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Sonoma County Salmon Coalition
Meeting
October 6, 2008

Item 1: Introductions

Adina Merenlender, Bill Hearn, David Smith, Matt Deitch, Fred Euphrat, Julie Collins Lex McCorvey, Colleen Fernauld, Matt O'Connor, Bob Anderson, Dave Cuneo, Carolyn Wasem, Marc Kelley, Charlette Epifanio, Denny Murphy, Susan Gorin, John Nagle, Al Nelson, Mike Dillabough, Duff Bevill, Allen Florkey, and Nick Frey

Item 2: Biological Opinion

NMFS has completed a draft of the Recovery Plan for Coho. It is currently under review by other Agencies. The BO is integrated into the recovery of the Coho plan

Item 3: Power Point Presentation NMFS

NMFS presented a power point on the Russian River Biological Opinion. Overarching references include: Water Supply, Flood Control Operations and Channel Maintenance by the Army Corps, SCWA and MCRRFCD in the Russian River. The PP consisted of the following:

1. Statement of Purpose: Provision of Corps, SCWA, MCRRFCD with ESA "take exemption" for the project and ensure that the Corps' actions and interdependent and interrelated actions do not jeopardize Federally listed species or adversely modify designated critical habitat.
2. Project elements: 1) Operations at Warm Springs Dam and Coyote Valley Dam (flood control, hydroelectric, water supply); 2) Channel Maintenance by SCWA and MCRRFCD; 3) Water level management of estuary at Jenner; 4) Fish Hatchery Operations; and 5) Water Diversion operations by SCWA.
3. Species covered include: Chinook Salmon (T), Coho Salmon (E), Steelhead (T) and Southern Resident Orca (E).
4. Structure of Jeopardy Analysis is based on several points, including species status, environmental baseline, and effects of the project. Jeopardy results in the need to implement a reasonable and prudent alternative with additional terms and conditions to minimize take of species.
5. Project effects analyzed includes: 1) high summer flow from CVD releases impacting steelhead rearing habitat in upper mainstem; 2) high summer flow releases from WSD adversely affect salmonid rearing in Dry Creek; 3) High summer flow releases adversely affect salmonid rearing in the estuary; 4) Management of water levels in the estuary adversely affects salmonid rearing; 5) Annual dam inspections interrupt flow in east branch; and 6) Release of turbid water from CVD are a concern.

6. Affects of High Summer flows based upon: 1) SCWA, NMFS, DFG and Corps 2001 assessment; 2) current velocities; 3) high summer releases from Lake Mendocino and steelhead rearing habitat in upper mainstem; 4) Habitat in Dry Creek where water is too swift; and 5) High summer releases from CVD and WSD creating high inflow to estuary.
7. Estuary breaching affects on salmonid rearing habitat: 1) Reduced lagoon depth; 2) Increased salinity; 3) Reduced dissolved oxygen near the bottom; 4) Freshwater lagoon formation is common and normal in central California; and 5) They are highly productive salmonid habitats
8. Status quo operations impact: 1) Coho and steelhead abundance; 2) Coho and steelhead population growths; and 3) Ecological diversity of coho and steelhead
9. Status quo operations 1) Jeopardize coho and steelhead and adversely modify their designated critical habitat; and 2) Do not jeopardize Chinook or modify their critical habitat.
10. RPA includes: 1) Reduce flows in mainstem of RR May through October 15th to benefit salmonid production in estuary and 34 miles of upper RR; 2) Minimize high flow impacts in Dry Creek by enhancing 6 miles (pool-riffle enhancement and placement of large boulder clusters); 3) Adaptive management of estuary breaching; 4) Enhanced coho broodstock program; 5) Feasibility study of Dry Creek bypass line; 6) Installation of back-up water supply pipeline to WSD hatchery; and 7) Monitoring of fisheries, water quality and aquatic invertebrates in the mainstem of the Russian, the estuary and Dry Creek.
11. Additional Terms and Conditions include: 1) CVD design and installation of minimum bypass flow pipeline; 2) Study and implement Dam release ramping rates to minimize impacts to fisheries while insuring flood protection; 3) Study turbidity issues at dams/develop and implement plan to minimize turbidity impact to salmonids, 4) Design and install new fish screens at Mirabel; and 5) Improve genetics management of hatchery steelhead.

Item 4: Responses to PowerPoint

Questions arose regarding channel modification. Was longstanding maintenance and conversion to trapezoidal considered? Are there possibilities for recovery of channels in Zone 1A?

