



## **Russian River Biological Opinion Update – June 5, 2023**

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 [SonomaWater.org](https://SonomaWater.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.

### **Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project**

#### **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.

Phase IV is being constructed in 2022 and 2023, Phase V is beginning construction in 2023, and Phase VI is tentatively planned for construction in 2024. Sonoma Water’s right-of-way staff and project manager continue to work with the Phase VI property owners to finalize the access routes and staging areas for these projects, obtain appraisals for the value of the right-of-way compensation amounts, and prepare right-of-way compensation offers.

#### **Construction**

The Corps is in the process of constructing Phase IV and V of the Dry Creek Project. Phase IV consists of sites in Reaches 10 and 13 of Dry Creek, and Phase V includes sites in Reaches 4C and 2A. Reaches are numbered according to approximate distance in miles from the confluence with the Russian River.

McCullough Construction completed both Reach 13 sites in 2022 by the October 15th in-stream work deadline, with the exception of the inlet to the 13B site, which is being constructed in 2023 by Sonoma Water. Construction of the nine Reach 10 sites is currently underway. McCullough is clearing vegetation in work areas at multiple sites and constructing habitat features in areas more than 100 feet from the edge of the Dry Creek channel. Work closer to Dry Creek may commence after the start of the in-stream work construction season on June 15th. Conditions at one of the sites changed during the wet 2022/2023 winter and the design is being updated to accommodate the new existing condition.

Sonoma Water advertised the 13B inlet construction on February 16, 2023. Construction of this small project component is expected to start in late June or early July. Sonoma Water went to the Board of Supervisors on May 9th to

award the contract with Rege Construction and issue a notice to proceed for June 12th. A pre-construction meeting was held on May 23<sup>rd</sup> and Rege expects to be ready to start construction in early-mid July.

The Corps advertised Phase V of the Dry Creek Project on March 14, 2023 in order to issue a notice to proceed in May and have construction start on June 15th for the in-stream elements of the project. The pre-bid site visit took place on March 21, bids were opened April 27th and the Corps expects to award the contract the week of May 30<sup>th</sup>.

### **Habitat Monitoring and Maintenance**

Sonoma Water environmental staff continue to evaluate and monitor 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, monitoring fish use using pit tags and fish surveys, and recording the location and extent of specific habitat structures such as log jams, pools, and riffles. Most of the in-water data collection was on hold during the higher wet-season flows. During that time, monitoring staff was primarily processing data to quantify habitat areas and scores, create graphics, assign scores to habitat sites, determine fish use, and produce other related results. They were also conducting drone flights to evaluate the conditions at the constructed project sites following the high flows that occurred during the series of atmospheric rivers in late December and Early January. On March 15, the Army Corps began releasing water from Warm Springs Dam to evacuate water from the flood control pool in Lake Sonoma. The flood control release reached a maximum flow of 4,000 cfs, declined to 1,000 cfs on March 23 until early April when flow releases were being decreased until reaching the current release of 95 cfs in early May. The photos below show sites in the recently constructed Reach 13 (close to the dam) at around 4,000 cfs and after the high flows were reduced. The Reach 13 site weathered the high flows without any notable changes occurring. Sonoma Water staff are in the process of evaluating other sites within Dry Creek after these high flows to determine what maintenance needs might be needed in the future. Sonoma Water staff are also back out collecting habitat data now that flows in Dry Creek are lower.



Reach 13 during 2023 high flows.





Reach 13 post high flows in 2023.

## **Public Outreach**

The Public Policy Facilitating Committee (PPFC) annual meeting was held on Wednesday, May 24 from 3 pm- 5 pm at the Sonoma Water Education Center. There were 35 attendees included the PPFC members.

The agenda included presentations on:

- Russian River Biological Assessment Update
- Russian River Estuary Management Project Pinniped Monitoring Update
- Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project
- Coho Smolt Survival Study



Presentations will be available online at [SonomaWater.org/rifr](https://SonomaWater.org/rifr)

## Fish Monitoring

Sonoma Water has installed eight downstream migrant traps. Traps are located in Dry Creek, Mill Creek, the mainstem Russian River at Mirabel, Mark West Creek, Green Valley Creek, Dutch Bill Creek, Austin Creek, and Willow Creek. While the downstream migrant trapping season is still underway, we have captured more wild Coho smolts and fewer Chinook smolts than typical (Figure 1 and Figure 2). The Number of steelhead parr captured at the downstream migrant traps are similar to the last few years of trapping, but down from earlier years (Figure 3). Only wild natural origin (NOR) fish are shown in the following graphs and no hatchery fish are shown.

