



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – October 6, 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 (effectiveness monitoring), 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. At the end of September, staff completed effectiveness monitoring in eight enhancement reaches (in river reaches 2, 4, 7, 10, 13, and 14; river reaches contain multiple enhancement sites) and began two others (in reaches 8 and 15). Maintenance work to address sedimentation within two enhanced side channels (sites 8a and 8d) in Reach 8 began in early August and is anticipated to be completed by October 15. Sediment removal is complete at site 8d (Aesthete Winery, formerly Truett Hurst; see photos below) and is ongoing at site 8a. Staff continue to work on long-term programmatic permit applications for maintenance of previously constructed sites. 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.



Typical condition of site 8D side channel (Aesthete Winery, formerly Truett Hurst) prior to sediment removal.



Sediment removal occurring at site 8d side channel (Aesthete, formerly Truett Hurst).



Free-flowing condition of the site 8d side channel after sediment removal.

Fish Monitoring

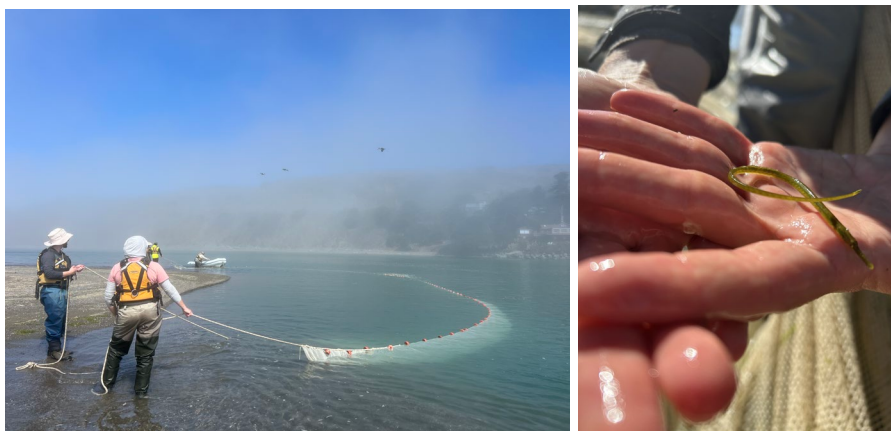
September is the time of year adult Chinook salmon begin entering the Russian River on their way upstream to spawn, although typically Environmental Resources staff do not see many fish until October or November. Although still early, staff have seen three Chinook swimming upstream through the Mirabel dam fish ladder this season including this first fish on September 12.



Chinook swimming upstream through the Mirabel dam fish ladder on September 12, 2025.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

The mouth of the Russian River is open as of September 25, 2025. Pinniped baseline, fisheries, and water quality monitoring is ongoing. Seining was completed the week of September 22.



Left panel: Estuary seining; Right panel: Bay pipefish.

Interim Flow Changes

On March 10, 2025, Sonoma Water filed temporary urgency change petitions (petitions) with the State Water Resources Control Board (State 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 expires on December 23, 2025. Because Russian River hydrologic conditions are currently *Normal*, the required State Board minimum flows are 125 cfs and 70 cfs in upper and lower Russian River respectively. The reduced flows required by the Biological Opinion concludes on October 15. After October 15, the minimum instream flows on the Upper and Lower Russian River will increase to 150 cfs and 125 cfs respectively. Sonoma Water is preparing to file new petitions with State Board requesting storage thresholds at Lake Mendocino continue to be used as the hydrologic index for determining the minimum instream flow requirements for a 180-day period starting December 24, 2025.

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 presented elements of the 2025 Biological Opinion to the Lower River Municipal Advisory Committee on September 11 at the West County Services Center. The presentation included the same information provided to the WAC/TAC at the August 4 meeting.