NMFS responded that the scope for the channel maintenance was contracted to Zone 1A and the Russian River. Areas such as Santa Rosa Creek is rearing habitat. We developed some BMPS.

The Corps of Engineers responded that in Santa Rosa Creek work is underway to understand how to restore the channel while at the same time provide for flood protections.

The City of Santa Rosa is very supportive of the feasibility study. They do not want the downtown to go under water – and are very interested in continuing partnerships with the Federal Agencies on this project.

Questions referencing the Laguna and the Bush Administration's impact on the BO also arose.

The Corps indicated that a separate feasibility study for the Laguna was underway – at least initial steps have been taken. Invasive species removal is considered. The Corps will be submitting a budget request for 2011. We will see what we can do with the FY budget. There will be some decisions as to scope. It is important to remember that WRDA is one of the documents that provide direction from Congress. It is not a funding document.

Discussions around flow ensued. Flow primarily determines channel size and shape. The proposed changes in flow will result in desired channel shape and change in habitat. If you give them a new flow regime is this going to result in the channel you want? There are episodic flow events that manage channel. The region should not make an investment and not address flow change.

NMFS responded that Dry Creek flow regime will basically not change. The Agency is contemplating more than just putting logs into the stream. They are contemplating a much more extensive enhancement of 6 miles of channel. We need to create pool habitat – and areas that are going to be sustained. This is going to be an expensive fix. And, the idea is to look at flow.

The Corps indicated that they have had extensive conversation re: flow and the formation of the channel.

A Dry Creek agriculture member asked if flow management addresses winter flows as well. Thousands of cubic feet of dirt go down Dry Creek in the winter. How are the agencies going to cooperate to resolve this? Is it possible to balance flood danger and the needs of the fish?

The Corps responded that they have developed a flow management curve. They do not want water to go over the spillway if that can be avoided. A lot of data goes into the management curve. Water behind the dam can be thought of as a multilayer cake: The bottom layer is sedimentation, the next layer is where we draw from for water supply; and the top layer is flood control. The Corps tries to keep it safe based on type of rain events that will occur. As to who can change the flood control regimes? The General has to have a large number of engineers tell him that the Dam will not fail. We charge our

water management section to address releases. These engineers make predictions as to where they keep the storage to avoid disaster.

NMFS stated that the ESA is top priority. We can predict what the flows need to be for flood control. Besides summer rearing habitat there is also winter rearing habitat we must consider. Currently, there is no place for fish to go. We want to provide winter and summer habitat. There will be a real interface between landowners, Corps and NOAA. How do we create refugia? It could be a win-win. If we mandated dramatic decrease in flow – we are thinking that the flows will remain at current levels in Dry Creek, or maybe increase. If we can create habitat at 110-130 cfs – we could have water supply and fish habitat.

The Water Agency stated that 5 tributary projects to enhance rearing habitat for Coho and steelhead (5 of 10 recommended) will need to be completed in next 3 years. Fish passage and roads need to be addressed as well. Projects in Crane, Wine and Grape are minor but are fast starters. . In addition, SCWA is looking at the 6 total miles of restoration from the perspective of stages. In years 5 and 6 we will have had time to construct enhancement in 1 mile of Dry Creek. In years 8 and 9, an additional 2 miles of Dry Creek will be enhanced. In years 11 and 12, the three additional miles will be enhanced. In addition, SCWA will install large boulder clusters – to create riffles for steelhead and coho resting. Currently 10 of these clusters are scheduled in first two stages and 10 in the third stage. Pre and post structure monitoring is planned. To assist them, the SCWA has contracted with Inter-fluve. Dr. Clure will be working with Inter-fluve as well to enhance Dry Creek.

NMFS believes that the current estimates on cost range between \$50 - \$100 million. In Dry Creek alone, potentially \$20-\$25 million. Tributary enhancement will be the focus in first 3 years. By 2010 estuary and flows will be addressed.

An agriculture member asked if there was any thought as to physical area of the Creek that would require work...How many total acres?

NMFS indicated that there is going to be a period of study, planning and permitting that will occur in the first four years. .It is difficult to estimate acreage until the plan has been developed.

