
North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

Regional Water Quality Control Board North Coast Region Staff Summary Report October 3-4, 2024

ITEM: 5

SUBJECT: Tour of Hanson Russian River Ponds Floodplain Restoration Project

BOARD ACTION: This is an informational item; no action will be taken by the Board.

BACKGROUND: The Russian River Floodplain Restoration Project (Project) proposes to restore a functional floodplain at a former gravel quarry of approximately 358-acres of private land along the middle reach Russian River near Windsor, California. The Hanson parcels comprise a former gravel quarry including four remnant gravel mining ponds on the east bank of the Russian River. The constructed restoration and natural process-based project design will improve the functions and values of the Russian River for ecological benefit, flood management, improved water quality and public enjoyment. Development of the Project to date is documented in the Hanson Russian River Ponds Floodplain Restoration: Feasibility Study and Conceptual Design (Feasibility Study), a multi-stakeholder effort with funding support from NOAA Fisheries.

The primary purpose of the Project is to re-establish functional riparian floodplain and thereby enhance the Russian River's native ecosystems and contribute to the recovery of three federally and/or state listed salmonids: Coho, Chinook and steelhead. With the support of the property owner, Hanson Aggregates Mid-Pacific, Inc., the Endangered Habitats Conservancy, NOAA Fisheries, Sonoma County Permit and Resource Management Department, California State Coastal Conservancy, and U.S. Geological Survey completed the Feasibility Study in 2016. Russian Riverkeeper now serves as the manager of the site. With funding from California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), California Coastal Conservancy, and County of Sonoma, Project engineers are working on designs to restore the site.

To date 30% civil and riparian designs have been completed based on the Feasibility Study design and incorporate floodplain channels intended to enhance river floodplain connectivity, support floodplain conveyance and flood recession, and promote natural fluvial processes (GHD 2022. Hanson Russian River Access Trail Project Public Access Designs). Floodplain grading and revegetation provide seasonally appropriate hydraulic

connections and support habitat for multiple life history stages of juvenile salmonids. With the integration of the off-channel habitats, seasonally inundated floodplain wetlands and native riparian vegetation communities will be enhanced. Further, the Project will provide numerous ecological services including water quality enhancements including nutrient and fine sediment processing, flood attenuation and aquifer recharge, resilience to the impacts of climate change, habitat enhancements for native flora and fauna, as well as public access amenities.

This year CDFW completed CEQA for the Project through the Statutory Exemption for Restoration Projects Program. Following completion of a Use Permit by Sonoma County, the project will require federal and state permits, including from the Regional Water Board.

RECOMMENDATION: N/A

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS: [Russian River Floodplain Restoration Project - Russian Riverkeeper](https://russianriverkeeper.org/restoration/)
(<https://russianriverkeeper.org/restoration/>)