



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – January 8, 2024

Sonoma Water is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. Below is a brief synopsis of the current work. For more detailed information, please visit [SonomaWater.org](https://www.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

The Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project is creating 6 miles of rearing habitat for endangered or threatened juvenile salmonids and consists of 6 Phases (I – VI) spread throughout the 15 miles of Dry Creek between the Russian River and Warms Springs Dam. In order to track project locations, this portion of Dry Creek is divided into 15 Reaches that are numbered according to approximate distance in miles from the confluence with the Russian River.

Phases I – III

Phases I – III were completed in 2021 and included approximately 14 sites from 6 different reaches. These Phases were designed and constructed primarily by Sonoma Water, however, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) constructed 3 sites. Sonoma Water is now monitoring and maintaining these sites as described in the next section.

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 Sonoma Water covers 35% of the cost, provides right-of-way, and manages the design contracts, and the Corps covers 65% of the cost and implements the construction. Phases IV and V are under construction and Phase VI is in final stages of design and planning, with construction tentatively planned for 2025 and 2026.

Construction of Phases IV and V

The Corps, with support from Sonoma Water staff and the Design Consultant, 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.

The Reach 13 sites are complete and the contractor, McCullough Construction, Inc. (McCullough) has constructed 8 of the 9 the nine Reach 10 sites. The design of the 9th site, Site 10A1, had to be revised to accommodate a new existing

condition following substantial erosion that occurred during the 2022/2023 wet season prior to construction. McCullough constructed the upstream end of the revised 10A1 site and plans to complete the site in 2024.



Photograph taken November 21, 2023 of the upstream end of a completed Reach 10 biotechnical bank repair.



Photograph taken November 21, 2023 of the Site 10B2 Side Channel.



Photograph taken November 21, 2023 of an alcove in the site 10A2 Side Channel.

The Corps advertised Phase V of the Dry Creek Project on March 14, 2023 and issued a notice to proceed on June 8th to ROD Construction. ROD mobilized on August 9th and completed most of the features in Reach 4C before having to stop due to the onset of wet weather in November. The ramp needed for site access off Dry Creek Road is complete along with the above-water portion of the new channel excavation, the inlets and outlets, and most of the log structures. ROD has winterized the banks of the unfinished portion of the side channel and will continue work starting in June 2024.



Photograph taken on 12/7/23 showing nearly completed section of new side-channel habitat feature at site 4C.

Phase VI Planning

Sonoma Water's right-of-way staff and project manager continue to work with the Phase VI property owners to obtain appraisals for the value of the right-of-way compensation amounts, prepare right-of-way compensation offers and easement agreements, present the documents to the owners, and address owner comments and concerns.

Approximately half of the offers have been presented so far and Sonoma Water is waiting for comments. Sonoma Water is also evaluating the feasibility of a project to replace the remaining two grade control sills on Dry Creek with engineered riffles.

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. Since June crews completed - post-effective flow monitoring on a past project in reach 14 (Weinstock) and began post-construction monitoring in reach 13 (Pedroncelli) that included collecting aerial photographs by drone.. Information collected is also being used to prioritize and plan for maintenance activities such as invasive vegetation management, removal of nuisance sedimentation, and repair of flood damage or erosion that impairs project function.



Pre-construction drone photo of reach 13 enhancement reach (Pedroncelli), in Dry Creek. Photo taken June 20, 2022.



Post-construction drone photo of reach 13 enhancement reach (Pedroncelli) in Dry Creek. Photo taken September 6, 2023.

Public Outreach

Fish Monitoring

Sonoma Water has completed collecting video for the 2023-2024 adult salmonid season at the Mirabel inflatable dam in Forestville, CA. Sonoma Water began deflating the dam on Monday December 18, 2023, to protect the dam from high winter flows. Deflating the dam marks the end of the 2023-2024 video season as Mirabel dam must be inflated for video system to function properly. All video collected for the 2023-2024 season has been reviewed. The preliminary count for adult Chinook salmon is 1,966, although this number is likely to change slightly as we will re-review some video as part of our quality control process. Based on the long-term data set the average number of Chinook returning to the Russian River is 2,641 fish. Last year 1,180 Chinook salmon were counted passing the Mirabel dam.



An image of adult Chinook Salmon from the Mirabel Fish ladder on November 18, 2023.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

The mouth of the Russian River is open. 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

Based on Sonoma Water's water rights permits and State Water Resources Control Board Decision 1610, the water supply condition for the remainder of the calendar 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 15, 2023. In response to this filing, the Division issued a Temporary

Urgency Change 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 on October 15, 2023. In preparation of the Order expiring on October 15, Sonoma Water intends to file temporary urgency change petitions requesting that the water supply condition for the Russian River be determined based on storage thresholds at Lake Mendocino. This is in response to the significant reductions of Eel River water transferred through the Potter Valley Project that have recently occurred and the need for the Russian River water supply condition be determined based on an index that is reflective of reservoir and hydrologic conditions in the Russian River watershed. Sonoma Water is requesting that the order approving the petitions become effective January 1, 2024.

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 on August 23, 2023.