

ANNUAL DRY CREEK COMMUNITY MEETING
6/27/13
RESPONSE TO AUDIENCE QUESTIONS/COMMENTS

Why not pipe water from Lake Sonoma into the headwaters of Pena Creek (which was a historic salmon and steelhead creek)?

Response: The Russian River Biological Opinion only deals with problems/issues that are related to the Sonoma County Water Agency and the US Army Corps of Engineers operations. The Biological Opinion doesn't deal with all the issues in the watershed. Pena Creek is outside of both agencies operational scope. By requiring the Water Agency and the USACE to build six miles of enhancements in Dry Creek, the Biological Opinion will create a tremendous amount of habitat for young steelhead and coho.

It was acknowledged that conditions in some of the tributaries are not ideal, and that many organizations (primarily the Resource Conservation Districts in cooperation with landowners) have been restoring areas of tributaries. But it was noted that the young fish raised in Pena Creek eventually go back to Dry Creek and the velocity of the water will flush them out, which is why it's important to create habitat in Dry Creek itself.

What repercussions could the habitat enhancements have on other species, like sharpshooters or mosquitoes?

Response: Much of the Dry Creek habitat enhancement will include removing invasive species (like Himalayan blackberries) and replanting with native vegetation that will provide shady cover for the creek but will also help protect vineyards from pests. In fact, more than 5,000 native plants will be planted in the first mile of habitat enhancement. Removal and replacement of non-native plants should help reduce the presence of sharpshooters and other pests.

This vegetation must be maintained over time, which is one of the reasons the Water Agency is seeking long-term easements from landowners.

A follow-up question was asked regarding the removal of eucalyptus.

Response: Eucalyptus won't be removed just because it's non-native. If trees are providing benefit, they will remain.

Staff was asked to elaborate on the selection process for Miles Two and Three and to indicate where the Water Agency is in the process.

Response: Consultants Interfluve Inc. ranked areas of the creek for the potential to create habitat for steelhead and coho (without consideration of cost, logistics and landowner interest). The areas with the highest benefit to fish were ranked Tier One or Tier Two. These spots were grouped and seven or eight high-ranking segments were identified. The Water Agency is in the process of sending out requests to landowners for access to see the sites and to determine landowner interest.

The process for Miles 2 & 3 has just begun, and will involve a couple of years of planning, design, environmental analysis and working with landowners. Construction will begin in 2016, with Miles Two and Three completed by 2017.

How could the heavy equipment used in this work impact local roads? Both road conditions and traffic? Concerns raised about West Dry Creek Road conditions, blind spots and curves.

The environmental analysis of the first mile project addressed this question. Lambert Bridge is fairly fragile and will be avoided for first-mile work, with most trucks using Yoakam Bridge, which is fairly modern. For miles two and Three, traffic will be considered under the California Environmental Impact Act (CEQA).

Next summer there will large vehicles, with material leaving the site and logs coming down from dam to site. The number of vehicle trips is in the CEQA document for Mile One, where traffic impacts are analyzed.

It was requested that the Water Agency give people a heads up for major traffic issue, including email alerts. Before construction, the contractor has to apply for encroachment permit – signs must be used. If the trucks negatively impact road, the road must be repaired after project is done.

Is there money available to help landowners who want to do restoration work?

Sotoyome RCD is expert at getting money to help private landowners. NRCS, California DFW fishery restoration grants program are other sources.

Can you cite any other areas where a project like this has been done and how did it work out?

Mike Burke, Interfluve, Inc. noted that his firm is located in the epicenter of coho habitat enhancement. They've done work on the Klackamas River system that is very similar to the techniques being used in Dry Creek and in Bellingham, WA, on a creek system similar to Dry Creek. The Yakima Nation is doing a lot of work on the Columbia system; in California, work is being done on the Upper Matole River and locally, in Austin Creek, near the mouth.

What are the predators of salmon and are they modeled into this project?

One great benefit of Dry Creek is the super cold water that is good for salmon and steelhead, but not the predator fish you find in the Russian River. The habitat enhancements provide places for the young fish to hide and provide cover from predators including other fish, birds and mammals.

Who decides if this project doesn't work and a pipeline is needed?

National Marine Fisheries Service and California Department of Fish & Wildlife determine the success. The water Agency and these agencies are working together, with a consultant, on an adaptive management plan that allows us to formulate plans and to define success. So far, we seem to be on track. The first component, at Quivira, worked well and the Water Agency and the other agencies were in constant communication during construction.

The cost of the habitat enhancement is about \$8 million per mile, for a total of \$48-\$50 million. The funding for this project will come from funds already collected, from ratepayers and from funds the Water Agency is seeking from the federal government. The pipeline would cost \$150-180 million, and would be paid for by ratepayers.