



## Russian River Biological Opinion Update – July 6, 2026

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).

### Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

#### Habitat Monitoring and Maintenance

Environmental Resources staff submitted long-term programmatic permit applications to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) in early March. These applications are under agency review. Once approved, permits will authorize maintenance work this summer at previously constructed habitat enhancement sites 10A1 and 4C. Planned maintenance includes sediment removal to preserve hydraulic connectivity and maintain the structural integrity of habitat elements to support rearing habitat for juvenile coho salmon and steelhead.

### Fish Monitoring

#### Downstream Migrant Trapping

Environmental Resources staff began installing downstream migrant traps on March 10 to monitor juvenile salmonids as they move downstream. Since then, traps have been installed at eight sampling locations throughout the basin: two in the Russian River mainstem (one at the Mirabel dam and one in Hopland), one in Dry Creek, and five in smaller Russian River tributaries (one each in Mill, Green Valley, Dutch Bill creeks, and two traps in Willow creek). Several traps have been removed over the last few weeks due to low catches and/or poor water quality conditions. As of June 21, only the mainstem Russian River trap in Hopland and the Dry Creek trap are still operating. The Hopland trap has been operating since May 13 and has caught 0 Coho, 159 steelhead (YOY, parr, and smolts), and 3,124 Chinook smolts. The Dry Creek trap has been operating since April 3 and has caught 331 Coho (YOY and smolts), 1,335 steelhead (YOY, parr, and smolts), and 3,210 Chinook smolts. The mainstem Russian River trap at Mirabel dam operated from May 28-June 11 and caught 11 Coho smolts, 50 steelhead (YOY, parr, and smolts), and 157 Chinook smolts. In the four tributary streams, the Mill trap operated from March 19-June 8, the Dutch Bill trap operated from March 12-June 4, the Green Valley trap operated from March 17-May 7, the upper Willow trap operated from March 11-May 14, and the lower Willow trap operated from March 10-June 15. These traps combined caught 3,116 Coho (YOY and smolts), 483 steelhead (YOY, parr, and smolts), and 42 Chinook smolts. The Dry Creek trap and the Russian River mainstem trap in Hopland are planned to continue operating until catches become too low for it to be worthwhile.



Photo: A fisheries technician retrieves a Sacramento sucker from the Mirabel trap on the Russian River mainstem.

## Snorkel Surveys

Environmental Resources staff began snorkel surveys in select tributaries of the Russian River on June 4, 2026, with the goal of assessing the spatial structure of juvenile salmonid populations. From early June to



mid-August, teams of technicians will hike upstream through predetermined sections (reaches) of creeks and snorkel a sample of pool habitats to count juvenile coho salmon and steelhead trout in two separate passes per reach. To date, staff have completed 12 reaches in six different creeks, documenting 1,973 coho juveniles and 9,459 steelhead juveniles. Among the surveyed reaches, Green Valley Creek had the highest number of coho (1,349), while Pena Creek had the highest number of steelhead (4,258). Approximately 40-50 reaches among 20-30 creeks remain to be surveyed. Based on the previous winter's spawner survey estimates, juvenile salmonid abundance is expected to be average to below average this season following an uncharacteristically high abundance in the summer of 2025.

Photo: A fisheries technician dives a pool in Pena Creek looking for juvenile salmonids.

## Russian River Estuary Management Project

The mouth of the Russian River is currently open. The mouth previously closed on May 25, 2026, and was artificially breached on June 10. Monitoring for water quality at Willow Creek stations and deployment of datasondes to capture vertical profiles of water quality conditions in multiple locations is continuing. Weekly pinniped baseline monitoring at the Jenner haulout is ongoing. Sonoma Water biologists and Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods volunteers are conducting the baseline surveys.

## Interim Flow Changes

On March 20, 2026, Sonoma Water filed temporary urgency change petitions (petitions) with the State Board Water Resources Control Board, Division of Water Rights (Division) to request the summertime reduction in minimum instream flow requirements in the mainstem of the Russian River under a *Normal* water supply condition and to continue using storage thresholds at Lake Mendocino as the hydrologic index for determining the minimum instream flow requirements in the Russian River and Dry Creek. The Division issued an order approving the changes requested in the petitions on May 21, 2026. The order expires on November 16, 2026. Based on storage in Lake Mendocino on June 1, the water supply condition for the Russian River is *Dry*. Under a *Dry* water supply condition, the minimum instream flow requirement on the Upper Russian River is 75 cubic feet per second and on the Lower Russian River is 85 cubic feet per second. The next assessment of the water supply condition is on October 1, 2026.

## Public Outreach

There are no public meetings scheduled at this time.