



Notice of Availability/Intent To Adopt
Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration
for the
Mirabel Fish Ladder and Fish Screen Replacement
Project
November 21, 2012

INTRODUCTION

The Sonoma County Water Agency (Water Agency) is the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the proposed **Mirabel Fish Ladder and Fish Screen Replacement Project**. The Water Agency has prepared an Initial Study and Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the project in accordance with CEQA. An electronic copy of the IS/MND is available at www.sonomacountywater.org. Hard copies of the IS/MND are available for purchase by request at 707-547-1900 or at the Water Agency's administrative office (404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa). Hard copies are also available for public viewing at the following locations:

- ❖ **Windsor Regional Library:** 9291 Old Redwood Hwy., Bldg. 100, Windsor
- ❖ **Guerneville Regional Library:** 14107 Armstrong Woods Road, Guerneville
- ❖ **Water Agency's administrative office**

An Initial Study is a preliminary analysis of a project's potential environmental impacts used to determine whether a Negative Declaration or an Environmental Impact Report will be prepared. The Initial Study document is intended to provide a clear understanding of the environmental impacts associated with the construction and operation of the proposed project for decision-makers, responsible and trustee agencies under CEQA, and the public. If an Initial Study identifies potentially significant impacts but the project is modified or revised to clearly mitigate the impacts, a Mitigated Negative Declaration may be prepared. If an Initial Study concludes that a project may have a significant effect on the environment, an Environmental Impact Report should be prepared.

PROJECT LOCATION

The Mirabel Fish Screen and Fish Ladder Replacement Project would be located at the site of the Water Agency's existing Mirabel Dam along the Russian River approximately 2,600 feet downstream of the Wohler Bridge in Sonoma County, California (Figures 1 and 2 below). Proposed modifications would occur on the western bank of the Russian River. No modifications are proposed for the existing fish ladder on the eastern bank of the Russian River.