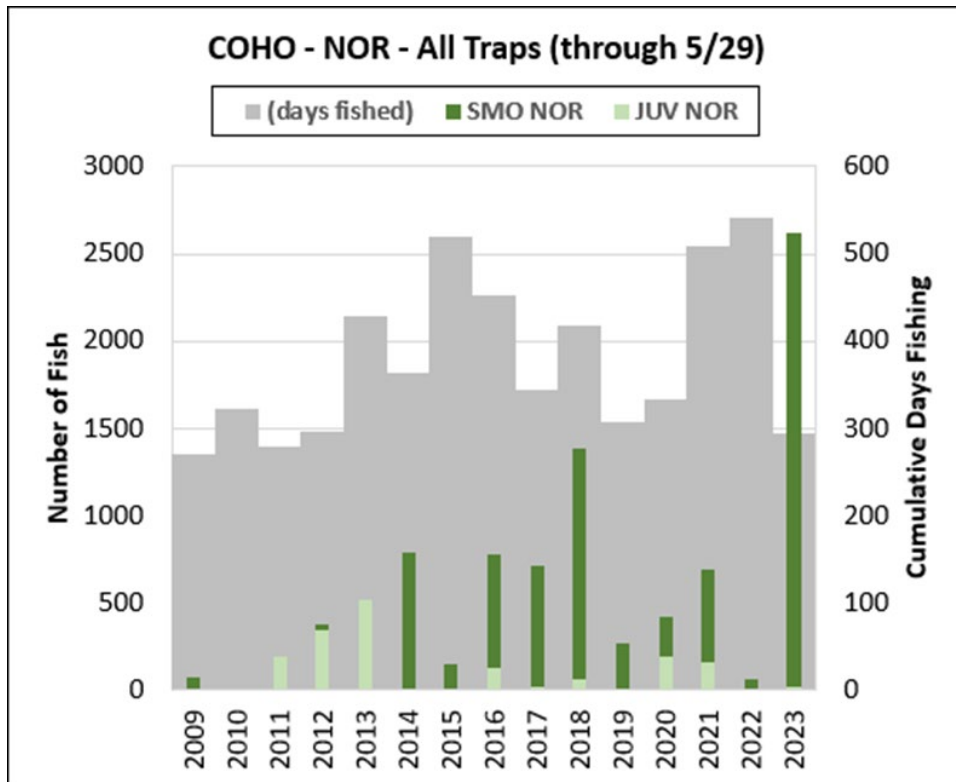


Figure 1.) The number of natural origin (NOR) juveniles and smolts captured in downstream migrant traps operated in the Russian River basin from 2009 through 2023.



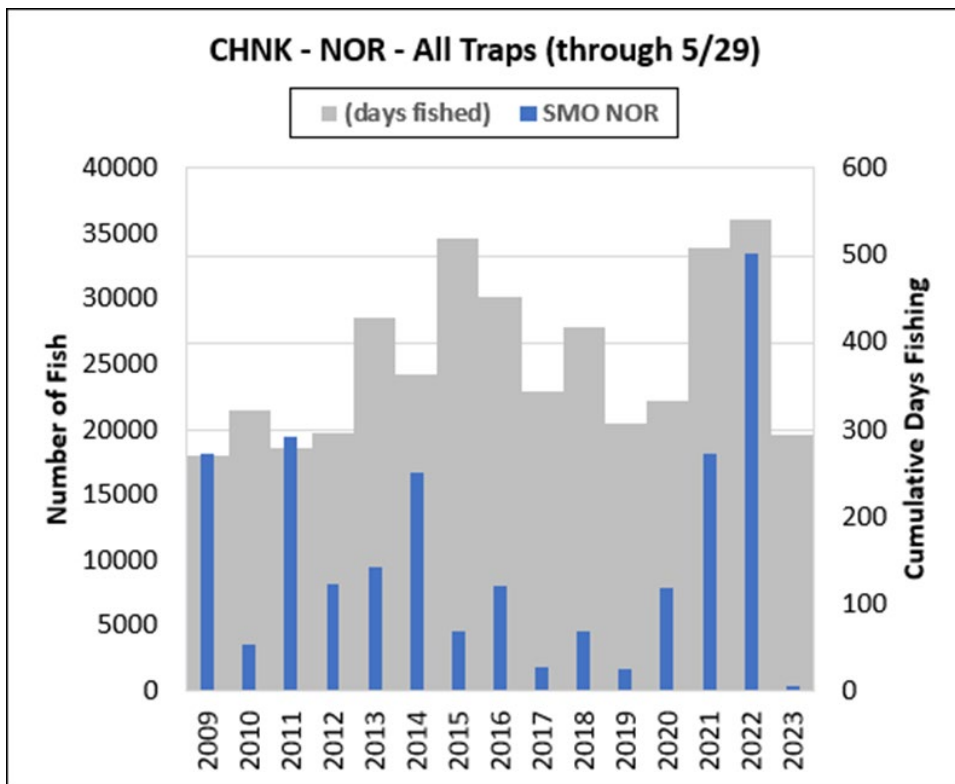


Figure 2.) The number of natural origin (NOR) Chinook juveniles and smolts captured in downstream migrant traps operated in the Russian River basin from 2009 through 2023.

