



## **Russian River Biological Opinion Update – November 4, 2024**

Sonoma Water is continually planning and implementing the Russian River Biological Opinion requirements. Below is a brief synopsis of the current work. For more detailed information, please visit [SonomaWater.org](https://www.SonomaWater.org).

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

The Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project is creating 6 miles of rearing habitat for endangered or threatened juvenile salmonids and consists of 6 Phases (I – VI) spread throughout the 15 miles of Dry Creek between the Russian River and Warms Springs Dam. In order to track project locations, this portion of Dry Creek is divided into 15 Reaches that are numbered according to approximate distance in miles from the confluence with the Russian River.

#### **Phases I – III**

Phases I – III were completed in 2021 and included approximately 14 sites from 6 different reaches. These Phases were designed and constructed primarily by Sonoma Water, however, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) constructed 2 sites. Sonoma Water is now monitoring and maintaining these sites as described in the next section.

#### **Phases IV – VI**

Sonoma Water and the Corps of Engineers are implementing Phases IV – VI of the Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project under a cost-share partnership where Sonoma Water covers 35% of the cost, provides right-of-way, and manages the design contracts, and the Corps covers 65% of the cost and implements the construction. Phases IV and V construction were both completed in 2024. Phase IV consists of sites in Reaches 10 and 13 of Dry Creek, and Phase V includes sites in Reaches 4C and 2A.

Phase VI is in final stages of design and planning, with construction tentatively planned for 2026.



Site 10A1 Side Channel looking upstream.





Site 10A1 Side Channel looking downstream from the inlet.

ROD Construction has completed the remaining 4 sites in Reach 2, and the post-construction walkthrough inspection occurred on September 4, 2024. This completes the construction of Phase V of the Dry Creek Habitat Projects



Reach 2 sites on September 4, 2024. View is looking back upstream with the main channel of Dry Creek in the center and a newly constructed side channel visible on the right and the outlet of a newly constructed side channel visible to the left of the main channel.



### *Phase VI Planning*

Sonoma Water's right-of-way staff and project manager continue to work with the Phase VI property owners to obtain appraisals for the value of the right-of-way compensation amounts, prepare right-of-way compensation offers and easement agreements, present the documents to the owners, and address owner comments and concerns. Approximately half of the offers have been presented so far and Sonoma Water is waiting for comments.

### **Habitat Monitoring and Maintenance**

Sonoma Water environmental staff are in the process of conducting 2024 effectiveness monitoring to evaluate newly and previously constructed reaches, to quantify the habitat areas meeting desired conditions, and to identify maintenance needs. Staff also completed pre-project surveys of reaches that were constructed in 2024. Methods include collecting bathymetric data with survey equipment, measuring water depth and velocity, recording aquatic habitat types and characteristics, collecting topographic data and aerial photography with drones, and monitoring fish use using pit tags and fish surveys. Sonoma Water Environmental staff are currently working to obtain long-term programmatic permits covering maintenance work and plan. Maintenance work was completed on October 9<sup>th</sup> in the Reach 5 area to remove sediment which had deposited in the site during high flow events and was reducing the habitat area and quality at the site. Maintenance in the Reach 8 area to address similar sedimentation impacts, is expected to occur during the 2025 work season.



Photo showing portion of the Reach 5A Channel that had filled in. Habitat channel shown is in process of being re-excavated. Photo taken September 26, 2024.





Photo of eroded bank of habitat channel stabilization work. Photo shows regraded bank slope, new willow cuttings at the toe of the slope and excavation of the habitat channel area. Photo taken September 26, 2024.



Photo of newly opened portion of the habitat channel. Photo is showing the inlet connection from Dry Creek into the habitat channel in Reach 5A. Photo taken October 3, 2024.





Photo of newly opened portion of the habitat channel. Photo is looking back upstream along the constructed habitat channel in Reach 5A. Photo taken October 9, 2024.





Photo of the lower portion of the habitat channel in Reach 5A where flow was recently restored back into. Photo is looking downstream along the constructed habitat channel in Reach 5A. Photo taken October 9, 2024.

Environmental Resources staff have been conducting habitat monitoring at Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement sites for the last several months and are currently keeping up with an ambitious schedule. Environmental Resources staff began the first 2024 post-construction survey at the reach 10A1 habitat enhancement site and are now conducting post-construction surveys in the other recently completed reaches of the Phase IV and V projects.

### **Public Outreach**

Sonoma Water Right-of-Way and Engineering staff are reaching out to landowners involved in Phase VI in order to advance the process of obtaining easements and evaluate feasibility of grade control sill replacement. The annual meeting on the Russian River Biological Opinion will be held after a new Biological Opinion is issued.



## **Fish Monitoring**

On September 1, Sonoma Water began operating a video camera in the fish ladder at the Mirabel dam near Forestville, CA to count adult salmonids returning to the Russian River. To date 433 adult Chinook have been counted. In most years, the Chinook run continues into the month of December. The long-term average annual adult Chinook count is 2,610.



## **Russian River Estuary Management Project**

The mouth of the Russian River is open as of September 24, 2024. Water quality and pinniped monitoring is ongoing. Our most recent seining was during the week of September 23rd. The lagoon management period ends on October 15.



### **Interim Flow Changes**

On June 6, 2024, the Division of Water Rights (Division) issued an order approving Sonoma Water's change petitions. As required by the 2008 Russian River Biological Opinion under *Normal* water supply conditions, the petitions requested to reduce the minimum instream flow requirement on the Upper Russian River from 185 cfs to 125 cfs and on the Lower Russian River from 125 cfs to 70 cfs. The order expires on October 15, 2024. On August 20, 2024, Sonoma Water filed new temporary urgency change petitions with the Division requesting that storage thresholds at Lake Mendocino be used as the hydrologic index for determining minimum instream flow requirements in the Russian River and Dry Creek starting November 1, 2024. Sonoma Water filed similar petitions in October of 2023, which the Division issued an order approving in December 2023. The Division publicly noticed Sonoma Water's recently filed petitions on August 28, 2024, with a comment deadline of September 25, 2024.

### **New Biological Opinion**

Sonoma Water and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) are in consultation with the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) for the next Biological Opinion (BO). Implementation of projects and monitoring required by the 2008 BO will continue until a new BO is issued.