Item 5: Update on Wine and Grape Creek Projects

On projects in Wine and Grape Creek, the preliminary designs have been completed by DFG and NOAA and NRCS engineering. For the most part landowners are on board. Next steps include engineering survey, grading and re-vegetation plan. If funding and planning comes through – projects will commence in spring. In Dry Creek there are several other proposals. In Alexander Valley, mainstem monitoring and fish passage issues are being explored.

Item 6: Description of Salmon Coalition

A City of Santa Rosa elected official stated that one of the challenges in every Coalition is to come up with a process to send in a letter of support, or opposition. It is difficult to determine how to coalesce a critical mass and articulate that. We need more details about letters that are to be submitted on behalf of the Salmon Coalition....

Item 7: Watershed Approach AB 2121

Numerous coalition members have been working with agriculture interests in both Alexander and Dry Creek Valleys. By the end of the year, we should have an idea if we have a critical mass of landowners as to whether we can address the water rights issues.

An agriculture representative from Alexander Valley has been working to create a Sonoma Ag Water Users Association. Most of these farmers have been involved with water issues for decades. When Coyote Dam was built there was a set-aside for a number of uses. Decision 1030 set aside 16,000 acre feet for Northern Sonoma County. Decision 1610, set regimes and reallocated the benefits of that water. It is still not clear how much water is set aside for agriculture in northern Sonoma County. The proposal is to put together agriculture water users in northern Sonoma County (from Mendocino County south to a point likely to Wohler Dam) and define interests and efforts. There needs to be a series of guiding principles and a developed, coordinated effort to work together to address needs of the BO and agriculture.

In order to take advantage of water available we cannot get one drop of water without some coordination and collaboration. In addition, a private organization has the advantage of holding proprietary water knowledge in house. The BO is a driving force when we begin looking at how and when we get water deliveries. How do they occur to agriculture's benefit without affecting fish? As to water in question considered surface or ground water: the courts will likely draw the line. We assume our ground water rights may have to be re-secured appropriative rights under a watershed approach. We want to secure already appropriative rights for both urban and agriculture users.

NMFS said that in the Carmel Valley the Water Board has a map of the underflow that is assumed part of the river. Is there a map like this for the Russian River?

The Ag representative responded that most landowners won't let us do a study as we need some way to keep the info private. There is no study to anyone's knowledge. In terms of the Association, we are out for comment – conversations between community water providers and a number of farmers have already taken place. This would present some components we fill are needed within a watershed approach.

Item 8: NFWF Keystone Grant

The National Fish and Wildlife Foundation is interested in funding a keystone grant for the protection of coho salmon. If we look at water management issues, a key is to bring water back in summer for fish. NFWF is looking for people north of SF Bay to manage water and take water for storage in winter months. CEMAR has put together a partnership of interests in the RR watershed to work out an outline for advancing this idea. The goal is to develop a plan to bring water back in streams in spring and summer.

It is very similar in trying to bring Coho back but doing so by managing water. The full proposal is due November 1st.

When some Coalition members were at the fish hatchery, NFWF was told that there is a 70% mortality rate of coho in summer and fall. We need to plant in areas where the pools are not going dry. The Salmon Coalition is important to building partnerships, identifying landowners to refine data and work with individuals on their sites. This region is in competition with others – I would think they want to provide money to get the best return on their investment. Do they need a commitment from the community to achieve those goals? Would support from the Salmon Coalition help? Is a formal expression of the support a good idea? It might be an item on the Coalition's agenda – when we need to issue that support.

Several individuals expressed interest in .how the grant fits into the BO relative to enhancing coho return.

Item 9: AWEP

Alan Florkey, NRCS explained Farm Bill programs. The Department was in a state of flux while the bill is passed. We do not have a final rule. The Department has 90 days to write the rules – that time period is up. We are now in the beginning of a new fiscal year. We can not actually start funding projects yet. What we do know is that Title II funds are largely intact, increased by \$1.25 billion in 2012. AWEP is an offshoot of the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. It is authorized at approximately \$70 million a year. It is a new way of implementing ground and surface water conservation.

AWEP started off as the RWEP focusing on water quantity and conservation in a partnership way. There are a wide variety of entities eligible. AWEP focuses on watershed or regional approaches to water quality and water conservation issues. The funding is going to be direct payments to landowners. There is an adjusted gross income requirement.

Partners will need to be able to identify a region or watershed area. Who are the landowners that will participate? A landowner steering committee would be helpful. There is a focus on water conservation. There is a waiver of adjusted gross income. For environmental quality projects there is an overall payment limitation - \$300K.