



## Russian River Biological Opinion Update – March 3, 2025

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](http://SonomaWater.org).

### Dry Creek Habitat Enhancement Project

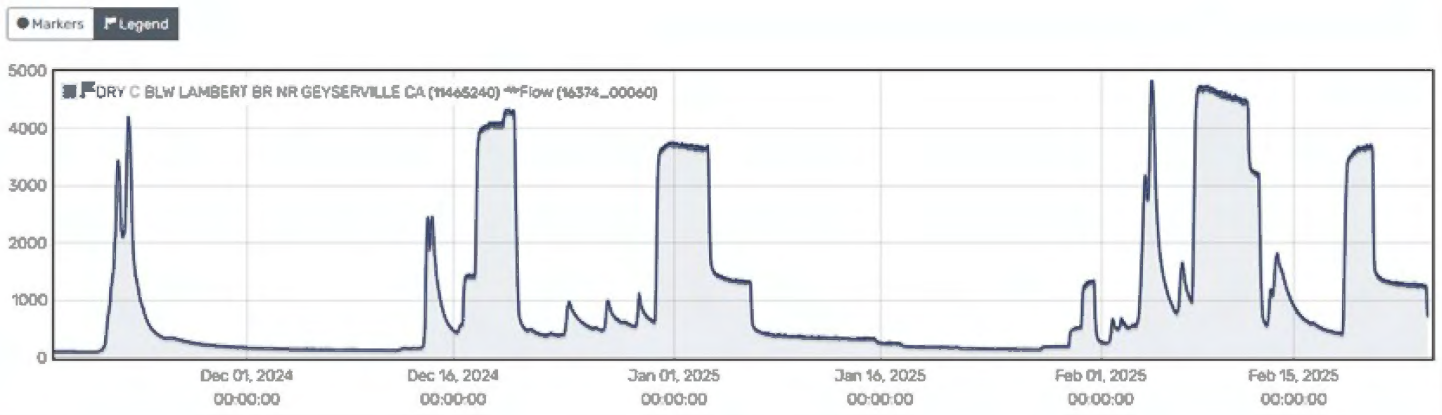
#### Habitat Monitoring and Maintenance

Sonoma Water Environmental Resources staff are currently working to obtain long-term programmatic permits covering maintenance work on previously constructed sites. Maintenance in the Reach 8 area to address sedimentation impacts, is expected to occur during the 2025 work season. Sonoma Water Environmental Resources staff are going to the Board of Supervisors in mid to late May 2025 for approval to execute a contract with a contractor that will conduct maintenance activities starting in Reach 8.



The photograph on left depicts sediment deposition at the inlet of Site 4C, which is a backwater channel constructed in 2024, that will obstruct the inlet at lower flow. Downstream connections between the mainstem and the channel remain open. The photograph on the right depicts the mainstem (background) filled in with sediment and avulsed into the newly constructed Site 2B backwater channel (foreground). Both photographs were taken in January 2025.

This has been a record rainfall year with three short-duration high-flow events from tributaries and four sustained high flow releases (see plot below). Sonoma Water staff will evaluate the effects of high flow on project reaches as part of effectiveness monitoring that will occur in spring and summer.



Hydrograph of Dry Creek Below Lambert Bridge stream gage showing high duration flow events and flow releases in Dry Creek in Fall 2024 and Winter 2025.

## Public Outreach

The annual meeting on the Russian River Biological Opinion will be held after a new Biological Opinion is issued.

## Fish Monitoring

Sonoma Water with support from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife and the Ukiah Fish and Wildlife Club has recently implemented a new steelhead smolt radio telemetry pilot study. Fifty smolts were radio tagged and held at the Coyote Valley Fish Facility for eight days. There was no observed pre-release mortality or tag loss. The fish were released into the East Fork of the Russian River near the Coyote Valley Dam on January 30, 2025, when reservoir release was 1,200 cfs. The study is ongoing, but radio receivers deployed at Ukiah, Hopland, and Healdsburg detected tagged fish as they moved downstream towards the ocean. The travel rate averaged 1.5 km/hour, with the fastest fish moving 5.4 km/hr. Fish at Healdsburg were detected over a wide range of flows including when flow was over 40,000 cfs. Riverine survival of steelhead smolts is largely unknown in the upper Russian River. Overtime, this information could be used to estimate survival bottlenecks for wild steelhead or to identify release strategies that give hatchery smolts the best chance of survival.



A radio tagged steelhead smolt from the Coyote Valley Fish Facility. Inset photo shows a radio tag used in the study.

## Russian River Estuary Management Project

The mouth of the Russian River is open as of February 18, 2025. Annual pinniped monitoring volunteer training hosted in collaboration with Stewards of the Coast and Redwoods is February 25, 2025, from 10 am to 12 pm. Please check the [Stewards website](#) for more information. Fisheries, pinniped baseline, and water quality monitoring are complete for the season. Pinniped baseline surveys will begin again in mid-March, coinciding with the harbor seal pupping season. Fisheries and water quality monitoring are scheduled to begin in late spring, depending on weather and river flow conditions.

## Interim Flow Changes

On August 20, 2024, Sonoma Water filed new temporary urgency change petitions with the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) 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 State Water Board issued the Order approving the temporary urgency change petitions for a 180-day term. Based on the storage thresholds, the Russian River continues to be in a *Normal* water supply condition as of February 1. The water supply condition will be reassessed using the storage thresholds on March 1.

### **New Biological Opinion**

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