March 12, 2013

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

Mateel Community Center/Reggae on the River - Seasonal Bridge Installation, South Fork Eel River
WDID No. 1B05083WNHU

Humboldt County

On December 13, 2012, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from Mr. Justin Crellin, representing the Mateel Community Center (applicant), requesting Federal Clean Water Act, section 401, water quality certification for proposed activities associated with annual installation and removal of a temporary bridge crossing over the South Fork Eel River. The primary purpose of the proposed temporary bridge crossing is to provide access to the east side of the river for parking, camping, and activities associated with the annual Reggae on the River concert event. The proposed bridge installation and removal activities will cause temporary disturbances to waters of the United States associated with the South Fork Eel River in the Benbow Hydrologic Subarea No. 111.32.

The Reggae on the River concert event and proposed temporary bridge crossing are located on the east side of Highway 101 in the Cooks Valley area, approximately 0.7 mile north of the intersection of Cooks Valley Road and Highway 101, on property known as French's Camp. The proposed project includes installation of two parallel and adjacent bridges at one location across the South Fork Eel River to provide access for vehicles and pedestrians. Three parallel and adjacent bridges were originally proposed to meet safety specifications which require one 12-foot wide lane for emergency vehicles, one 10-foot wide lane for other vehicles, and a separate lane for pedestrians. The applicant has determined they can meet safety specifications using two bridges instead of three which reduces the length of the bridge abutments and the area of temporary impact to the dry gravel bars associated with using native river-run aggregate as temporary fill material to build the abutments. Fewer bridges may also minimize the number of heavy equipment trips across the wetted channel during bridge installation and removal activities.

The proposed temporary bridge crossing consists of two steel-frame flatcars installed side-by-side. The flatcars are 9-feet 4-inches wide and they have a maximum span of 50-feet between the abutments. It is anticipated that the wetted channel will be less than 50-feet wide at the temporary crossing location at the time of bridge installation and removal. The abutments will be 36-feet wide on each side of the channel and the bridges will be centered over the abutments. The western abutment will be installed first. An excavator will be used to form a level foundation pad on the dry gravel bar and pre-cast interlocking concrete blocks will be placed end-to-end on the pad. If either abutment must be placed in the wetted portion of the channel edge, clean washed gravel will be placed on the streambed to form the foundation pad. The temporary abutments will be formed using native river-run aggregate scraped from borrow areas located on the adjacent dry gravel

bars. Installation of the abutments will result in temporary impacts to approximately 10,000 square feet of dry gravel bar on the west side of the channel and approximately 33,000 square feet of dry gravel bar on the east side of the channel. The excavator will cross the river to install the east abutment and to lift the flatcars into place on the abutments. The excavator will avoid and minimize wet river crossings by using the first installed bridge deck to complete the crossing installation and to return to the west side.

The flatcar frames will be decked with 12-inch wide by 4-inch thick pressure-treated lumber. One deck will be 13 feet wide and used as the emergency vehicle lane. The other deck will be 16 feet wide and will include a 10 foot wide vehicle lane and a pedestrian lane that will be cantilevered off the side of the steel frame using the decking lumber. Lumber used on the bridges will be cut to length and drilled for fasteners prior to being brought to the site. Safety rails will be installed after the flatcars and decking are installed.

The applicant has applied for authorization from the United States 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 for the project from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. On February 14, 2013, the County of Humboldt certified a Final Supplemental Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) (SCH No._2012082108) for the project in order to comply with CEQA. The Regional Water Board has considered the environmental document. The SEIR identifies that the project will have potentially significant effects on the environment within Regional Water Board jurisdiction including: 1) substantial adverse effect on riparian habitat or other sensitive natural community; 2) substantial adverse effect on federally protected wetlands through direct removal, filling, hydrological interruption, or other means; 3) violation of water quality standard or waste discharge requirements; and, 4) could otherwise substantially degrade water quality. Proposed measures are expected to mitigate these potential impacts to less-than-significant levels. Proposed construction methods, BMPs, and applicable mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate significant impacts on the environment will be incorporated as enforceable conditions of a water quality certification order issued for the project.

The proposed project will temporarily impact approximately 42,951 square feet of streambed and 72 linear feet of the streambank annually. The proposed project is not anticipated to result in any permanent impacts to the streambed or channel. Compensatory mitigation is not required. Noncompensatory mitigation includes the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for sediment and turbidity control, and for operation of heavy equipment in a stream channel.

Installation of the proposed temporary crossing may begin annually on or after June 15. Removal of the temporary crossing will occur before September 1. Following annual removal of the temporary bridges, native aggregate material that was used to form the abutments will be returned to the borrow areas and re-graded as necessary to restore the gravel bar area while leaving no depressions or berms that may potentially trap fish or cause impacts to surrounding habitats.

The South Fork Eel River Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) for sediment and temperature were established in 1999 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 South 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 South Fork Eel River pertain to cold freshwater habitat, primarily anadromous salmonid habitat. Proposed activities do not involve removal of any riparian vegetation providing shade to the river and implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for sediment and turbidity control is required. Accordingly, the proposed activities are consistent with, and implement portions of the South Fork Eel River TMDL.

The South Fork Eel River from the middle of Section 29, T23N, R16W (approximately one-half mile upstream of Rattlesnake Creek confluence) to the confluence with the Eel River 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 South Fork Eel River and would not affect the extraordinary values for which the segment was listed.

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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