

**Public Notice for Water Quality Certification and/or Waste
Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects)**

Lower Rocky Gulch Salmonid Access and Habitat Restoration Project
WDID No. 1B05022WNHU

Humboldt County

On March 3, 2005, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from Mr. Aldaron Laird, representing Roger and Johanna Rodoni and the California Department of Fish and Game (applicants), requesting a Water Quality Certification and/or Waste Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects) for the Lower Rocky Gulch Salmonid Access and Habitat Restoration Project near Bracut, Humboldt County. The proposed project will cause disturbances to waters of the United States associated with Rocky Gulch in the Eureka Plain Hydrologic Unit No. 110.00.

Rocky Gulch is a small watershed tributary to northern Humboldt Bay that originates in the hills southeast of the Bracut area. The upper reaches of this watershed are in forested mountains while the lower reaches traverse gently sloping, diked former tidelands that are primarily used as cow pasture. The primary purpose of this restoration project is to re-establish access for anadromous fish passage between Humboldt Bay and the upper reaches of Rocky Gulch. A secondary purpose of this project is to enhance and expand the estuarine and freshwater habitats in the lowermost mile of Rocky Gulch.

The proposed project area includes approximately 5,500 feet of stream and associated salt marsh and riparian corridor between Old Arcata Road and Highway 101. The upper 2,000 feet of stream within the project area is narrow and channelized between poorly maintained dikes and the embankment along Old Arcata Road. This stream reach is plugged by fine sediment and is overgrown by willows and alders. A California Department of Fish and Game warden documented a report from a local rancher who observed a catastrophic sediment deposition event in this watershed in the winter of 1956. The rancher reported a sudden rise in the creek with an abnormally heavy amount of silt. Spawning fish were killed and washed out by the heavy silt flowing down the creek. The rancher reported that the creek flowed like a semi-solid moving sluggishly down the stream. This event is the likely cause of the expiration of coho salmon, steelhead, coastal cutthroat trout, and probably tidewater goby within the watershed. The damage to anadromous fish habitat was compounded further by installation of a tide gate at the mouth of Rocky Gulch in the 1960s that significantly reduced the ability of fish to migrate into the stream.

The lower 3,000-foot section of stream within the project area runs across cow pasture with straight sections and sharp ninety-degree bends. Dikes in this stream reach contain most tides and flood flows including input from three small perennial tributary streams. At the downstream end the stream flows through a recently upgraded tidegate and joins Washington Gulch to form Brainard Slough above Highway 101. The new tidegate is designed to allow fish passage.

The proposed restoration project is the second phase of a multi-phased restoration plan to restore fish access between Humboldt Bay and the upper Rocky Gulch watershed and to enhance habitat along the lower mile of the watershed. Tractors will be used to excavate excess sediment from the existing channels, excavate two new sections of channel totaling approximately 1,400 feet to

eliminate unnatural straightening and ninety-degree bends, and the dredged material will be used to rehabilitate existing dikes to contain winter floods and tidal waters. A 2,500-foot section of existing dike parallel to Old Arcata Road will be moved 50 feet away from the existing channel to create floodplain and increase the riparian corridor. Riparian fencing, cattle crossings, and armored cattle watering access sites will be installed to reduce future impacts from cattle. The proposed project will affect approximately 1.1 miles of stream channel and approximately 26.8 acres of stream and wetland area.

Compensatory mitigation is not required for this project. Noncompensatory mitigation measures will include the use of Best Management Practices for heavy equipment use and sediment and turbidity control. Heavy equipment use will be limited to designated access and staging areas. Geotex mats and crushed rock may be used to reduce heavy equipment impacts to excessively wet areas. Construction is planned to take place during the low flow period between July 1 and October 31, 2005. Following construction, vegetation will be replanted using native riparian and wetland plant species. Willow baffles and other materials will be installed to protect the disturbed areas from excessive winter erosion.

The applicant has applied for authorization to perform the proposed restoration project from the United States Army Corps of Engineers, pursuant to the Clean Water Act, Section 404. The applicant has also applied for a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement (1600 Permit) from the California Department of Fish and Game. The County of Humboldt, as the lead California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) agency, will be preparing a Mitigated Negative Declaration for CEQA.

Regional Water Board staff is proposing to regulate this project pursuant to Section 401 of the Clean Water Act (33 USC 1341) and/or Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act Authority. In addition, staff will consider all comments received during a 21-day comment period that begins on the first date of issuance of this letter. If you have any questions or comments, please contact staff member Dean Prat at (707) 576-2801 or at dprat@waterboards.ca.gov within 21 days of the posting of this notice.

March 21, 2005