August 8, 2011

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

Humboldt County DPW – McCann Low Level Bridge Crossing
WDID No. 1B01013WNHU

Humboldt County

On May 23, 2011, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from the Humboldt County Public Works Department (applicant) requesting Federal Clean Water Act, section 401, Water Quality Certification (certification) to continue annual maintenance activities associated with the low water bridge over the Eel River (project) at McCann. The proposed project is located on McCann Road near the intersection with Dyerville Loop Road. The proposed activities will cause disturbances to waters of the United States associated with the Middle Main Eel River in the Sequoia Hydrologic Subarea No. 111.41.

The applicant maintains a permanent low water bridge crossing on McCann Road over the Eel River. The crossing consists of a 305-foot long permanent structure that was built in 1965 and a gravel approach ramp that requires reconstruction following high flow events. The McCann low water bridge crossing is an important route to the west side of the river and Highway 101 corridor for residents in the McCann area. This route also provides access for emergency medical and fire personnel as well as utility personnel and equipment. Use of the existing bridge is dependent on river stage and flows. Summer low flows are typically 8 feet below the bridge deck; however, the deck is below the elevation of ordinary high water and becomes submerged during winter flows over 10,000 cubic feet per second (CFS) as measured approximately 16 miles upstream at the Fort Seward gauge.

The proposed bridge maintenance activities will include: 1) multiple installations of a gravel approach ramp during the winter; 2) removal of sediment from the channel during the dry portion of the year to maintain adequate flow capacity under the permanent portion of the bridge structure; 3) stockpiling excavated sediment in upland storage areas adjacent to the project area for future use as gravel approach ramp material during the winter; and, 4) removal of all the existing large rock riprap located on the upstream side of the gravel approach ramp and relocation of the rock riprap to the downstream side of the gravel approach ramp where it will be placed on top of existing riprap.

The left bridge abutment is part of a permanent bridge structure and requires little maintenance. The right abutment and roadway approach ramp are constructed with river-run aggregate. The right abutment and roadway approach are reconstructed during the winter whenever long-term weather forecasts indicate that river flows will be below 8,000 CFS for extended periods of time. The reconstruction process is typically repeated several times during the winter. This activity involves dump trucks transporting gravel from upland stockpile locations across the bridge deck and dumping it over the end to create the ramp. Approximately 50 to 150 cubic yards are typically

needed to reconstruct the ramp. After the gravel is added, the ramp is graded to include berms along both shoulders and the new travel surface is graded smooth. Activities associated with reconstruction of the roadway approach ramp will result in temporary impacts to 4,200 square feet of the streambed and 14 linear feet of streambank.

During periods when the bridge structure is inundated, the applicant uses a small motorized boat to operate a ferry service that shuttles the public across the river several times per day, seven days per week. Reconstructing the gravel approach ramp whenever possible and periodically removing sediment along dry portions of the gravel bar to increase flow capacity under the permanent bridge structure minimizes the risks involved with operating the small ferry boat during high flows.

Periodic removal of accumulated sediment along dry portions of the gravel bar located under and adjacent to the permanent bridge structure is proposed to maintain adequate flow capacity under the structure. Working within pre-set cut stakes, a dozer or front-end loader will remove the accumulated sediment from the extraction area and deposit the material in temporary piles on the gravel bar. A front-end loader will load the material into dump trucks for transport to designated stockpile areas located along Dyerville Loop Road that are located away from the wetted channel and above the 100-year flood plane elevation. Sediment removed from the channel to increase flow capacity will eventually be used for reconstruction of the roadway approach ramp. Temporarily stockpiles on the gravel bar will be removed daily after October 1.

Proposed activities associated with removal of sediment to maintain adequate flow capacity under the permanent bridge structure will result in temporary impacts to approximately 26,000 square feet of the streambed and 350 linear feet of stream channel. The applicant estimates that 3,850 cubic yards of sediment will be removed during the next sediment removal operation. Removal of sediment will be restricted to the lower two-thirds of the gravel bar to provide protection of the natural stream flow steering effect provided by an undisturbed gravel bar as well as to maintain the stability of the existing low flow channel feature. A 12-inch vertical offset from the low flow water surface elevation will be maintained through the entire extraction area. Following completion of sediment removal activities, all disturbed areas within the bank-fill channel will be graded to facilitate free drainage and to prevent fish stranding.

Large rock riprap (3 to 5 ton) was previously placed along both shoulders of the roadway approach ramp in an effort to reduce scour and erosion of the gravel fill material during moderate flow events. However, once the river elevation reaches approximately two feet above the approach elevation, water flowing over the existing riprap shoulder becomes turbulent which accelerates erosion of the gravel approach materials. The proposed project includes removal of the existing large riprap that is located on the upstream shoulder of the roadway approach and placement of the riprap on the downstream shoulder of the roadway approach. By removing the rough upstream shoulder, it is anticipated that water flowing over the roadway approach will be

less turbulent and erosive, and less likely to scour and erode the gravel approach materials. Erosion of the approach is inevitable when flows reach approximately 9,500 CFS.

The project does not require removal of any mature riparian vegetation and will not result in any loss of wetlands. Compensatory mitigation is not required for the proposed activities. Noncompensatory mitigation for the proposed project includes the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for heavy equipment use in a stream channel and for sediment and turbidity control.

The applicant has applied for authorization from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to perform the project under Individual Permit (File No. 25186N) pursuant to Clean Water Act, section 404. The applicant has also applied for a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement (File No. R1-00-0028) 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 Middle Main Eel River Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDLs) for temperature and sediment were established 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 Middle Main Eel River are exceeded due to excessive temperature and sediment. 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 Middle Main Eel River pertain to cold freshwater habitat, primarily anadromous salmonid habitat. Activities authorized by Regional Water Board certification will not impact the riparian zone or reduce riparian vegetation. Implementation of BMPs for sediment and turbidity control and implementation of impact avoidance measures are also required. Accordingly, the proposed project is consistent with, and implements portions of the Middle Main Eel River TMDLs.

The Eel River from the confluence with Outlet Creek to the mouth at the Pacific Ocean is designated as a recreational reach under both federal and California Wild and Scenic Rivers Acts. These acts require preservation of the river's free-flowing condition; anadromous and resident fisheries; and outstanding geologic, wildlife, flora and fauna, historic and cultural, visual, recreational, and water quality values. Recreational segments are generally developed, with parallel roads, bridges, and structures. All activities normally associated with public lands are permitted subject to the protection of free flowing conditions and outstanding values. Implementation of the project would not affect the free-flowing condition of the Eel River and would not affect the extraordinary values for which the segment was listed.

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. 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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