



# COUNTY OF SONOMA

575 ADMINISTRATION  
DRIVE, ROOM 102A  
SANTA ROSA, CA 95403

## SUMMARY REPORT

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**Agenda Date:** 1/27/2026

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**To:** Board of Directors, Sonoma County Water Agency

**Department or Agency Name(s):** Sonoma County Water Agency

**Staff Name and Phone Number:** Grant Davis 707-547-1911, Neil Lassettre 707-547-1951

**Vote Requirement:** Majority

**Supervisoral District(s):** Countywide

**Title:**

Russian River Estuary Adaptive Management Plans and Habitat Enhancement Feasibility Study

**Recommended Action:**

- A) Authorize Sonoma County Water Agency's General Manager to execute an agreement with Environmental Science Associates, in substantially the form presented to this Board, for technical support services related to Russian River Estuary adaptive management and the habitat enhancement feasibility study with an effective date of January 1, 2026, and a term end date of July 31, 2028, in the not-to-exceed amount of \$301,295.
- B) Authorize Sonoma County Water Agency's General Manager to amend the agreement to increase costs provided amendments do not cumulatively increase the total cost to Sonoma County Water Agency beyond \$30,000.

**Executive Summary:**

The National Marine Fisheries Service's (NMFS) 2025 Biological Opinion for the Russian River requires Sonoma County Water Agency (Sonoma Water) to collaborate with NMFS and develop annual adaptive management plans (Adaptive Management Plans). Adaptive Management Plans describe beach management measures that may be pursued by Sonoma Water to enhance the estuary for salmonid habitat and to minimize flood risk following river mouth closures. Under the proposed agreement, Environmental Science Associates (Consultant) will provide technical assistance for the development of Adaptive Management Plans for 2026, 2027, and 2028, and will build upon prior habitat enhancement conceptual assessments for the Russian River Estuary to conduct a Habitat Enhancements Feasibility Study consistent with the 2025 Biological Opinion.

**Discussion:**

**HISTORY OF ITEM/BACKGROUND**

On September 24, 2008, NMFS issued its Biological Opinion for Water Supply, Flood Control Operations, and Channel Maintenance conducted by the United States Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), Sonoma Water, and the Mendocino County Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District (2008 Biological Opinion). The 2008 Biological Opinion required that Sonoma Water collaborate with NMFS to modify estuary management practices to reduce marine influence during the summer, promote a higher water surface elevation, and improve water quality in the estuary to enhance rearing habitat for steelhead. It also required development of annual adaptive management plans for estuary management.

On April 29, 2025, NMFS issued its second Biological Opinion for the Russian River Watershed Water Supply

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and Channel Maintenance Project by the Corps, Sonoma Water, and the Mendocino County Russian River Flood Control and Water Conservation Improvement District (2025 Biological Opinion). NMFS found that the Corps' and Sonoma Water's proposal to continue water supply and flood control operations at Warm Springs Dam and Coyote Valley Dam (Proposed Action), including proposed estuary management, was not likely to jeopardize the continued existence of the federally endangered Central California Coast (CCC) coho salmon (*Oncorhynchus kisutch*) or killer whale, Southern Resident Distinct Population Segment (*Orcinus orca*), nor the threatened CCC steelhead (*O. mykiss*) and California Coastal (CC) Chinook salmon (*O. tshawytscha*). NMFS also concluded that the Proposed Action was not likely to result in the destruction or adverse modification of designated critical habitat for these listed species. Under the Proposed Action, Sonoma Water will continue to adaptively breach the naturally forming bar that closes the beach inlet, will conduct physical and biological monitoring in the estuary, and will implement habitat enhancement measures in the estuary to minimize the effects of bar breaching.

Sonoma Water develops the Adaptive Management Plans that describe beach management measures that may be pursued by Sonoma Water to enhance the estuary for salmonid habitat and to minimize flood risk following river mouth closures. Under previous agreements, Consultant has annually updated Adaptive Management Plans; developed a hydrodynamic and water quality model of the estuary to evaluate impacts and guide implementation of Adaptive Management Plans and other potential management strategies; and assisted Sonoma Water with implementation of annual Adaptive Management Plans and inlet management activities.

In addition to development of the Adaptive Management Plans, Consultant will build upon prior habitat enhancement conceptual assessments for the Russian River Estuary to conduct a Habitat Enhancements Feasibility Study consistent with the 2025 Biological Opinion. The habitat enhancements would minimize the effects of bar breaching activities in the Estuary and include the addition of structures to the Estuary mainstem (e.g., two to four pieces of large woody debris and boulders), and enhancement of three to five acres (not to exceed six acres) of wetland and/or floodplain habitat (littoral habitat).

