

Salmonid Coalition
June 2, 2006 10 AM
Sonoma County Water Agency
Santa Rosa, CA
Meeting Notes

Item 1: Introductions

Bob Anderson, Mike Martini, Walt Ryan, Bill Cox, Bob Cooley, Jen Jenkins, Kara Heckert, Ralph Locke, Richard Swanson, Dennis Halligan, John Perry, Jim Syar, Bill Hearn, Joe Dillon, Nick Frey, Al Nelson, Pate Dayton, Al Cadd, Amy Bolten, Keenan Foster, Marc Kelley, Carolyn Wasem

By phone: Brian Johnson

Item 2: Syar Industries, Inc. Presentation on Gravel Extraction/Syar Industries, Inc., ongoing NMFS discussions

Syar Industries, Inc. has developed a plan for gravel extraction within specific reaches of the Russian River. This proposed plan is designed in accordance with the principles of the "Guidelines to NOAA Fisheries Staff for the Evaluation of Sediment Removal Actions from California Streams" authored by Brian Clure.

The dynamics of the River, and the inability to address those dynamics, have created challenges for the community at large. The benefits of this cooperative effort will hopefully assist Syar Industries, Inc. in resolving some of the inconsistencies in regulatory permitting. Ecologically sound methods for gravel extraction can help prevent flooding, address commercial needs, and also enhance habitat for the fish. Using the guidelines, sedimentation removal will enhance the topographic complexity within the channel, and encourage natural restoration and self-sustaining geomorphic features within associated aquatic and riparian habitat.

Using the recommendations of NOAA Fisheries, and an Adaptive Management program, the proposed plan is designed to have multiple benefits to the listed salmonids. Key benefits include:

1. Maintenance of primary channel integrity
2. Enhancement of native vegetative cover

3. Removal of invasive refuge areas for salmonids
4. Creation of velocity refuge areas for salmonids
5. Creation of thermal refuge areas for fish
6. Improvement of connectivity from primary River to tributary streams

Item 3: NMFS Discussion Memorandum of Agreement Sonoma County Water Agency/NMFS (2 positions)

A Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) in which the SCWA will fund two-one year positions was discussed. The first position will fund a NOAA biologist to complete the SCWA's Section 7, Coho Recovery Plan.

The second position will work with the salmonid coalition, concerned with habitat planning effort for the Alexander and Dry Creek Valley(s). An MOA, memorializing that agreement, has been signed by Rod McInnis, NOAA Fisheries Regional Director for the Southwest Region, and will be signed by Sonoma County Supervisor's Chair, Paul Kelley.

On the 13th of June the Southwest Region Director for NOAA Fisheries will come to Sonoma County to receive an acknowledgement for his work on Bay Area steelhead and Chinook population enhancements.

Item 4: NMFS Discussion - Job description (Salmonid Coalition Position)

NOAA Fisheries circulated a job description for a biologist who will be working with this group. The following is a synopsis of the description:

Applicants for the position must, at a minimum, have a BA/BS in Biology, Natural Resource Management or Environmental Sciences, and a minimum of three years professional experience in fisheries biology, aquatic biology, aquatic habitat restoration, or a closely related field. A Masters Degree in the above fields may be substituted for the specialized professional experience.

Responsibilities will include participation and contributions to the collaborative process with the goal of developing a written plan for conserving and restoring critical habitat for threatened and endangered salmonid species in the Alexander and Dry Creek Valleys of the Russian River watershed. The incumbent will:

- 1) Review existing relevant environmental data for main stem river and tributaries to the Alexander and Dry Creek Valley for the purpose of conserving and restoring salmonid habitat.
- 2) In cooperation with landowners, conduct limited reconnaissance to verify habitat areas in need of restoration.
- 3) Collaboratively work with NMFS staff and stakeholders to identify Best Management Practices (BMPs) to improve land management activities for purposes of conserving salmonid habitat – this will include a suite of activity identified by (CDFG, NOAA, NRCS, RWQCB), land management practices, and conduction of a gap analysis.
- 4) Draft a Conservation Plan that reviews, identifies and prioritizes the conservation actions, BMPs, and restoration needs for stream segments listed as critical habitat in the Alexander and Dry Creek Valleys of the Russian River watershed.
- 5) Identify projects for habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement that provide benefits where the root causes of degradation of habitat are understood and where species restoration goals can be achieved.

This position for will be funded for 12 months.

Item 5: Timely Completion of Watershed Assessment—Timeline Discussion

This group needs to demonstrate that real progress has been made in the next 12 months. Key to that timeline is completion of a Watershed Assessment. The biologist, working with the group needs to look at how on a watershed value basis we could achieve restoration and ensure that improvements are made. This group needs to set dates to assess progress. If we are unable to make that level of progress, a review of the group's effectiveness needs to transpire.

Because the watershed we are dealing with is very large, this group, the coalition needs to narrow the scope of area for conservation and establish which tributaries are the highest priorities and have the greatest potential for the endangered salmonids. It would be beneficial to have some of this work done prior to the new biologist coming on board.

NRCS has some knowledge as to how to complete a watershed assessment in a timely manner. Working with NRCS, RCD, and NOAA the group will work for a completed assessment by late this summer. Kelley & Wasem indicated that they would work with NOAA Fisheries to identify land uses in the Dry Creek and Alexander Valley and associated impacts to salmonids.

Item 6: NMFS Reviews of Regulatory Mechanisms available upon completion of Conservation Plan

1. Removal of critical habitat in the Alexander and Dry Creek valleys – if a conservation plan, with regulatory oversight can be achieved
2. Section 10 HCP – for projects that don't have a federal nexus
3. Section 7 Consultation – for projects with a federal nexus. The outcome of consultation will be a programmatic biological opinion (PBO)
4. Utilization of 4(d) rule – certain activities, if the BMP criteria were met, than a 4 (d) exclusion could be explored

Item 7: NRCS Meeting, State Conservationist Ed Burton/Marc Kelley

NRCS would like to be an active participant in this process. NRCS wants to, and believes that they can contribute to:

- Detailing projects – existing
- Identifying future projects and measures
- Coordinate efforts to ensure there is no duplication between the participants. NRCS has various existing relationships with the agricultural community. They could assist this project by bringing these relationships to the table, and assist in developing new relationships within the agriculture industry.

Item 8: Distribution of Russian River Property Owners Association (RRPOA) “Fisheries Management Plan”

The RRPOA constructed a fisheries management plan several years ago. It has undergone some editing to be consistent with existing local regulations. The Plan was constructed in response to the need for regulatory certainty for private property owners in the Alexander Valley.

The Plan will become part of the foundation to decide what projects can and will be done by this coalition.

It was determined that a subcommittee with grape growers, the Farm Bureau, and the Russian River Private Property Owners (RRPOA) would meet to identify what current activities are ongoing in the Alexander and Dry Creek Valley(s) and identify willingness of these groups to pursue future measures and projects for conservation.

Item 9: Next Meeting

Next meeting is to be held on June 30th at 10am at the SCWA.