

April 1, 2014

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

Sonoma County Water Agency
Russian River Estuary Management Project
WDID No. 1B10122WNSO

Sonoma County

On November 29, 2010, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from Mr. David Cook of the Sonoma County Water Agency (applicant), requesting Federal Clean Water Act, Section 401, water quality certification (Certification) for proposed activities associated with the Russian River Estuary Management Project (project). Over the five years considered for this Certification, the proposed project may produce a maximum of 49,000 cubic yards of dredged material per year. The project would impact waters of the United States and waters of the State associated with the Russian River within the Guerneville Hydrologic Subarea No. 114.11, Russian River Hydrologic Unit No. 114.00.

The proposed project site is located at Goat Rock State Beach, at the mouth of the Russian River, latitude 38.4513182°N, longitude 123.1295920°W, Assessor's parcel numbers 099-040-002, and 099-030-006.

The primary purpose of the proposed project is to provide freshwater habitat for rearing salmonids, particularly steelhead, and managing Estuary water levels to minimize flood risk to low-lying riverfront properties along the Estuary.

The proposed project involves maintaining tidal circulation in the Russian River Estuary by mechanically breaching the river mouth through the barrier beach during winter and maintaining a closed perched lagoon during summer to improve habitat for rearing Pacific salmonids. The breaching management area consists of 1,500 feet of barrier beach at the north end of Goat Rock State Beach. There are two methods proposed for forming a channel connecting the Russian River to the Pacific Ocean, both channel breaching excavation methods involve the use of heavy equipment (e.g., bulldozer, excavator) at the river mouth.

- The first method, the Pilot Channel method, which has been the method used to date, is to excavate a relatively steep, narrow pilot channel directly through the barrier beach which naturally forms at the mouth of the Russian River which allows the river to rush out through the cut channel quickly and scour a deep channel from the river to the ocean. This method may be implemented up to 13 times per year, year-round. There has been an average of 6 artificial breaching events annually over the 14 years period from 1996-2010. This method is tidally influenced allowing both tidal inflow to the river and discharge from the river, barrier beach closure usually lasts a short duration, is done to rapidly lower the water elevation of the freshwater lagoon and alleviate flood

risk, may be done year-round, and allows for a maximum of 1,000 cubic yards of sand to be excavated;

- The second method, the Lagoon Outlet Channel method, which is a new method to be used in conjunction to the current Pilot Channel method, is to excavate a stable, shallow and wider, relatively low velocity lagoon outlet channel on a diagonal path across the beach to the ocean that will minimize scour. This channel will be at an elevation high enough to minimize the inflow of saline ocean water to the freshwater lagoon; this elevation is to be at a target of 7 feet above sea level to allow the formation of a freshwater lagoon, but will be below the point of flooding adjacent properties upstream. This method may be implemented up to 18 times per year during the Lagoon Management period (May 15 through October 15). The duration of barrier beach closure is longer, from one to five months, is done to form a freshwater lagoon to create better salmonid habitat and to alleviate flood risk, may be done during the Lagoon Management period, and allows for a maximum of 2,000 cubic yards of sand to be excavated. The Lagoon Outlet Channel method is intended to comply with Reasonable and Prudent Alternative 2 mandated by the National Marine Fisheries Service's 2008 Biological Opinion with the goal to preserve beach sands and maintain productive rearing habitat for Pacific salmonids listed as threatened or endangered. Physical and biological monitoring would be conducted within the action area to determine, among other things, water quality dynamics and effects to fish and wildlife. In addition, water level management will reduce flood risk to low-lying residential properties built along the estuary.

Adaptive techniques will be used to optimize management of the breaching and lagoon forming activities. Monitoring of the outlet channel will inform adaptive management changes that may be made over the course of the management season. Additionally, comprehensive review of outlet channel monitoring at the end of the management season will allow management revisions for the following year. To address flood risk during the management period, the estuary may be breached in anticipation of large storm events.

Water quality will be monitored during the lagoon management period (May 15-October 15) to evaluate potential changes to water quality and available habitat resulting from the management of the estuary. In the event of potentially dangerous water quality conditions, the applicant will consult with staff of the National Marine Fisheries Service, the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, and California State Parks. In cases of high bacterial levels, the applicant will also consult with the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board. A draft water quality monitoring plan has been submitted, which includes datasonde deployment, nutrient/bacterial/algal sampling, and sediment chemistry and benthic community indices.

The applicant has received authorization from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to perform the project pursuant to Clean Water Act, section 404. The applicant has also received a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement from the California Department of Fish and

Wildlife. The Sonoma County Water Agency prepared an Environmental Impact Report (SCH 2010052024) and filed a notice of determination on August 16, 2011, with the State Clearinghouse to comply with CEQA.

The Russian River is identified as impaired for sediment and temperature on the Clean Water Act Section 303(d) list. At present, total maximum daily loads (TMDLs) have not been established for this water body. If TMDLs are established and implementation plans are adopted for this watershed prior to the expiration date of the requested Certification, the Regional Water Board may revise the provisions of that Certification to address actions identified in such action plans. Bank erosion is identified as a source contributing to the sediment impairment. Removal of riparian vegetation is identified as contributing to temperature impairment. Activities that will be authorized by the pending certification are designed to increase riparian vegetation and reduce sediment discharges from bank erosion. Actions authorized by this Order require implementation of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for sediment and turbidity control and planting of more riparian zone shade vegetation at and near the project site. Accordingly, this Order is consistent with, and implements BMPs that would attenuate sediment and temperature adverse impacts.

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 notice and ends at 5:00 p.m. on the last day of the comment period. If you have any questions, please contact staff member Kaete King at (707) 576-2848 or Kaete.King@waterboards.ca.gov within 21 days of the posting of this notice.