**SELECTION PROCESS**

Consultant was selected from a list of qualified consultants developed from a competitive selection process. Attached is a memo that explains the competitive selection process.

Consultant was selected for the subject work because they demonstrated experience in the development of estuarine habitat enhancement and adaptive management programs in California, they have successfully worked with, and obtained approval from, regulatory and resource agencies of programs similar to the Russian River Estuary's, and they have specific expertise in the Russian River Estuary's complex physical and biological processes.

**SERVICES TO BE PERFORMED**

Under the proposed agreement, Consultant will provide technical assistance for and development of Adaptive Management Plans for 2026, 2027, and 2028, and will build upon prior habitat enhancement conceptual assessments for the Russian River Estuary to conduct a Habitat Enhancements Feasibility Study consistent with the 2025 Biological Opinion.

The cost of services will not exceed \$301,295. This agreement covers services rendered from January 1, 2026, to July 31, 2028. Services preceded Board approval because Consultant needed to begin work on the Habitat

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Feasibility Study on January 1, 2026, to meet deadlines imposed by the 2025 Biological Opinion.

Through the proposed agreement, the General Manager will be delegated the authority to approve a written amendment to extend the term of the agreement for up to two additional years by providing written notice to the other party thirty days in advance of the term end date and by executing an agreement amendment.

**County of Sonoma Strategic Plan Alignment:**

N/A

**Sonoma Water Strategic Plan Alignment**

Goal: Environmental Stewardship

Strategy: Ensure current and future water supply reliability by complying with Federal and State Endangered Species Acts

Action: Implement the 2025 Russian River Biological Opinion

This agreement implements actions detailed in the 2025 Russian River Biological Opinion, specifically by: 1) continuing implementation and refinement of breaching the naturally forming bar that closes the beach inlet in an effort to enhance the estuary for salmonid habitat and to minimize flood risk following river mouth closures, and 2) determining feasibility of conceptual habitat enhancements that would minimize the effects of bar breaching activities on threatened and endangered salmonids in the estuary.

**Racial Equity:****Was this item identified as an opportunity to apply the Racial Equity Toolkit?**

No

**Prior Board Actions:**

07/20/2021: Board approved agreement between Sonoma Water and Environmental Science Associates for Technical Support Services Related to Russian River Estuary Adaptive Management in the amount of \$267,000.

10/03/2017: Approved agreement between Sonoma Water and Environmental Science Associates for Technical Support Services Related to Russian River Estuary Outlet Channel Adaptive Management. Cost \$162,626; term end December 31, 2020. Agreement was amended to add additional time for a new term end date of June 30, 2021.

02/10/2015: Approved agreement between Sonoma Water and Environmental Science Associates for technical support services related to Russian River Estuary Outlet Channel Adaptive Management. Cost \$116,000; term end December 31, 2016. Agreement was amended to add additional time for a new term end date of December 31, 2017.

03/17/2009: Approved agreement between Sonoma Water and Philip Williams and Associates (Environmental Science Associates) for Consulting Services for Russian River Estuary Outlet Channel Management Plan. Cost \$139,725. Agreement was amended five times for an agreement total of \$476,484, and term end date of 5/31/2014.

**FISCAL SUMMARY**

Expenditures	FY25-26 Adopted	FY26-27 Projected	FY27-28 Projected
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Budgeted Expenses	\$130,000	\$171,295	
Additional Appropriation Requested			
<b>Total Expenditures</b>	<b>\$130,000</b>	<b>\$171,295</b>	
<b>Funding Sources</b>			
General Fund/WA GF			
State/Federal			
Fees/Other	\$130,000	\$171,295	
Use of Fund Balance			
General Fund Contingencies			
<b>Total Sources</b>	<b>\$130,000</b>	<b>\$171,295</b>	

**Narrative Explanation of Fiscal Impacts:**

Budgeted amount of \$130,000 is available from FY 2025/2026 appropriations for the Watershed Planning and Restoration fund. FY 2026/2027 appropriations will be budgeted in that fiscal year.

<b>Staffing Impacts:</b>			
<b>Position Title (Payroll Classification)</b>	<b>Monthly Salary Range (A-I Step)</b>	<b>Additions (Number)</b>	<b>Deletions (Number)</b>

**Narrative Explanation of Staffing Impacts (If Required):**

N/A

**Attachments:**

Attachment 1: Draft Agreement with Environmental Science Associates

Attachment 2: Competitive Selection Process Memo

**Related Items “On File” with the Clerk of the Board:**

None.