

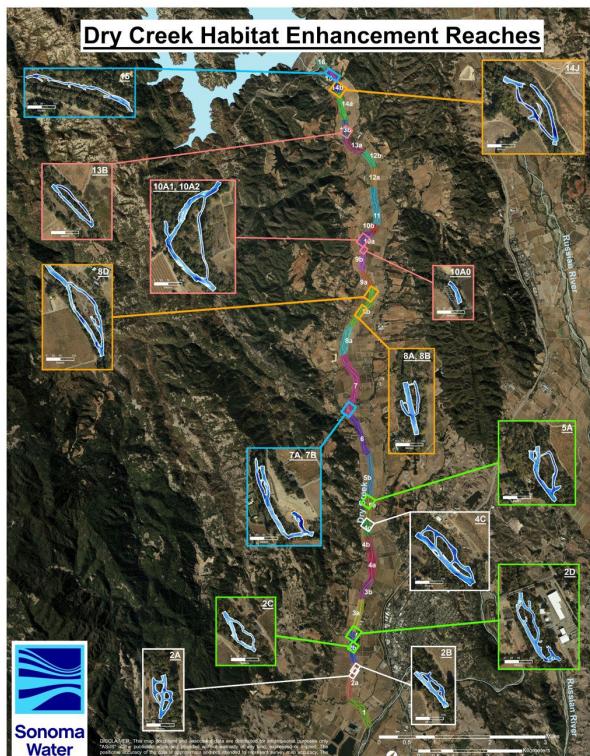


## Russian River Biological Opinion Update – January 5, 2026

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](http://SonomaWater.org).

### Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

#### Habitat Monitoring and Maintenance



Sonoma Water Environmental Resources staff completed monitoring enhancement reach physical conditions (effectiveness monitoring), which occurs annually during the dry season and follows the Dry Creek Adaptive Management Plan, for 2025. Environmental Resources staff monitored 14 enhancement reaches during the 2025 monitoring season in river reaches 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14, and 15 (river reaches contain multiple enhancement reaches). Staff installed over 2,000 willow cuttings at three sites in Reach 10 to assist with bank stabilization. Staff continue to work on long-term programmatic permit applications for maintenance of previously constructed sites and plan maintenance for several enhancement reaches in 2026 to improve habitat conditions and project performance. Lastly, Sonoma Water Design 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.

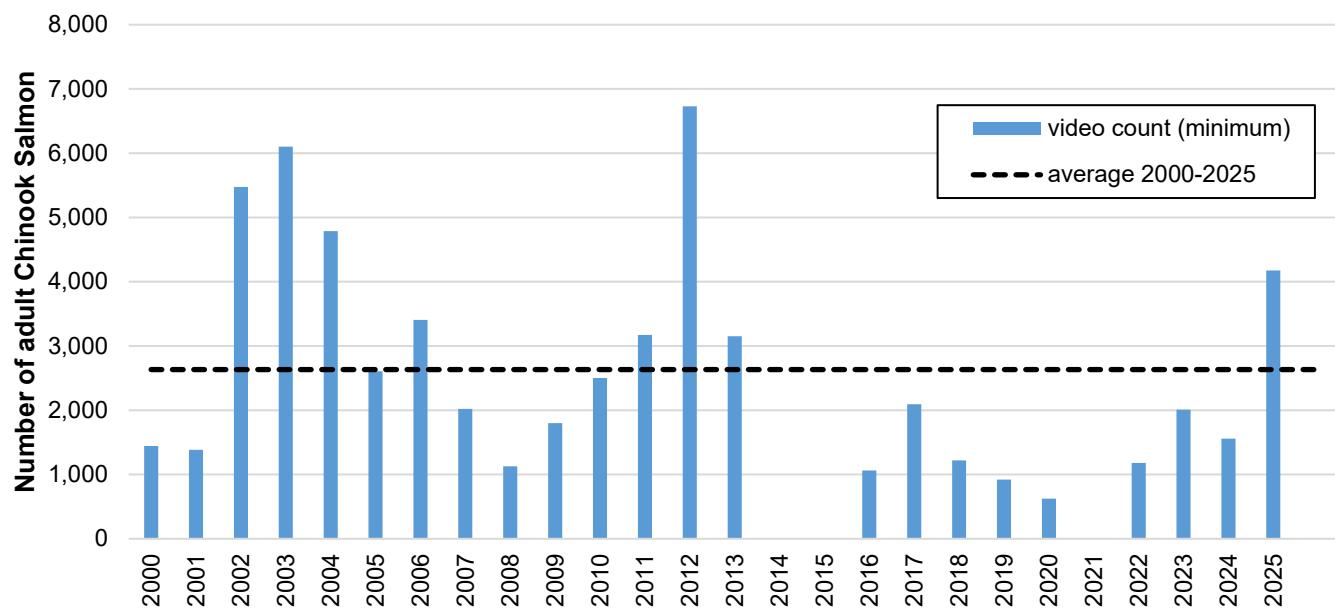
Dry Creek habitat enhancement reaches monitored in 2025. Environmental Resources staff completed effectiveness monitoring in 14 reaches from near the confluence of the Russian River to just below Warm Spring Dam.

