



Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement

From its outlet in Warm Springs Dam, Dry Creek meanders 14 miles to the Russian River. The creek is home to endangered coho salmon and threatened steelhead (including steelhead raised at the Don Clausen Fish Hatchery). The creek also serves as a conduit for water that is released from Lake Sonoma by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) in the winter for flood control purposes and by the Sonoma County Water Agency (Water Agency) in the summer for water supply.

The Problem

National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) biologists have determined that current flow levels in Dry Creek in the summer are too high for young coho and steelhead. The velocity of the water released from Lake Sonoma makes it difficult for the juvenile fish to thrive.

The Solution

The NMFS's biological opinion recognizes that drastically reducing the summertime flows in Dry Creek would severely impair the Water Agency's ability to deliver water to its customers, so the biological opinion proposes "reasonable and prudent alternatives," which include the following:

- The Water Agency and the Corps would enhance six miles of habitat along Dry Creek over a 12-year period to create protected areas for juvenile coho and steelhead. If the habitat enhancement works as intended, the current water levels could continue to be released from Warm Springs Dam during the summer.
- If habitat enhancement doesn't result in significant improvements by 2018, the Water Agency would pursue construction of a pipeline that would carry water from the dam to the Russian River so that flow in the creek could be reduced.

The Implementation

The biological opinion proposes a schedule of studies and phased habitat enhancement work that will include ongoing monitoring (see the reverse side for a project time line). The Water Agency is nearing completion of the first step, which is to conduct two feasibility studies and to pay for habitat enhancement work in Dry Creek tributaries.

One study, conducted by consulting firm Inter-Fluve, Inc., focuses on habitat enhancement. A "Current Conditions" analysis is complete and the draft Habitat Enhancement Feasibility Study has been released. The study found that 45 areas in Dry Creek provide opportunities for habitat enhancement. The biological opinion requires construction of the first mile of habitat enhancement to begin in 2013. This schedule is likely to be accelerated by a demonstration project proposed by a group of willing landowners. The design and environmental work for the demonstration project is underway.

The second study looks at the feasibility of constructing a pipeline from Warm Springs Dam to the Russian River. A draft study prepared by HDR, Inc. was released in April 2011 and identifies potential routes and costs. The California Department of Fish and Game, in conjunction with the Sotoyome Resource Conservation District, is implementing Water Agency-funded projects in a number of Dry Creek tributaries that will improve fish passage and restore habitat.



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Timeline of Projects Required in Dry Creek Valley

