



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – May 2, 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 2023.

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.

Sonoma Water field crews have recently performed maintenance work using manual labor to remove invasive plants and to reopen inlets and connections to previously constructed habitat features that were partially blocked by debris.

Sonoma Water field crews are in the process of scheduling planting crews to install container plantings at several of the existing habitat sites. Plantings are anticipated to be installed over the next 2-3 weeks.

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. We achieved a significant milestone this month - the Corps of Engineers advertised the Phase IV project for construction on April 8 and bids are due on May 9. Sonoma Water and Corps staff conducted a site visit for 12 potential bidders on April 20. Sonoma Water right-of-way staff and counsel are closing escrow and certifying real estate for the 9 properties in reaches 10 and 13 that are participating in the project. Construction is on track to begin mid-summer.



Potential bidders for the construction of Dry Creek Phase IV during the pre-bid site tour on April 20th led by the Sonoma Water and Corps of Engineers Project Team.

ESA and Cardno completed the 99% design submittals for Phases V and VI, respectively, and have partially on hold while the project team been working on right-of-way acquisition and finalization of Phase IV. ESA is now working on revisions to the Phase V design report, plans, and specifications reflecting comments received during final review and solicitation of the Phase IV project. The revised 99% design submittal will undergo final review and be advanced to final package that the Corps expects to advertise in fall 2022. 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 60% design Phase, with the next design submittal due in April. ESA is using hydraulic models to refine the project design and addressing 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

As is the case every spring, Sonoma Water began operating downstream migrant fish traps in late March and early April, 2022. The traps will be operated, flow permitting, through June. These traps are designed to allow capture of fish that are moving downstream and they are operated at the Mirabel Dam (see photo) in addition to four tributaries: Dry Creek, Mark West Creek, Dutch Bill Creek and Austin Creek. The focus of these trapping operations is to capture young salmon and steelhead as they make their way to the ocean as smolts. Fish are enumerated by species and life stage at each trap in order to give us a relative measure of the number of smolts being produced from various portions of the watershed. In addition to salmon and steelhead, we have also captured nearly 50 species of non-salmonids in the 22 years we have been operating fish traps in the Russian River Watershed.



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Russian River Estuary Management Project

The mouth of the Russian River has closed six times so far in 2022, most recently on April 10. 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. An annual training for pinniped monitoring volunteers was held on April 21 with our monitoring partners at the Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods.

Interim Flow Changes

On November 16, 2021, Sonoma Water filed Temporary Urgency Change Petitions (Petitions) with the Division of Water Rights (Division) 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 Division on December 10, 2021. The order expires on June 7, 2022. Based on Lake Mendocino storage thresholds, the water supply condition for the Russian River remains *Critical*. Consequently, the minimum instream flow requirement continues to be 25 cfs on the Upper Russian River and 35 cfs on the Lower Russian River. At this time Sonoma Water anticipates filing new Petitions with the Division in early May. However, due to uncertainties regarding Pacific Gas & Electric Company's operation of the Potter Valley Project this summer and changing storage conditions at Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma, Sonoma Water has not finalized the requested changes that will be contained in the Petitions.



Lake Mendocino May 14, 2021.