

April 8, 2008

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

CDOT – Hwy 101, Mad River Bridges Replacement Project
WDID No. 1B06134WNHU

Humboldt County

On September 7, 2006, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), requesting Federal Clean Water Act (CWA), section 401, Water Quality Certification for activities related to the proposed Highway 101/Mad River Bridges Replacement Project. Staff received additional project information on February 19, 2008, February 21, 2008, March 26, 2008 and April 1, 2008. The project is proposed to replace the northbound and southbound Mad River Bridges which were originally constructed in 1929 and 1958, respectively. The proposed project will cause disturbances to Waters of the United States associated with the Mad River within the Blue Lake Hydrologic Area No. 109.10.

The project is located from post mile (PM) 89.1 to R90.4 on Highway 101, approximately 1 mile north of the town of Arcata in Humboldt County. The project is necessary in view of an evaluation which indicated the Mad River Bridges are structurally deficient and do not meet current seismic standards. In 1987, the southbound bridge was seismically retrofitted; however, no retrofits have been made to the northbound bridge. In addition, scouring around the piers of the current bridges has lead to potentially unstable conditions. The proposed bridges would be constructed on a relatively parallel alignment, situated west of the existing structures.

The proposed bridges are designed to endure the strongest seismic event estimated for the area. The project will also extend on/off exit ramp lengths, since the current exit ramp lengths are not up to current standards and appear to contribute to traffic accidents within the project area. In addition, the bridge designs have wider vehicle lanes, shoulder widths, bicycle lanes, and include a pedestrian path. The bridges would be supported by two abutments and three piers, which include a total of 17 piles. Construction of temporary falsework, cofferdams, and trestles will be required for the construction of the new bridges. Additional clearing and grade changes will be made along the on/off exit ramps, access roads, and staging areas within the project area.

The proposed project will result in permanent and temporary impacts to areas that are within jurisdiction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), California Coastal Commission (CCC), California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) and Regional Water Board. The scope of work proposed will result in approximately 0.82 acres of temporary and 0.90 acres of permanent impacts to riparian vegetation within the project area. Approximately 0.04 acres of wetlands will be permanently impacted and it is anticipated that the project will temporarily impact 0.02 acres of wetlands. During the construction of the bridges, which is likely to be four working seasons, the temporary impacts to the Mad River (Waters of the U.S.) will be approximately 2.1 acres. However, newly designed bridges will result in an over all loss of permanent fill within the channel, since the new piers will take less area as compared to the area of the current piers. Over the lifetime of the bridges, a scour hole (observed fish holding habitat) has developed along the northern pier of the northbound bridge. As

part of the proposed project Caltrans will fill the scour hole to discourage fish from holding within the project area during construction. Compensatory mitigation will be required to offset the permanent and temporary impacts to jurisdictional waters. Noncompensatory mitigation includes the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for erosion control.

As a compensatory mitigation measure Caltrans has proposed 1.72 acres of riparian restoration and 0.34 acres of wetland creation on-site. In addition, approximately 5.16 acres of riparian vegetation will be mitigated for off-site. Caltrans has proposed creating a new scour feature for fish habitat, to replace the area filled during bridge construction. To ensure the success of the proposed mitigation, monitoring and maintenance will be conducted to promote the establishment of native plant species.

The proposed project will slightly realign and add road surface to the highway. New pavement will be added resulting in a net increase of impervious surface throughout the project area. Therefore, additional storm water treatment controls are proposed which includes the addition of three biofiltration strips along the highway. Also, construction and post construction BMPs will be implemented to ensure erosion controls.

The applicant has applied for authorization from the USACE to perform the project under their Nationwide Permits No. 3 (maintenance) and 33 (temporary construction, access, and dewatering), pursuant to Clean Water Act, section 404. On June 17, 2005, Caltrans adopted a negative declaration (SCH No. 2003122015) for the project in order to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act. The Regional Water Board has considered the environmental document and any proposed changes incorporated into the project or required as a condition of approval to avoid significant effects to the environment. The applicant has also applied to CDFG for a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement, the CCC for a Coastal Development Permit and the NMFS for a Biological Opinion. The proposed project activities are anticipated to begin in the summer of 2008. Construction work within the channel will only be conducted during the period of May 1 – October 15 annually. The entire project is expected to require 4 years to complete.

The information contained in this public notice is only a summary of the applicant's proposed activities. The application for Water Quality Certification in the Regional Water Board's file contains additional details about the proposed project including maps and design drawings. The application and Regional Water Board file are available for public review.

Regional Water Board staff are proposing to regulate this project pursuant to Section 401 of the CWA (33 USC 1341) and/or Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act authority. In addition, staff will consider all comments submitted in writing and received at this office by mail 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 or comments, please contact staff member Jeremiah Puget at (707) 576-2835 or jpuget@waterboards.ca.gov within 21 days of the posting of this notice.