September 26, 2007

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

Sonoma County Water Agency,
Hinebaugh Creek Emergency Maintenance Project
(WDID# 1B07096WNSO)

Sonoma County

On September 21, 2007, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from Michael Stevenson of Jones & Stokes Associates, on behalf of the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA), requesting a Water Quality Certification and/or Waste Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects) for the Hinebaugh Creek Channel Maintenance Project located in Sonoma County. The proposed project causes permanent impacts to 6.58 acres of streambed within the Laguna Hydrologic Sub Unit No. 114.21.

The project extends from Highway 101 to approximately 100 feet downstream of Labath Drive in Rohnert Park, Sonoma County, California. The latitude and longitude is 38.34995˚N and -122.7185˚W. The purpose of the project is to improve the hydraulic capacity of Hinebaugh Creek, prevent potential flooding of adjacent residences and properties, and improve the creeks potential to serve as aquatic habitat. Emergency dredging of the creek channel is critical to the prevention of flooding in the Redwood Drive area of Rohnert Park.

The project is comprised of: (1) installation of temporary access ramps; removal of sediment from the channel bottom and the box culverts under Redwood Drive and Labath Avenue; (2) removal of vegetation from the channel bottom; (3) removal or limbing of selected trees growing at the bank toes; (4) installation of a dewatering system; and (5) creation of a low flow channel (thalweg).

The project involves vegetation management and sediment removal in Hinebaugh Creek (approximately 2,400 linear feet). Other activities may include bank stabilization, landscaping, fencing, mowing, and debris removal. Hinebaugh Creek is an engineered trapezoidal flood conveyance channel. The hydraulic and flood conveyance capacity of this channel has been decreased from its original design, due to a combination of silt accumulation and growth of in-channel vegetation. Winzler and Kelly Consulting engineers (W&K) performed a hydrologic and hydraulic study of Hinebaugh Creek (W&K 2005). Results of the study indicate that under 2003 channel conditions, the predicted 100-year water surface is above the top of bank for much of the project reach. Results of this model were used to identify general problem areas to aid in the design of this project.

Four temporary access ramps will be constructed. The ramp locations on both banks were selected to avoid impacts to large, mature trees and to minimize impacts to under-story vegetation. Access ramps would be temporary and would be restored following sediment removal. The ramps would be seeded with native grasses and erosion control fabric would be installed.

Sediment and vegetation growing in the bed would be removed with an excavator, bulldozer, or front loader operating in the dewatered channel. Approximately 4,400 cubic yards of accumulated sediment will be piled and removed using a long-reach excavator positioned at access ramps, or with equipment, including haul trucks operating in the dewatered channel when necessary. Sediment will be hauled to an off-site location approved by the Regional Board.

Vegetation growing on the lower bank that impedes high flows and contributes to flooding will be selectively removed or limbed. Work on banks would be completed using hand tools. The existing over-story canopy will be preserved to the greatest extent possible. In anticipation of this project, and the corresponding reduction of stream bank shading, SCWA planted 50 Alder trees on the South bank between Redwood Drive and Labath Avenue.

Work will be done during the fall; however it is likely that some flow will be present as a result of urban runoff. Sediment removal will require installation of a dewatering system to intercept and divert surface water and intercepted shallow groundwater moving through near surface sediments. The water diversion system will consist of digging a sump at the upper end of the Project, just downstream of Highway 101, and pumping any nuisance water around the worksite to re-enter the channel below Labath Drive. Fish screening shall be conducted at the intake meeting all NOAA Fisheries fish screen criteria. Large sediment filtering bags will be incorporated into the outlet end of the discharge line to minimize turbidity. The dewatering system will be removed following project completion.

Meandering low flow channels will be constructed in a similar wavelength and sinuosity as those observed in the channel from aerial photographs. In the lower areas, which exhibit backwatering characteristics, a thalweg will be created near the south bank. Locating the thalweg near the south bank will concentrate flow into a deeper channel and allow aquatic habitat to benefit from shading from the southern bank.

No special status plant species were found during the September of 2005 and 2006 surveys, and none are expected to occur within the area proposed for development.

Compensatory mitigation will include off-site restoration of a 9,000 square foot area of highly impacted riparian habitat. The project footprint is 89,000 square feet, the restoration ratio is 1:10 (restoration area : project footprint). The restoration site is in the process of being identified; a full restoration plan will be submitted to the Regional Board for approval within 6 months of permit approval. Construction of the mitigation site will be completed within 1 year of Regional Board approval of the restoration plan. The restoration plan will include a written description and site plans that will identify the measures to be implemented, including a species list and the locations and quantities of each species to be planted. The major criteria for the restoration site selection will include proximity to the project site and the condition of the restoration site. If the site is located on private property, the restoration plan will be accompanied by an agreement with the landowner(s) regarding the restoration project and provisions for its maintenance. Native trees and shrubs will be planted and managed. A five year monitoring plan will be implemented with an 85% survival rate of all proposed plant species. Additionally, a native seed mix will be spread below erosion control fabric on all areas of disturbed soil. Yearly monitoring and reporting will be required.

The applicant has received a California Department of Fish and Game 1600 Streambed Alteration Agreement, on July 16, 2007, Notification Number: 1600-2007-0315-3.

The County of Sonoma has determined that this project is statutorily exempt from California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review (Section 15301 – Existing Facilities). Based on a review of the project information submitted to date, Regional Water Board staff 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.

At a minimum, the following construction Best Management Practices (BMPs) will be incorporated into the final project plans in order to reduce and control soil erosion: work in and around waterways will be conducted during the dry season; installation of construction barrier fencing to preclude equipment entry into sensitive areas; installation of silt fencing or fiber rolls to prevent sediment loss from immediate work area; topsoil salvage and reapplication; and seeding and mulching.

The Hinebaugh Creek Channel Maintenance is scheduled to begin and end in Fall 2007. Staff is 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. Under Title 23, California Code of Regulations, Section 3858(a): "The executive director or the executive officer with whom an application for certification is filed shall provide public notice of an application at least twenty-one (21) days before taking certification action on the application, unless the public notice requirement has been adequately satisfied by the applicant or federal agency. If the applicant or federal agency provides public notice, it shall be in a manner and to an extent fully equivalent to that normally provided by the certifying agency. If an emergency requires that certification be issued in less than 21 days, public notice shall be provided as much in advance of issuance as possible, but no later than simultaneously with issuance of certification." Due to the nature of emergency associated with this project, 401 Water Quality Certification will be issued during the 21-day public comment period. Public comments will still be accepted and reviewed during the entire 21-day comment period.

If you have any questions or comments, please contact staff member Stephen Bargsten at (707) 576-2653, or at sbargsten@waterboards.ca.gov**,** or Darren Bradford at (707) 576-2466, dbradford@waterboards.ca.gov, within 21 days of posting of this notice.

This is a brief summary of this project; all related documents and comments received are on file and may be inspected or copied at the Regional Water Board office, 5550 Skylane Blvd., Boulevard, Suite A, Santa Rosa, California. Appointments are recommended for document review. Appointments can be made by calling (707) 576-2220.