



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – February 7, 2022

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

Construction

No construction activity this period.

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. A post-construction drone flight was conducted on October 6th and a 2nd flight was conducted on October 27



Sonoma Water Environmental Specialist Eric McDermott installs a willow cutting at a recently completed habitat site in January.

(comparison shown above) to evaluate changes following the high flows of the October 24th rainfall event. Follow up drone flights of were conducted on various dates in January 2022. Willow plantings and invasive plant removal (primarily blackberry and vinca) work has been ongoing at the different habitat sites.

Phases IV – VI

Sonoma Water and the Corps of Engineers are implementing Phases IV – VI of the Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project under a cost-share partnership where the Corps of Engineers covers 65% of the cost and implements the actual construction. Inter-Fluve, Inc. has completed the bid documents for Phase IV, and the Corps of Engineers is scheduled to put the project out to bid for construction in 2022 and 2023. Sonoma Water Right-of-Way staff are in the final stages of executing the right-of-way agreements with the participating property owners and expect to close them by the end of the month or early March.

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. Sonoma Water has presented right-of-way offers to the property owners in Phase V for review. Property Owners for the Phase V sites are reviewing the appraisals and compensation estimates for the right-of-way easements. The Sonoma Water right-of-way staff and project manager are also working with Cardno and the Phase VI property owners to finalize the access routes and staging areas for these projects and prepare right-of-way compensation offers.

The additional Phase V site in Reach 5B, immediately upstream of the Phase III site constructed in 2021 in Reach 5, is in the 30% design Phase. ESA is updating their designs to address feedback from the 30% design review meeting with Sonoma Water and the on-site meeting with the property owner. The updates primarily involve refining the designs of bank repair and log features and evaluating options for resolving access constraints. Sonoma Water staff and the design consultants met with the Resource Agency staff in January to obtain input and guidance on the design of the project elements. Sonoma Water Environmental Resource staff are now setting up an on-site meeting with the regulatory agency staff to obtain additional input on the project design and preliminary approval of certain project elements.

Fish Monitoring

An important yardstick to measure progress toward recovery of coho salmon and steelhead populations in the Russian River is the number of adult fish returning to spawn. To acquire these numbers, Sonoma Water and our partners at California Sea Grant conduct what are known as spawner surveys during the winter when fish arrive at spawning locations in smaller tributaries to the Russian River. When fish spawn, the female will first excavate a shallow depression in the stream gravel using tail beats. Next, she will deposit her eggs as a male fertilizes her eggs. Finally, she will bury the now fertilized



Pair of adult steelhead constructing a redd (above) and a completed redd (in photo below on next page).

tributaries to the Russian River. When fish spawn, the female will first excavate a shallow depression in the stream gravel using tail beats. Next, she will deposit her eggs as a male fertilizes her eggs. Finally, she will bury the now fertilized

eggs by further excavating stream gravel and then leave them to incubate for several weeks until they hatch. It is these tell-tale depressions known as redds that our survey crews count to provide the raw data for estimating the number of adult returns to the Russian each year. By locating these redds we can also glean information on the distribution of spawning in the watershed.



Russian River Estuary Management Project

The mouth of the Russian River is open as of January 31, 2022. The lagoon management season begins on May 15th and Sonoma Water staff anticipate beginning fisheries and water quality monitoring in May, depending on streamflows. Baseline, weekly pinniped monitoring continues.

Interim Flow Changes

On November 16, 2021, Sonoma Water filed Temporary Urgency Change Petitions to request the water supply condition, which sets the minimum instream flow requirements, be determined based on storage thresholds at Lake Mendocino rather than cumulative inflow into Lake Pillsbury. This was in response to equipment failures at Pacific Gas & Electric Company's Potter Valley Project, which has resulted in significantly reduced transfers of Eel River water into the Russian River watershed. An Order approving the Petitions was issued by the State Water Resources Control Board on December 10, 2021. The order expires on June 7, 2022.



The Yorty Creek arm of Lake Sonoma on April 14, 2021 when storage was approximately 153,000 acre feet. Storage on February 2, 2022 was approximately 151,000 acre feet. The low storage point last year was approximately 105,000 acre feet, the lowest level since the lake filled for the first time in 1986.