



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – November 2, 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 (CDFW), the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board), and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in early March. In mid-October, three of the four permits have been obtained for the Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Maintenance Program. Sonoma Water has received a draft CDFW Streambed Alteration Agreement and is currently collaborating with CDFW to provide comments to finalize the agreement.

Fish Monitoring

Electrofishing Surveys

Environmental Resources staff completed electrofishing surveys in Dutch Bill, Green Valley, Mill, and Willow Creeks for the 2026 season. These electrofishing surveys are completed annually in the four life cycle monitoring streams and their tributaries. Electrofishing surveys are used to estimate juvenile steelhead abundance, calibrate our late summer snorkel counts, and get PIT (passive integrated transponder) tags into steelhead that will eventually migrate to the ocean and inform our steelhead smolt estimate. Environmental Resources staff tagged 1,360 juvenile steelhead across four watersheds over 37 field days.



Photo: Fisheries technicians conduct electrofishing surveys on Dutch Bill Creek.



Chinook Video Monitoring

Environmental Resources staff installed a video camera in the Mirabel fish ladder on September 1, 2026, to monitor adult salmon and steelhead that return to the Russian River to spawn. Typically, adult Chinook salmon do not return in large numbers until October. Staff reviewed footage through October 21, 2026, and recorded 1,116 Chinook passing through the fish ladder. October 4th had the highest fish count so far with 307 individuals passing the dam in one day. Fish movement can be triggered by a number of environmental factors including rain events, barometric pressure changes, and increases in river flow. The camera can be operated until the Mirabel Dam is deflated which occurs when the flow in the mainstem Russian River is predicted to exceed 1,600 cfs (which typically occurs between mid-November and mid-December). Sonoma Water has operated a video camera in the mainstem Russian River since 2000.

Photo: Chinook milling in the camera frame on October 4, 2026.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

The mouth of the Russian River closed on October 14, 2026. Sonoma Water monitored conditions in the Estuary, including water quality and salmonid presence. A monthly beach topographic survey was conducted on October 21, 2026. The estuary self-breached on October 27, 2026, and the river mouth is open.



Environmental resources staff seined in the Russian River Estuary from September 21 to September 29, 2026. Over 50 seine pulls in the lower, middle, and upper estuary were completed. Staff captured and applied PIT tags to three wild steelhead. The largest group of non-salmonid fish captured was topsmelt with total catch exceeding 2,600 individuals. Other captured non-salmonids include bay shrimp, sculpin, stickleback, shiner surfperch, Tule perch, largemouth bass, American shad, starry flounder, bluegill, green crab, and bay pipefish. The goals of estuary seining are to estimate steelhead and coho adult and smolt abundance, determine steelhead, Chinook, and coho migration timing, and assess steelhead and coho survival, but these surveys will also help to document the different species of fish utilizing the Russian River Estuary.

Photo: Fisheries technicians sort through a freshly hauled seine net full of fish.

Public Outreach

There are no public meetings scheduled at this time.