### Fish Monitoring



Environmental Resources staff installed an underwater video camera at the Mirabel dam on August 21, 2025, to monitor adult salmon and steelhead that return to the Russian River to spawn. The camera is located in the fish ladder and can only be operated when the dam is inflated. The camera was operated until mid-November when the dam was deflated for the season. All the video from the Mirabel fish ladder has been reviewed and the preliminary Chinook count for 2025 is 4,175 (this number will shift slightly as we further QA/QC the data). This is the fifth highest count for the 23-year data set. The long-term average of adult Chinook salmon is 2,633. The camera was removed on November 13, 2025, which is earlier than typical (median deflation date of the dam is 12/7). In the last 23 years this was the second earliest the camera was removed. The high number of Chinook observed in 2025 over a shorter than typical monitoring season suggests that the Chinook return in 2025 was very strong. In addition

to Chinook, 90 adult coho and 7 steelhead were observed on the video camera. Mirabel video counts are not good indicators of the strength of the coho and steelhead runs because much of the spawning for coho is downstream of the Mirabel dam and steelhead typically return later in the year when the dam is deflated.



The number of adult Chinook salmon observed on the underwater camera located at the Mirabel inflatable dam from 2000-2025. The camera was not operated at the Mirabel Dam in 2014 and 2015 because the site was under construction in order to construct the new fish screens and ladder. Counts were not obtained in 2021 because early season storms precluded camera operations beyond October 23.

Environmental Resources staff began spawner surveys in select tributaries of the Russian River on November 17, following multiple rainstorms that created sufficient flows to reconnect streams and open up spawning habitat for returning adult fish. As of December 16, staff have completed 103 surveys in 23 tributaries throughout the lower Russian River basin (downstream of Maacama Creek).



To date, staff have recorded 16 Chinook redds and three redds that could not be positively identified but are likely Chinook as well. Staff have also recorded 17 live Chinook and 48 Chinook carcasses. An additional six carcasses were recorded that could not be identified to species due to decomposition. Following the initial mid-November rainfall events, several weeks of dry weather have reduced flows in many tributaries, resulting in channel disconnections preventing fish from moving upstream into spawning habitats. As a result, significant Coho and steelhead spawning is not expected until additional storm events produce higher flows and reconnect tributary habitats.

Photo: Environmental Resources staff conducting spawner surveys.

## Russian River Estuary Management Project

The mouth of the Russian River closed three times in fall 2025 due to high surf conditions that filled the river mouth with sand. Two of the closures resulted in need for artificial breaching of the barrier beach to minimize flood risk. The first closure of the year and fall season resulted in a self-breach. The latest artificial breach occurred on November 7, 2025, following the river mouth closing on November 2, 2025. Pinniped baseline monitoring has concluded for the season and will resume in mid-March 2026 for the harbor seal pupping season. Water quality monitoring using the vertical profiling stations in the mainstem estuary has ended due to increasing river flows. Datasondes are currently being maintained in the Willow Creek tributary to the estuary. Grab sampling and algae monitoring is scheduled to continue through December 23 or until river flows increase further.

## Interim Flow Changes

On October 3, 2025, Sonoma Water filed temporary urgency change petitions (petitions) with the State Water Resources Control Board (State Board) requesting storage thresholds at Lake Mendocino be used as the hydrologic index for determining the minimum instream flow requirements in the Russian River and Dry Creek. The State Water Board issued an order approving changes requested in the petitions on December 23, 2025. The order expires on July 21, 2026. Under the Lake Mendocino storage hydrologic index approved in the order, conditions are heading towards a Normal Water Supply Condition for January 1 based on the latest Lake Mendocino inflow projections.

## 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 work groups 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.

A near-term goal in the Biological Opinion requires Sonoma Water to identify, a small-scale habitat enhancement project to be implemented within two years of issuance of the Biological Opinion. Sonoma Water has identified a potential large woody debris enhancement project in Mill Creek - a tributary to Dry Creek.

## Public Outreach

Sonoma Water will be holding a Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Community Meeting on Monday, January 12 from 6:00-8:00 PM at the Lake Sonoma Visitor's Center. Presentations at the meeting will describe the background and status of the project, the results of habitat monitoring and adaptive management, fish monitoring, and the plan for future maintenance activities. The next Public Policy Facilitating Committee meeting will be held at the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors Chambers on January 21 from 2:30 to 5:00 PM.