Salmonid Coalition
Meeting Notes
February 28th, 2007
Draft Document

Item 1: Introductions:

Adina Merenlender, Al Cadd, Amy Bolten, Amy Mai, Bill Cox, Bob Anderson, Bob Cooey, Bob Klampt, Brian Johnson, Carolyn Wasem, Charlie Carson, Colleen Fernauld, Daniel Mountjoy, Dave Lewis, Dave Ripple, Dennis Hunter, Dennis Murphy, Dick Butler, Greg Horton, Jake MacKenzie, John Perry, Kara Heckert, Kathy Hayes, Keenan Foster, Marc Kelley, Mike Martini, Mr. Krishner, Nick Frey, Pete Dayton, Pete Down, Ralph Locke, and Walt Ryan

Item 2: NRCS Explanation of Coordination of "Rapid Watershed Assessment"

A Rapid Watershed Assessment will be conducted in order to look at conservation needs, delineate the programs that can help landowners accomplish conservation goals and to look at what can be done to repair salmonid habitat.

The Rapid Watershed Assessment will be conducted by pulling together pertinent studies that have been conducted in the Dry Creek and Alexander Valleys. Though most of the data will come from existing studies, there will be some effort by the NRCS to fill in gaps in the available information. The team of biologists that will help with this assessment will include our new biologist.

In September or October it will be possible to give an estimate as to when this information may be available for the coalition to review

Item 3: NOAA Update on Employee to Work With the Coalition

Greg Horton reported that the data are lacking or limited and/or collection or verification of data has been delayed. His scope of work includes:

1) Assessing current habitat conditions in the 16 streams
2) Identifying anthropogenic activities that have lead to current habitat conditions
3) Recommended best management practices (BMP's) to minimize further habitat degradation
4) Identifying and prioritize watershed restoration projects to repair habitat problems where they exist

Dr. Horton's work is focusing on current habitat conditions.

After initial assessments Dr. Horton concluded that existing data to assess water quality in the 16 streams are almost non-existent and the data that does exist is limited. Although

some data exists on appropriative water rights (largely storage ponds), data are extremely limited for riparian rights (direct diversions) and off stream wells.

One of the challenges is that only four of the six fundamental habitat factors (FHF) can be assessed in 12 of the 16 streams and even then the assessment will remain incomplete for some habitat components without the collection of new data. For the remaining four streams, assessment cannot occur without the collection of new data for all FHF.

We need to resolve these challenges if we are to complete the task of stream assessment by September of 2007.

Item 4: NOAA Explanation of Salmon Life Cycles in the Watershed

A simple life history diagram was distributed to the group.

There are three different species of salmonids (Coho, Chinook, and steelhead) that inhabit the Russian River Watershed. Each one has a different life cycle, meaning they migrate and spawn at different times of the year. Chinook are first to arrive in late August, though their run is heaviest in October. Coho come in starting in October and their run lasts into January. The steelhead run is between January and March. The distributed graph illustrates that Coho and steelhead juveniles are in the stream for a full year, which is why the flows and habitat must be conserved year round.

These salmonids are found in different places in the watershed. Chinook are large river spawning fish. Steelheads are found in large rivers but also in small streams and tributaries. Coho have similar habitats but they need very cold water to survive. Dry Creek is vital to Coho recovery efforts because it has as much as 14 miles of potential cold water habitat.

Before Warm Springs Dam was built, natural flows in the summertime were closer to about 22 cfs. The creek was dubbed "Dry Creek" because it used to be very dry during the hot summer months. The pools formed in the creek bed, which were fed by cold ground water, were what this creek prime salmonid habitat. What we must keep in mind is that it is not mass of water, but quality of habitat that that allows the salmonids to thrive.

Item 5: Urban Subcommittee Update: Water Supply and Flows in Dry Creek

In 2000, nine people examined the river at three different study sites, each about 100 yards long, with different flow rates: one with a flow of 47cfs, another with a flow of 90cfs, and a third with a flow of 130cfs. The panel scored the amount of habitat that was suitable or optimal for various life stages at different flow rates. There was a consensus among the surveyors 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, it was determined that 50cfs was an ideal flow, and 90cfs was an acceptable flow. Any higher and the river flow is too strong for the fish to overcome.

The SCWA provided a graph to show flows at the mouth of the Dry Creek. The flow rates on the graph would need to be increased by 25-30cfs downstream, and cannot easily be reduced because of urban users who need drinking water.

After the completion of the Warm Springs Dam, the Dry Creek became habitat for Coho salmon and has potential to become more extensive habitat because of the large supply of cold water from behind the dam. The key to making Dry Creek suitable habitat is reducing the flows or widening the channel so that the current flows would not cause the same waterslide effect that washes away the Coho. Getting the help of the landowners and gaining access to their land along the creek is vital in order to see if the possibility of channel widening and restoration exists. Another option for fixing the flow problems would be putting in a pipeline that would carry the majority of the water designated for urban users.

Dry Creek is full of riparian vegetation that impedes high flows. A complex habitat, one full of logs and boulders, is vital to Coho salmon survival. Adding the complexity necessary for the survival of the fish adds to problems with hydraulic inefficiency when the dam overflows. Also, the wider the channel, the harder it is to provide a shade canopy that helps keep the water cool, another important component to the survival of the salmonids.

Item 6: County Road: Conservation Plan

There is a proposed plan that has been developed for five northern California counties that addresses guidelines for maintaining and managing new county roads. The coalition needs to know where Sonoma County stands because roads are a major contributor to bank erosion, and will surely be a consideration while working towards incidental take rights.

The entire Russian River basin is included in the Fishnet 4c roads project that is already in place. That manual is similar in practices to the developing five-county manual, but the latter has more criteria and requirements rather than guidelines. The five county agreements are fish specific.