The Upper Eel River Watershed Improvement Strategy

The Upper Eel River Watershed is a 688 square mile watershed upstream of the Middle Fork. Land uses include timber harvest operations, cattle ranching, hunting, recreation, rural residential, and marijuana cultivation. In 1992, the watershed was added to the 303(d) list for sediment and temperature. Historically large salmon and steelhead populations have been greatly reduced as a result of elevated water temperatures. To address the impairments, USEPA established the Upper Main Eel River and Tributaries TMDLs for Temperature and Sediment in 2004. The TMDL assigned heat load allocations based on natural shade and flow conditions, but did not establish an implementation plan. To establish actions to achieve the TMDL load allocations, Region 1 adopted the Action Plan to Address Elevated Water Temperatures in the Eel River Watershed (Action Plan) in March 2014. The Action Plan addresses stream shade and flow levels, and identifies the regulatory tools for addressing temperature concerns (e.g., regulatory programs for discharges from timber harvest operations, dairies, county roads, State highways, dredge and fill activities, and agriculture). The Action Plan also directs Region 1 to coordinate with the Division of Water Rights to address flow- and temperature-related concerns.

Water Quality Improvement Strategy

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Percent Canopy Cover in CalFire’s North Coast Region, 2001-2004

- Water quality data demonstrate that temperatures in the mainstem Upper Eel River and the tributaries have not substantially changed since the 1990s.
- Water quality data demonstrate that downstream temperatures (at Outlet Creek and Eel River at Outlet Creek) regularly exceed wet year temperature targets.
- Region 1 will continue to implement the Action Plan, as well as develop an agriculture permitting program, and temperature trend monitoring and work plans.

Water Quality Outcomes

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Upper Eel River Watershed Maximum Weekly Average Temperature (MWAT), 1996-2013

- Temperature targets were only established for the Eel River at Emandal monitoring site for wet and very wet years; (2) Soda and Panther creeks were not monitored in 2012, and went dry during summer 2013; (3) Some reaches of Outlet and Tomki creeks were dry or intermittent in 2012 and 2013.