



## **Russian River Biological Opinion Update – December 2018**

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](http://www.sonomacountywater.org).

### **Fish Flow Project**

The Fish Flow Habitat and Water Rights Project (Fish Flow) Draft Environmental Impact Report (Draft EIR) was released on August 19, 2016. The public comment period closed on March 10, 2017. Three public hearings were held (September 9, 2016, in Santa Rosa, November 16, 2016, in Cloverdale, and November 17, 2016, in Guerneville) to obtain public comments on the Draft EIR. 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 addressing issues raised by comments. Staff are also clarifying the next steps for the CEQA process including recirculation of the Draft EIR. Additional updates will be provided during the meeting.

### **Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project**

Construction for 2018 is wrapped up on multiple habitat enhancement sites in two separate reaches of Dry Creek. Reach 4A, designed for Sonoma Water by ESA Associates and consists of three side channels and a modification to the downstream-most grade control sill, was constructed by the US Army Corps of Engineers for Sonoma Water under the Continuing Authorities Program. The Corps’ Contractor, Sand Point Generating, began in June and finished in mid-November. Reach 14 is located just downstream of Warm Springs Dam and consists of three side-channel features designed for Sonoma Water by Inter-Fluve, Inc. This Reach is being constructed for Sonoma Water by McCullough Construction, who finished two of the three sites in October and will start the third site in summer of 2019.

### **Fish Monitoring**

We recently completed the 2018 fish population surveys in main stem Dry Creek. These surveys serve objectives of the Coastal Monitoring Program (CMP) and allow us to place fish monitoring results in habitat enhanced areas of Dry Creek into a broader context. During juvenile surveys young coho were observed in eight of the nine sections sampled. Our fish monitoring in the winter includes placement of antennas in newly-created off-channel areas to evaluate whether tagged steelhead and coho are taking advantage of these habitats. CMP surveys for adult salmon and steelhead redds will begin throughout the Russian River basin as soon as seasonal rains allow access to spawning habitat for adult migrants. These surveys will continue through the spring, usually ending in mid-April.

On September 1 we installed video cameras in the fish ladders at the Mirabel inflatable dam. We use these cameras to count adult Chinook, steelhead, and coho that return to the Russian River to spawn. As of October 28 we have

observed 373 adult Chinook ascending the fish ladders. We will continue to use video cameras to monitor the adult salmon run until the first major storm which requires us to deflate the Mirabel dam, which typically occurs in mid-December.

### **Russian River Estuary Management Project**

The 2018 season ended on October 15. Staff are working on data analysis and preparation of reports for the prior year management season. The Russian River Estuary closed as a result of formation of a barrier beach on October 15, 2018 and reopened on November 13 following digging of channel by unknown individuals. The river mouth briefly closed again on November 18 and self-breached on November 24.

### **Interim Flow Changes**

On May 1 the water supply condition changed from *Dry* to *Normal*. On June 1, conditions changed back to *Dry*. A petition was not filed this year, as the minimum streamflow requirements in dry water year conditions comply with the instream flow requirements in the Biological Opinion. **NOTE:** This is the first year since 2009 that a TUCP has not been filed.



***The mouth of the Russian River opened on the afternoon of Nov. 13, 2018 nearly one month after it closed on October 15, 2018. It briefly closed again on Nov. 18 and self-breached on Nov. 24, when this photo was taken.***