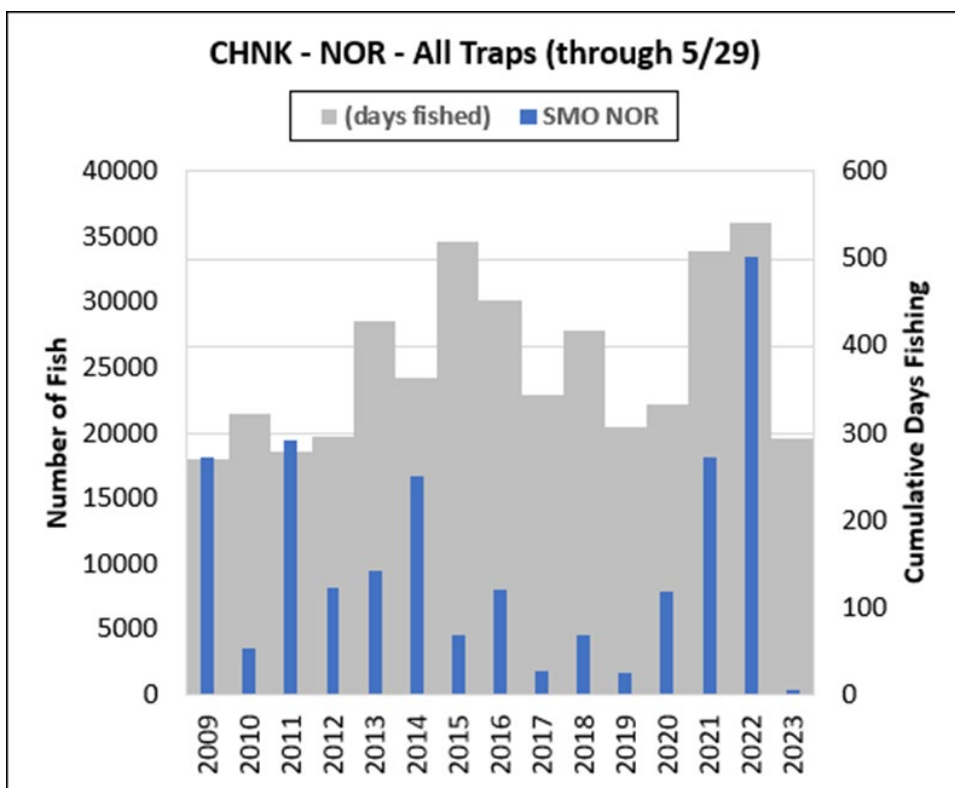


Figure 3.) The number of natural origin (NOR) steelhead juveniles and smolts captured in downstream migrant traps operated in the Russian River basin from 2009 through 2023.

## **Russian River Estuary Management Project**

The mouth of the Russian River is open. Sonoma Water submitted the final 2023 Adaptive Management Plan (AMP) to resource agencies on May 15, 2023. The lagoon management season began on May 15 and ends on October 15. Biological (fisheries and pinnipeds) and water quality monitoring for the season is underway.

## **Interim Flow Changes**

On October 28, 2022, Sonoma Water filed Temporary Urgency Change Petitions with the State Water Resources Control Board, Division of Water Rights (Division) requesting that the water supply condition, which determines the minimum instream flow requirements, be changed from cumulative inflow into Lake Pillsbury (in the Eel River watershed) to storage thresholds at Lake Mendocino starting December 14, 2022. This is in response to the ongoing reduced transfer of Eel River water into the Russian River watershed due to the transformer bank failure at the Potter Valley Project powerhouse. On December 14, 2022, the Division issued an order approving Sonoma Water's Petitions. The order was set to expire on June 12, 2023.

Based on the December 14, 2022 Division order and Sonoma Water's water rights permits, the water supply condition for the remainder of the calendar year will be *Normal*. As required by the Russian River Biological Opinion, Sonoma Water filed Temporary Urgency Change Petitions with the Division requesting that the minimum instream flow requirement on the Upper Russian River be reduced from 185 cfs to 125 cfs and on the Lower Russian River be reduced from 125 cfs to 70 cfs from June 1 through October 31, 2023. In response to this filing, the Division issued a Temporary Urgency Change Petition Order (Order) on May 19, 2023. The Order replaces the order that was already in place, sets minimum instream flow requirements as requested, includes multiple monitoring and reporting requirements, and expires in mid-November 2023.

## **Biological Assessment for New Biological Opinion**

In anticipation of the expiration of the 2008 Biological Opinion (BO) in September 2023, Sonoma Water is working with National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) to reinitiate consultation and develop a Biological Assessment (BA) for continuation of the USACE and Sonoma Water operations in the Russian River watershed. A Biological Assessment was submitted to NMFS and CDFW and staff are revising the document in response to resource agency's comments.