July 10, 2006

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

Bureau of Reclamation, Trinity River Restoration Program
Canyon Creek Suite of Rehabilitation Sites
WDID No. 1A06067WNTR

Trinity County

On May 15, 2006, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (hereinafter Regional Water Board) received an application from Mr. Doug Schleusner on behalf of the Bureau of Reclamation, Trinity River Restoration Program (hereinafter applicant), requesting Water Quality Certification and/or Waste Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects) for the Canyon Creek Suite of Rehabilitation Sites near Junction City, Trinity County. The proposed project will cause disturbances to the Trinity River in the Helena Hydrologic Subarea No. 106.15.
The proposed project includes habitat rehabilitation activities at four discrete but related project areas that are referred to as the Conner Creek, Valdor Gulch, Elkhorn, and Pear Tree rehabilitation areas. The proposed project areas are located within an approximately 6-mile section of the Trinity River between the mouth of Canyon Creek and the town of Helena. Conner Creek is at the upstream end of the project and immediately downstream of the Hocker Flat Rehabilitation Site, a similar habitat restoration project that was implemented by the Trinity River Restoration Program in 2005. The Pear Tree rehabilitation area is at the downstream end of the project, approximately one half mile upstream of the mouth of the North Fork Trinity River.

The primary purpose of the proposed project is to improve salmonid habitat in the mainstem Trinity River by removing riparian berms and restoring alluvial processes to the river. Development of riparian berms along the Trinity River is associated with the typical low flows the Trinity River has experienced since flow releases have been regulated following completion of the Trinity Dan and Lewiston Dam in 1964. The fossilized riparian berms are anchored by extensive root systems and consolidated sand deposits. The fossilized riparian berms have degraded the salmonid habitat and limited the habitat diversity by confining the channel and impeding the natural geomorphic processes that occur in an alluvial river channel. The proposed rehabilitation activities are designed to reestablish the geomorphic processes that existed prior to completion of the dams.

The removal of riparian berms involves excavation, vegetation removal and grading in sensitive areas adjacent to the water's edge. These activities are expected to improve floodplain habitat and to allow for the development of point bars that are associated with more natural and properly functioning alluvial river channels. The intended outcome of this project is an overall improvement to the salmonid habitat in the vicinity of these project areas. In addition, the beneficial effects of the proposed project are expected to extend beyond those areas that will be directly affected by the project activities by promoting more natural processes over a larger area of the river.

The proposed project will directly and temporarily impact approximately 14.1 acres of waters of the United States including 9,355 linear feet of streambank and 6.23 acres of riparian wetlands. As much as 91,150 cubic yards of material will be graded and/or excavated during project implementation. Disposal of excess excavated material will occur at adjacent upland areas. No excavated material will be transported out of the project area. Impacts to waters of the United States are considered temporary because the project does not include installation of any permanent structures or fill and the primary purpose is to restore natural alluvial processes and floodplain functions to the river.

Compensatory mitigation is not required for the proposed project. The project has been designed to avoid and minimize adverse impacts and permanent impacts to waters of the United States.

Non-compensatory mitigation measures include the use of Best Management Practices and implementation of a monitoring program to ensure there will be no net loss of wetlands as a result of the anticipated direct impacts to 6.23 acres of existing riparian wetlands. The mitigation and monitoring plan includes provisions for conducting a wetland delineation of the project area five years after project completion. New areas within the restored floodplain and along the river channel are expected to convert to riparian wetlands as the natural alluvial processes are restored to the channel. The mitigation and monitoring plan will contain a contingency plan for implementing additional wetland restoration activities if the delineation shows that natural alluvial process and revegetation have not adequately replaced the 6.23 acres of riparian wetlands that will be directly impacted by the project. Native vegetation is expected to naturally replace affected riparian vegetation. The applicant will also be replanting impacted riparian vegetation with a diverse assortment of native vegetation. Strict riparian vegetation replacement requirements that are based on stem counts and species are not requirements for this project because the current river channel is significantly encroached by riparian vegetation.

The applicant has received authorization (File No. 290920N) to implement the proposed project under Nationwide Permit Number 27 from the United States Army Corps of Engineers. A Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement (1600 Permit) from the California Department of Fish and Game is not required for federal projects. The Regional Water Board, as lead California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) agency, has prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the project. The DEIR was submitted to the State Clearinghouse in February 2006 for a 30-day review and comment period. The Regional Water Board is in the process of completing the Final Environmental Impact Report (SCH# 2005102025) for this project.

Regional Water Board staff are 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 written comments submitted during a 21-day comment period that begins on the first date of issuance of this letter and ends at 5:00 p.m. on the last day of the comment period. If you have any questions, please contact staff member Dean Prat at (707) 576-2801 within 21 days of the posting of this notice.

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