May 12, 2011

Public Notice for Water Quality Certification and/or Waste Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects)

Travis Ranch – Replace Two Bridges
WDID No. 1B11015WNTR

Trinity County

On February 1, 2011, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from Mr. Jeremy Heidrick, representing Travis Ranch LLC (applicant), requesting Federal Clean Water Act, section 401, water quality certification for proposed activities associated with removal and replacement of two bridges for Travis Ranch access. The proposed project will cause disturbances to waters of the United States associated with Hulls Creek and an unnamed tributary to the North Fork Eel River in the North Fork Eel River Hydrologic Area No. 111.50.

The proposed project is located in southern Trinity County approximately 22 miles north of Covelo. The project involves improvement of two creek crossings, one on Hulls Creek and one on an unnamed tributary to North Fork Eel River. The Hulls Creek crossing (Crossing 1) is located on BLM property and private property owned by the Pierce Ranch. Crossing 2 (unnamed tributary to North Fork Eel River) is located on BLM property. Access to these bridge crossings is provided by Hulls Creek Road which extends northward from the Mendocino County line and is maintained by Trinity County for approximately two miles before becoming a private road that includes these stream crossings. This southern route has historically provided access to Travis Ranch from the south and west.

The previous property manager received a 5-year Streambed Alteration Agreement (R1-07-0010) from the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG) to conduct routine maintenance on several properties including a summer creek crossing on Hulls Creek. Summer crossing maintenance activities authorized by DFG include blading bigger rocks to the side and repairing road approaches to maintain the road system for ranch access. According to the applicant, Travis Ranch parcels have a deeded easement in perpetuity from the Pierce Ranch (adjacent neighbor to the south of Travis Ranch) including the right to maintain and improve the access road by construction of a bridge over Hulls Creek.

The existing summer low-water crossing on Hulls Creek bypasses an existing deteriorated suspension bridge. The bridge was reported to have been constructed by Trinity County Department of Transportation for former inhabitants of Travis Ranch. The suspension bridge is 160-feet long and 8-feet wide with a wood deck. Portions of the wood deck are missing and the bridge creates a hazard in its current state. Several concrete blocks that are visible along the Hulls Creek channel are believed to be the remnants of a former bridge at this location that was destroyed during the flood of 1964. The proposed Crossing 1 bridge will replace the existing suspension bridge in approximately the same alignment.

The proposed Crossing 1 bridge consists of a 190-foot long and 10-foot wide free span Bailey-style bridge designed for light vehicles. The proposed bridge is a prefabricated product that has been designed for a maximum vehicle load of 10,000 pounds. The

bridge abutments will be supported on pre-fabricated concrete slab abutments. The bridge will span Hulls Creek from top of bank to top of bank with the deck elevation designed above the 100-year water surface elevation. Minor grading will be required to realign the roadway approaches at both ends. Grading of the abutment areas will impact upland vegetation that will be replaced in accordance with a proposed Revegetation Plan. The proposed activities for construction of Crossing 1 will not result in any permanent impacts to waters of the United States.

A temporary launching tower will be placed along the southern edge of the streambed below the Crossing 1 bridge in order to temporarily support the underside of the bridge during installation. The temporary launching tower consists of a steel framework that will be assembled on the roadway and lowered from the top of the creek bank onto a temporary work area located on the streambed. The launching tower is approximately 9 feet on each side and 32-feet tall. A temporary sandbag coffer dam will be installed around the base of the support tower to isolate the work area and deflect any dry season flows away from the temporary work area and into the main stream channel. The streambed within the isolated sand bag area will be leveled with hand tools as necessary. The launch tower base may be shimmed and leveled with wood timbers.

Upon completion of the project the temporary work area will be restored to mimic pre-project conditions and to ensure that the disturbed area gently slopes toward the main channel with no depressions. The temporary work area may temporarily dewater a 10-foot wide and up to 100-foot long area along the south streambank without cutting off the flow through the main portion of the creek channel. The temporary support tower work area will result in temporary impacts to 100 square feet and 10 linear feet of streambed.

Crossing 2 is located approximately 1,500 feet north of Crossing 1 on an unnamed tributary to the North Fork Eel River. Crossing 2 currently consists of an existing 60-foot long and 12-foot wide free span railcar bridge supported by log abutments located above the ordinary high water elevation. The existing bridge is deteriorated and unsafe for crossing so only the summer creek crossing is currently being used. The proposed project includes removal of the existing bridge and log abutments. The existing bridge will be replaced by an 80-foot long and 10-foot wide free span pre-manufactured bridge deck supported by pre-cast concrete abutments. The proposed new bridge is designed to span the unnamed stream from top of bank to top of bank with the deck elevation designed above the 100-year water surface elevation.

The proposed activities at Crossing 2 do not involve excavation or the placement of fill material within waters of the United States. Potential temporary impacts at Crossing 2 are associated with the potential for materials to dislodge and fall into the stream channel during removal of the existing bridge and log abutments. Any material that falls into the channel during the project will be removed. Rock riprap will be installed around the Crossing 2 bridge abutments. The “riprap” will consist of cobbles placed immediately around the abutments to provide additional stabilization around the disturbed footing areas.

Compensatory mitigation is not required for the proposed project. Non-compensatory mitigation measures include the use of Best Management Practices for sediment and

erosion control. The proposed project will not result in any permanent impacts to waters of the United States. The project is scheduled to begin in September 2011.

The applicant has applied for authorization from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to perform the project pursuant to Clean Water Act, section 404. The applicant has also applied for a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement from the California Department of Fish and Game. Regional Water Board staff have determined that this project is categorically exempt from CEQA review (Class 1, Section 15301 – existing facilities) and anticipate filing a Notice of Exemption for this project.

The North Fork Eel River Technical Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) for sediment and temperature were established in 2002 by the United States Environmental Protection Agency in accordance with section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act, because the State of California determined that the water quality standards for the North Fork Eel River are exceeded due to excessive sediment and temperature. Roads and bank erosion are identified as sources contributing to the sediment impairment. In addition, activities that impact the riparian zone and reduce riparian vegetation are identified as sources contributing to increased stream temperatures. The primary adverse impacts associated with excessive temperature and sediment in the North Fork Eel River pertain to cold freshwater habitat, primarily anadromous salmonid habitat. Activities authorized by the pending certification will require implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for sediment and turbidity control, and implementation of impact avoidance measures as described above. Accordingly, the proposed project is consistent with, and implements portions of the Middle Fork Eel River TMDL.

The information contained in this public notice is only a summary of the applicant's proposed activities. The application for Water Quality Certification in the Regional Water Board's file contains additional details about the proposed activities including maps and detailed design drawings. The application and Regional Water Board file are available for public review.

Regional Water Board staff are proposing to regulate this project pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act (33 USC 1341) and/or Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act authority. In addition, staff will consider all comments submitted in writing and received at this office by mail during a 21-day comment period that begins on the first date of issuance of this letter and ends at 5:00 p.m. on the last day of the comment period. If you have any questions, please contact staff member Dean Prat at (707) 576-2801 within 21 days of the posting of this notice.

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