprising.



Hatchery-origin adult steelhead, Mirabel fish ladder, 9/16/21

Russian River Estuary Management Project

The mouth of the Russian River is closed as of September 28, 2021. 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 was 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 in an additional effort to preserve storage at Lake Sonoma. The Order was implemented immediately and expires in December of 2021.



Lake Sonoma, September 24, 2021 when the reservoir was approximately 45% of capacity with 110,600 acre feet of water in storage.