Figure 1

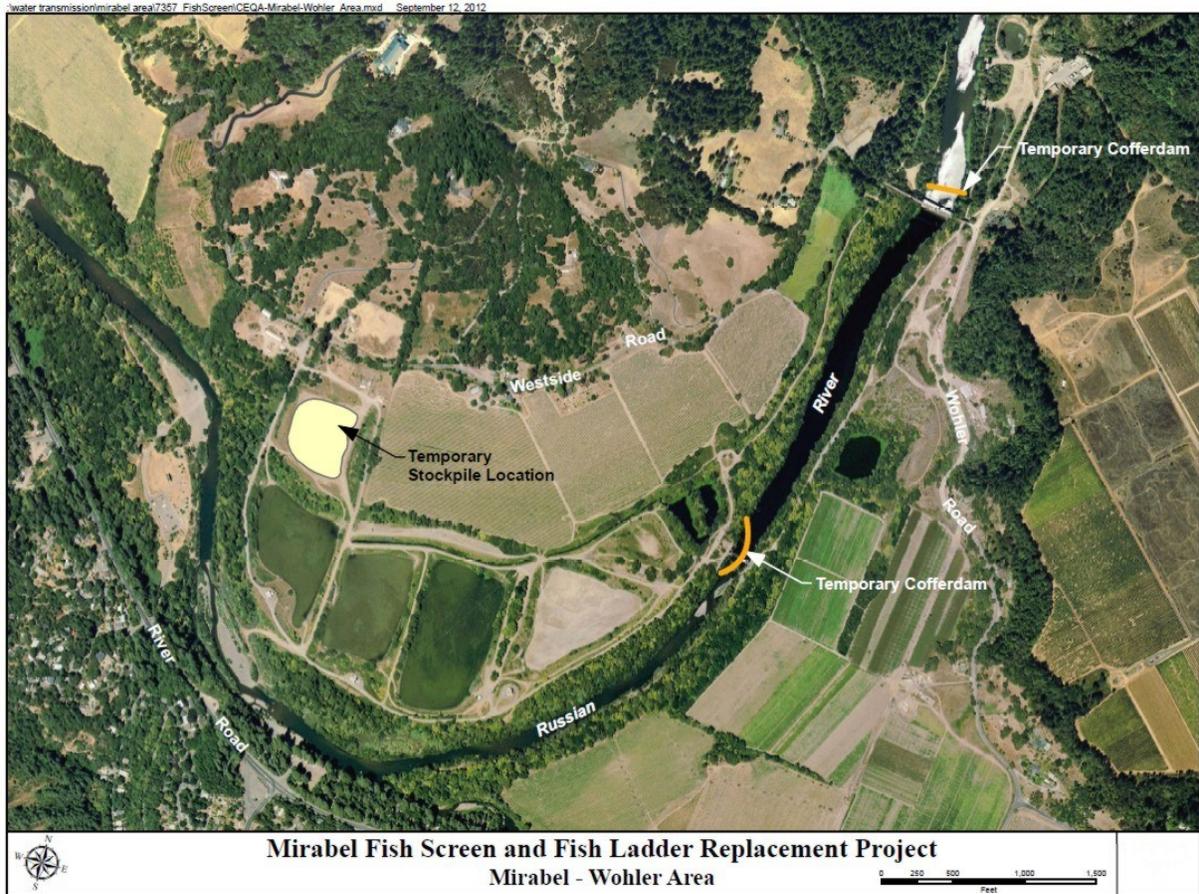


Figure 2

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Project components consist of those relating to the fish screen modifications and those relating to the fish ladder modifications. Project construction activities would require isolating the work area from the active flow of the Russian River, demolishing the existing fish screen/intake and fish ladder structures on the western bank of the Russian River, and constructing the new fish screen/intake and fish ladder structures. The new facilities would extend approximately 40 feet farther upstream and approximately 100 feet farther downstream than the existing facilities. This larger footprint is necessary to meet contemporary fish screen and fish passage design criteria (NMFS 1997). Figure 3 shows a plan view of the proposed project design. Figure 4 shows a conceptual design drawing of the proposed project components.

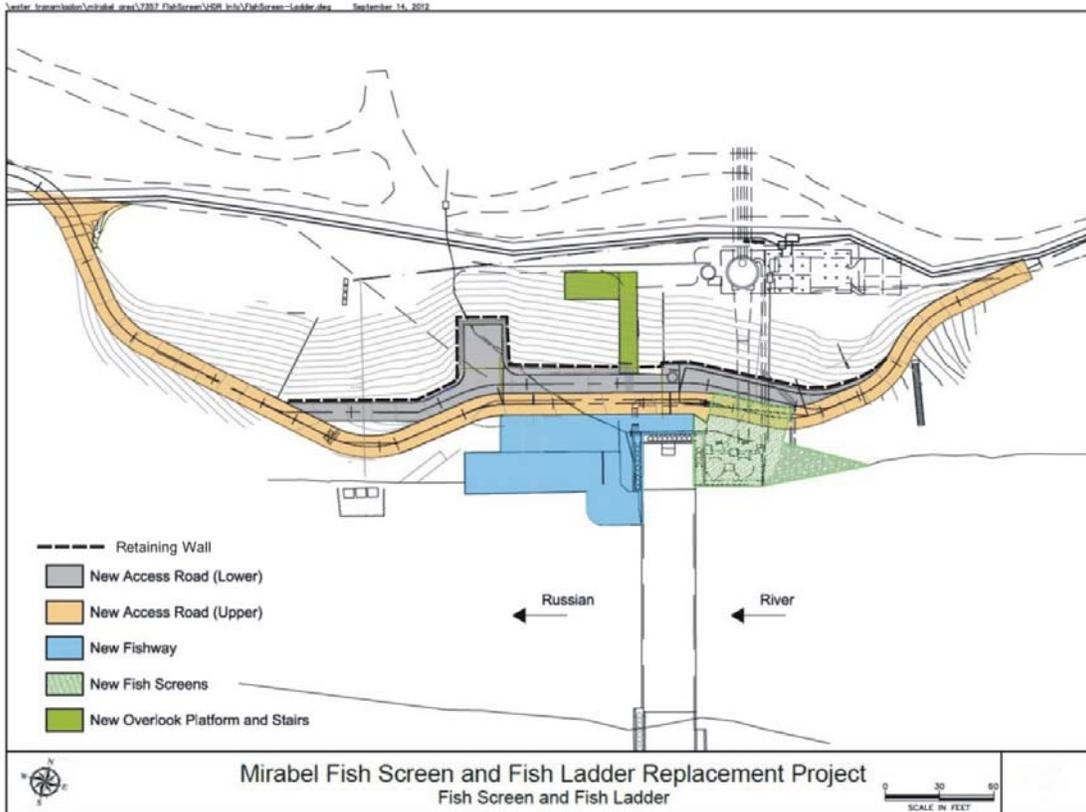


Figure 3



Figure 4

Fish Screen

The proposed intake screen would consist of six 12-foot tall by 6-foot wide panels, with a total area of 432 square feet. The new fish screen would also incorporate a cleaning system to ensure that the screen material does not become clogged. Clogged screens result in higher flows through unclogged portions of the screen, which can lead to fish getting trapped against the screen. The cleaning mechanism is anticipated to be an electric motor-driven mechanical brush system that periodically moves back and forth to clean the intake screen structure.

