



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – September 1, 2025

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.

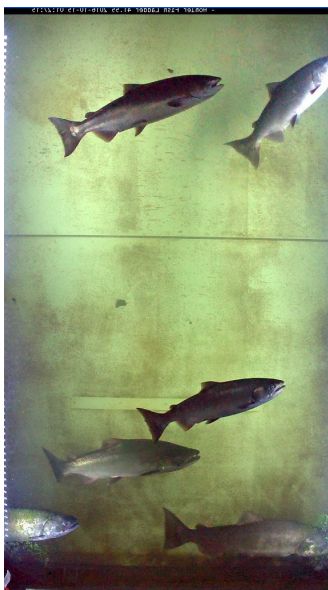
Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

Habitat Monitoring and Maintenance

Sonoma Water Environmental Resources staff are monitoring enhancement reach physical conditions, which occurs annually during the dry season and follows the Dry Creek Adaptive Management Plan. Environmental Resources staff plan to monitor 14 enhancement reaches during the 2025 monitoring season. By the end of August, crews will have completed eight enhancement reaches (in reaches 2, 4, 10, and 13) and began three others (in reaches 7, 14, and 15). Staff continue to work on long-term programmatic permit applications for maintenance of previously constructed sites. Maintenance work to address sedimentation of an enhanced side channel in Reach 8 began in early August and is anticipated to be completed by October 15. Lastly, Sonoma Water Engineering and Environmental Resources staff are working with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) to finalize the Operations and Maintenance Manual for the Dry Creek enhancement projects constructed by the USACE from 2022 to 2024.

Fish Monitoring

Environmental Resources staff installed a video camera in the Mirabel fish ladder on August 21, 2025, to monitor adult salmon and steelhead that return to the Russian River to spawn. Video footage will be reviewed starting September 1. The camera can be operated until the Mirabel dam is deflated which occurs when the flow in the mainstem Russian River is predicted to be above 1,600 cfs (typically mid-November to mid-December). Sonoma Water has operated a video camera in the mainstem Russian River since 2000.



An example of an image of Chinook salmon adults viewed at the Mirabel dam fish ladder near Forestville.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

The mouth of the Russian River is open as of August 22, 2025. Pinniped baseline, fisheries, and water quality monitoring is ongoing. Seining is scheduled for September.

Interim Flow Changes

On March 10, 2025, Sonoma Water filed new temporary urgency change petitions (petitions) with the State Water Resources Control Board requesting: (1) storage thresholds at Lake Mendocino be used as the hydrologic index for determining the minimum instream flow requirements; and (2) summertime minimum instream flow requirements in the Russian River be reduced if the water supply condition is *Normal* per the 2008 Russian River Biological opinion to increase the quality and quantity of rearing habitat for Chinook Salmon and steelhead. The State Water Board issued an order approving changes requested in the petitions on June 27, 2025. The order will be in effect for 180 days. Because Russian River hydrologic conditions are currently Normal, the required State Board minimum flows are now 125 cfs and 70 cfs in upper and lower Russian River respectively.

2025 Russian River Biological Opinion

On April 29, 2025, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) issued a second Russian River Biological Opinion to the USACE, Sonoma Water, and the Mendocino County Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District. The 2025 Russian River Biological Opinion has a ten-year term and covers the USACE and Sonoma Water's operations and maintenance activities, including water supply, flood control, channel maintenance and habitat restoration in the Russian River watershed.

The 2025 Russian River Biological Opinion requires that Sonoma Water and USACE form designated working groups and technical advisory committees that meet at least once within four months of issuance of the Biological Opinion. Inter-agency workgroups focused on Lake Mendocino turbidity, Lake Mendocino and Lake Sonoma reservoir operations, Upper and Lower River fish migration and survival studies, Dry Creek habitat enhancement, and Russian River estuary management have all convened and held meetings in advance of the August 29, 2025 requirement. The frequency of regular workgroup meetings is generally monthly to quarterly. Some groups, like reservoir operations and estuary management, guide adaptive management actions and can meet more frequently as changing watershed conditions and fish life cycle needs require.

Public Outreach

Sonoma Water will present elements of the 2025 Biological Opinion to the Lower River Municipal Advisory Committee at 6 PM on September 11 at the West County Services Center. The presentation will include the same information provided to the WAC/TAC at the August 4 meeting.