



Russian River Biological Opinion Update – July 2020

The Sonoma County Water Agency (Sonoma Water) is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. Below is a brief synopsis of current work. For more detailed information about these activities, please visit www.sonomacountywater.org.

Fish Flow Project

The Fish Flow Habitat and Water Rights Project (Fish Flow) Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) was released in 2016 for public comments. Submitted comments fall into a number of categories, but many comments fall into the following general issues:

- Water Quality (e.g. algae and biostimulatory conditions);
- Water Rights (e.g. illegal/unauthorized diversions along Russian River, minimum bypass flow terms in State Water Resources Control Board-issued water right permits);
- Recreation (e.g. lower Russian River recreation and tourism, quantity and quality of river flow for recreation);
- Independent Science Review Panel (ISRP) Report (e.g. consideration of results/recommendations of ISRP report in Draft EIR);
- Proposed Project description and alternatives (e.g. consideration of “adaptive management” in implementation of proposed project).

Sonoma Water staff are working on revisions in anticipation of recirculating the Draft EIR. Staff are also working on outreach materials to improve communication and understanding of key topics related to the Fish Flow Project.

Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

Sonoma Water is poised to start construction in July 2020 on the last remaining Phase 3 project in Reach 5 approximately five miles upstream from the confluence with the Russian River. On June 2, Sonoma Water’s Board of Directors awarded the contract to Hanford ARC of Petaluma. Hanford constructed an earlier phase of the Dry Creek Project and has extensive experience in stream restoration work. The Right-of-Way agreements for all property owners are now finalized and permits have been obtained. Sonoma Water is also planning maintenance work for summer 2020 to restore full function to sites that accumulated sediment during extended high flows.

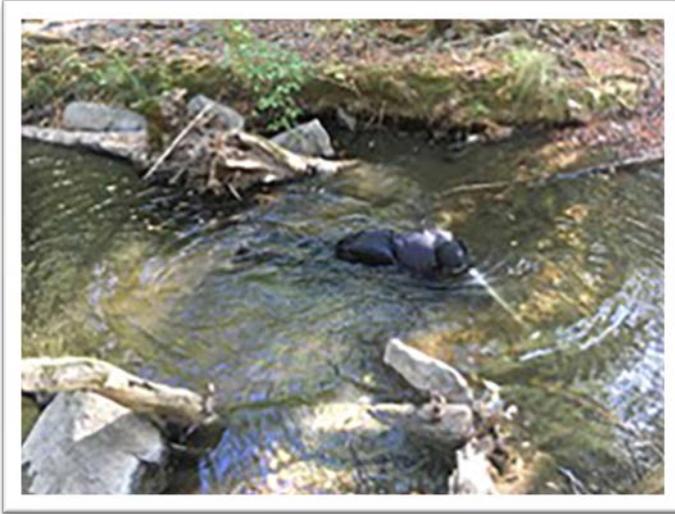
Sonoma Water and the Army Corps are moving ahead with Phases IV - VI of the habitat enhancement project, which make up the last three of the six miles required by the Russian River Biological Opinion. On February 10, the Army Corps published their fiscal year 2020 work plan that included a new-start designation and \$28.3 million dollars - the full amount of federal funding needed to complete the Corps’ Dry Creek Ecosystem Restoration Project when combined with the 35% cost share from Sonoma Water. The Army Corps plans to Construct Phase IV in 2021, Phase V in 2022, and Phase VI in 2023. The design consultants have addressed comments received from the 90% design reviews and are due to submit the 99% design packages at the end of July 2020.

Sonoma Water continues to meet with property owners participating in Phases IV, V, and VI to present the 90% designs, obtain comments, answer questions, address concerns, and explain the process, while working out the right-way agreements needed to implement the project.

Fish Monitoring

As we transition to summer, we turn our focus to juvenile salmon and steelhead. An important summer fish monitoring activity is snorkeling to determine which stream reaches young salmon and steelhead are occupying. During these surveys, our crew members don dry suits, masks and snorkels and search for fish in pools. These surveys not only

provide information on the relative numbers of fish but also their location. During these surveys, we are also able to observe stream flow conditions which can have an important influence on fish survival.



Pictured at left is a crew member conducting a snorkel survey and at right a juvenile in its natural environment.

Russian River Estuary Management Project

The 2020 management season began on May 15 and ends on October 15. The 2020 Adaptive Management Plan was finalized in May. Staff resumed biological and water quality monitoring in May, including fisheries and water quality monitoring. Monthly seining monitoring has been modified due to COVID-19. The river mouth is currently open.



Harbor seals and their pups at Jenner on May 6 with the mouth of the river closed. The groin of the jetty is visible in the background. (Jak Wonderly photography)

Interim Flow Changes

Water supply conditions are currently *Dry*. Normally, under *Dry* conditions, Sonoma Water would not be filing Temporary Urgency Change Petitions (Petitions) with the State Water Resources Control Board to modify the minimum instream flow requirements for the Russian River as established by Decision 1610 for Permits 12947 A, 12949, 12950

and 16596. Recently, however, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission issued a variance for the operation of PG&E's Potter Valley Project. The change in operation is expected to result in limited transfers of water through the hydroelectric project this summer and adversely impact water storage levels in Lake Mendocino. Sonoma Water staff have modelled the expected changes and, based on that work, prepared a supporting technical memo and Petitions. The Petitions were filed on June 8, 2020. We hope to have a Temporary Urgency Change Order in place by mid-July.

A press release on the Petitions can be found here: <https://www.sonomawater.org/news/post/9340/>