Russian River Biological Opinion Update – August 3, 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.

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 (CDFW), the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in early March. In late July, the North Coast Regional Board issued a Water Quality Certification for the Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Maintenance Program. The other applications are under agency review. Once approved, permits will authorize maintenance work this summer. Additionally, Sonoma Water maintenance crews installed irrigation systems at three Reach 10 sites and are currently operating them to support the establishment of riparian vegetation establishment on biotechnical bank stabilization features.

Fish Monitoring

Downstream Migrant Trapping

Environmental Resources staff began installing downstream migrant traps on March 10 to monitor juvenile salmonids as they move downstream. Traps were 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). As of July 15, all traps have ceased fishing for the season. The Hopland trap operated from May 13 to July 15 and caught 0 Coho, 219 steelhead (young-of-year [YOY], parr, and smolts), and 3,522 Chinook smolts. The Dry Creek trap operated from April 3 to July 15, and caught 344 Coho (YOY and smolts), 1,461 steelhead (YOY, parr, and smolts), and 3,226 Chinook smolts. The mainstem Russian River trap at Mirabel dam operated from May 28 to 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 to June 8, the Dutch Bill trap operated from March 12 to June 4, the Green Valley trap operated from March 17 to May 7, the upper Willow trap operated from March 11 to May 14, and the lower Willow trap operated from March 10 to June 15. These traps combined caught 3,116 Coho (YOY and smolts), 483 steelhead (YOY, parr, and smolts), and 42 Chinook smolts. Catches of Coho smolts were slightly higher than average this season, but catches of steelhead were well below average. Chinook catches at Dry Creek and Mirabel locations were also below average. The Hopland trap, located on the mainstem Russian River, was operated for the first time during this monitoring season; therefore, comparisons with previous years are not available. However, the seasonal total of 3,522 Chinook smolts (more than any other trap) indicating that this location has the potential to provide valuable information on Chinook smolt production in the upper Russian River in future monitoring efforts.

Photo: Fisheries technicians pause for a quick selfie while tending the Mirabel trap on the mainstem Russian River.

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 and steelhead in two separate passes per reach. As of July 22, staff have completed 39 reaches in 24 different creeks, documenting 5,422 coho juveniles and 22,474 steelhead juveniles. Among the surveyed reaches, Green Valley and Purrington Creeks had the highest number of coho (1,450 and 749 respectively), while Pena and Porter creeks had the highest number of steelhead (4,975 and 2875 respectively). 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.

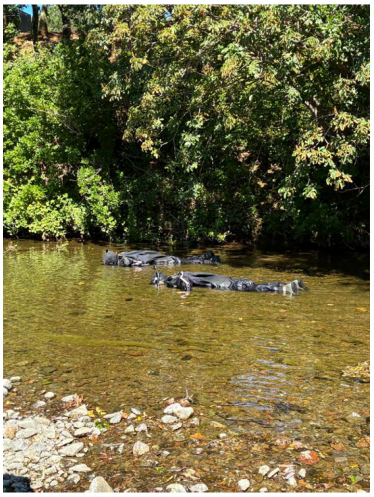

Photo: Fisheries technicians dive a pool in Pena Creek looking for juvenile salmonids.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

The mouth of the Russian River is currently open. 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. Fisheries seining surveys will be scheduled for September 2026.

California Department of Fish and Wildlife Incidental Take Permit

Sonoma Water applied for an Incidental Take Permit (ITP) pursuant to Section 2081(b) of the California Endangered Species Act (CESA) from the CDFW to authorize the incidental take of state-listed species for projects described in the Russian River Watershed Water Supply and Channel Maintenance Biological Opinion (2025 Russian River Biological Opinion). CDFW did not issue a CESA consistency determination for the Proposed Action described in the 2025 Russian River Biological Opinion, but rather directed Sonoma Water to seek an ITP. Consequently, Sonoma Water is pursuing an ITP to obtain the necessary state authorization for projects that have potential for incidental take of the CESA-listed as endangered coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) and threatened longfin smelt (*Spirinchus thaleichthys*).

Public Outreach

There are no public meetings scheduled at this time.