Fish Ladder

A vertical slot type fish ladder was selected as the recommended design to provide passage for upstream migrating salmonids. Vertical slot fish ladders are commonly used for salmon and steelhead (among other fish species) throughout the world. A vertical slot fish ladder consists of a sloped, reinforced concrete rectangular channel separated by vertical baffles with 15-inch wide slots that extend down the entire depth of the baffle. The baffles are located at even increments to create a step-like arrangement of resting pools.

The design would be self-regulating and provide consistent velocities, flow depths, and water surface differentials at each slot throughout a range of operating conditions. It is anticipated that the ladder would be configured to accommodate a range of fish passage conditions while the Mirabel Dam is up and river flows ranging from 125 to 800 cfs. Fish passage while the Mirabel Dam is down would also be accommodated, but is not the primary focus of design. The fish ladder would extend approximately 100 feet further downstream than the existing fish ladder at the site.

Fisheries Monitoring Components

The Water Agency currently conducts a variety of fisheries monitoring activities at its Mirabel Dam facilities. The new fish ladder design would support these monitoring activities by providing a dedicated viewing window and video equipment room and a fish trapping and holding area built into the fish ladder. The monitoring information collected by Water Agency staff is critical in tracking population trends and movement of different species in the Russian River system.

Education Opportunities

The existing facility at Mirabel is visited every year by approximately 3,000 schoolchildren as part of the Water Agency's water education efforts. The existing facility allows schoolchildren to see a critical component of the Water Agency's water supply system, but the views of the top of the existing fish ladder do not offer much opportunity for observing and learning about the fisheries of the Russian River system. The proposed project would include a viewing area, separate from the video monitoring viewing window, which would allow visitors to see into the side of the fish ladder. The educational experience for schoolchildren would be improved by having the opportunity to actually see fish travelling up or down the fish ladder.

Supporting Components

The project design would also include a variety of other components that would support the primary fish screen and fish ladder aspects of the project. These other components consist of items such as replacement of the buoy warning line upstream of the Mirabel Dam, modification of the existing access road to the project site, and the installation of a viewing platform to allow visitors a safe location to view the overall facility. The existing access road down to the Mirabel Dam is a steep one-way road. Vehicles going down to the Mirabel Dam area must be turned around or backed up the road down to the project site. The proposed project includes a modification of the access road so that the road will not be as steep and will include both an entrance and exit ramp from the Mirabel Dam site. Because the site is a major component of the Water Agency's water education program where several thousand schoolchildren are brought out to the site each year, the design for the new access road also includes a parking area at the Mirabel Dam that would be compliant with Americans with Disabilities Act access standards. The viewing platform would be a deck area at the elevation of the existing upper levee road above the Mirabel Dam that would allow visitors to the site to view the facility. A stairway from the top of bank down to the Mirabel Dam would allow visitor access from the upper levee road area down to the Mirabel Dam.

INITIAL STUDY REVIEW

Agencies and interested members of the public are invited to review and comment on the IS/MND. Please include a name, address, and telephone number of a contact person in your agency for all future correspondence on this subject.

Please send your comments to:

David Cuneo
Sonoma County Water Agency
404 Aviation Blvd.
Santa Rosa, CA 95403

Or email your comments to

david.cuneo@scwa.ca.gov

The public comment period closes at 5:00 p.m. **January 18, 2013.**

ADOPTION OF THE INITIAL STUDY AND MITIGATED NEGATIVE DECLARATION

The project is scheduled for consideration and adoption by the Water Agency's Board of Directors at their regularly scheduled Board meeting beginning at 8:30 a.m. on **January 29, 2013.** Comments submitted during the Initial Study review period will be included in our report to the Board of Directors. Opportunity to comment on the project will also be available at the Board meeting.