Urban Subcommittee of the Salmonid Coalition
August 4, 2006
Santa Rosa

Item 1. **Introductions**
Those in attendance included: Bill Hearn (NOAA), Carolyn Wasem, Chris DeGabrielle, Darrin Jenkins, Dick Butler (NOAA), Glen Wright, Marc Kelley, Mike Ban, Pamela Tuft, Randy Poole and Virginia Porter

Item 2. **Section 7 Overview - Sonoma County Water Agency**
Section 7 of the ESA is geared towards interagency cooperation for projects with a federal focus. The Water Agency, Army Corps of Engineers and NOAA have been working together on existing Section 7 negotiations.

Key factors in this process include:

- Operation of release from Warm Springs Dam
- Need for additional potable water
- Need for input from NOAA regarding the EIR
- Need for assistance from NOAA to get approval

Item 3. **Partnerships to Identify and Fund Conservation Measures and Respond to Municipalities/Agriculture Water Supply Needs**
The Water Advisory Committee representatives are partners to help facilitate and negotiate conservation and water supply needs. In the end they will be partially responsible to approve funding for the projects that the Coalition will undertake.

Although, the process has been drawn-out, in January of 2006, the entire west coast of the USA was declared critical habitat for listed salmonids. The federal government is of a mind to try to work together through cooperative conservation to help alleviate the challenges associated with critical habitat designation. The agriculture community approached NOAA Fisheries to understand what would be required for an exclusion from final critical habitat designation in the Russian River Watershed. That effort was not successful.

However, designation of critical habitat was so large that the Federal Agencies have indicated they will revisit the issue in a few years. In response, the regulated community formed the Salmonid Coalition to begin identifying conservation measures that could be implemented, and provide the economic interests of Sonoma County regulatory flexibility.

NOAA has embraced these efforts. The support is so strong among the regulatory agencies that the money has been approved to hire a full time employee, a biologist, to assist with this process. The goal is, to within a year, to have a complete watershed analysis for the Alexander, Dry Creek and Knights Valleys, and to come up with some BMPs that conserve the salmonids. Simply put, this process starts with an effort to identify what is broken and how to fix it, as well as identify what is not broken and

decide how best to maintain it. The end product will be a conservation plan specific to the Alexander, Dry Creek and Knights Valleys..

Item 4. **Life Cycle of Salmonids**
A life history diagram of the Coho, Chinook and steelhead in the Russian River Watershed was distributed to the group.

The question posed is: When are the salmonids in the river, and when will they be impacted?

Each species has a different life cycle, meaning they migrate and spawn at different times of the year. Chinook salmon are absent in the River in the late summer and early fall. Coho and steelhead juveniles take up residence for a full year. There are salmonid in the river all times of the year.

There are about five locations that have possible Coho habitat in the Russian River Watershed. Dry Creek is vital because it has as much as 14 miles of potential habitat.

Item 5: **BOGSAR Analysis**

Acronym for "Bunch of Guys Standing Around a River"

There were assertions that the flows were too high in the Russian River in 2000. A proposal was put forth to conduct a formal IFIM analysis of the river. It was denied due to cost. NOAA suggested a BOGSAR be preformed. It is an informal, but accurate analysis of flows in the river. The official term is a Delphi Panel Assessment. In this case, nine experts on salmonid habitat examined the River at different study sites. Each site was approximately 100 yards long. The panel numerically scored the amount of habitat that was suitable or optimal for various life stages of the salmonids at differing flow rates.

The Study looked at three sites, one with a flow of 47cfs, another with a flow of 90cfs, and a third with a flow of 130cfs. There was a consensus among the participants that between 47 and 90cfs there was a good amount of suitable, if not optimal, habitat. However, above 90cfs the available habitat dropped dramatically. With this information NOAA indicated that 50cfs was an ideal flow, and 90cfs was an acceptable flow. Any higher, the rate of the river flow is too much of a challenge for the fish to overcome.

Item 6: **Impact of Urban Water use on Salmonid Populations and Potential Contributions to Habitat Enhancement**
A graph was distributed that showed flows, between the months of June and October, at the mouth of the Dry Creek. The data from three different years (one showing a wet year, another a dry year, and the third a "normal" year) showed that the rate of the water was higher than 90cfs at almost all times in all three years.

Currently, four potential solutions exist:

1. A pipeline that would reduce the flow in Dry Creek.

--This is the ideal, but it also has drawbacks. Most notably is the cost and timeline associated with completion. NOAA Fisheries finds this option the most desirable.

2. The Dry Creek channel is narrow without twists and turns. That is what makes these high flows problematic for fish. The channel could be managed through physical modification such that the flow rate would slow down.
   --This is not as expensive as the pipeline but still costly and would require private property owners' participation and concurrence.
3. Flows down in estuary are too high and if the instream requirements for the main stem could be reduced, this would result in lower flows in Dry Creek..
   --It would be difficult to get landowners and cities to agree to lower flows.
   --This required a change to Decision 1610
4. *"Quid pro quo"* Enhance habitat in the tributaries in exchange for allowing extra flows down Dry Creek.
   --NOAA finds this concept challenging and the least desirable because it may result in too much habitat loss.

Item 7. **Agriculture/Viticulture Contribution to Conservation**
The Agriculture community is working as a part of the Coalition to understand its impact on the Watershed, and the conservation efforts needed to reduce those impacts.

At the last Ag Sub-Committee meeting, a discussion around off-stream storage ensued. NOAA and DFG agree that if water is collected (i.e., run-off at appropriate times of the year) and stored for later use that could be very beneficial. NMFS and DFG have been support of diverting in the winter and off stream storage for years. This practice has a lesser impact and could potentially enhance salmonid habitat. A presentation by Watershed experts from UC Berkeley Extension suggested that offsite storage is important if Sonoma County is going to address some of the challenges that surround the protection of salmonid habitat.

The Ag community embraced this concept, because it might actually be beneficial for all sides. The main deterrents are the difficulties and expenses associated with acquiring permits and construction.

Item 8. **A Conservation Plan**
Ultimately, to achieve our conservation goals, and provide regulatory certainty for all facets of the community, the Coalition needs a habitat restoration plan for Dry Creek. In addition to challenges presented by elevated flows, cover, and bank stabilization were referenced. If it were possible to widen the channel and provide adequate riparian cover, then 130 cfs would not be as bad for the fish as with a narrower channel.

A reasonable goal could be making 130 cfs as suitable for the salmonids as 90 cfs. A potential benefit for the private property owners would be flood control and erosion prevention.

Item 6: **Formation of Subcommittee**

The members present will make up the Sonoma County Salmonid Coalition's Urban Subcommittee and have agreed to meet again on August 25th, 2006, at the Sonoma County Water Agency.