

June 16, 2008

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

California Department of Transportation
Highway 101 High Occupancy Vehicle (HOV)
Lane Widening and Improvements Project:
Steele Lane to Windsor River Road
WDID No. 1B07177WNSO

Sonoma County

On March 21, 2008 the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) issued a 401 Water Quality Certification and/or Waste Discharge Requirements (Dredge/Fill Projects) for the Highway 101 Widening Project from Windsor to Steele Lane in Sonoma County (Project). Based on the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) prepared *Amendment to the Biological Opinion on the Effects of the Proposed Three Highway 101 Lane Widening, and Improvement Projects in Sonoma County, California*, dated April 15, 2008, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans) has requested an amendment to the 401 Certification to reflect the changes in the USFWS document. Additional revisions to the 401 Certification will include changes in the due dates for the purchase of mitigation credits as well as the mitigation and monitoring plans.

The amendments to the Biological Opinion have altered the amount of impacts and mitigation required by the USFWS for the Project. In addition, the revised Biological Opinion also reflects that the project will be completed in three separate construction phases. Phase A will consist of all proposed improvements to the Highway. Phase B will include the ramp improvements to Airport Blvd. and Fulton Rd., construction of the collector distributor roads and bridges between Airport Blvd. and Fulton Rd., and all project soundwalls. Phase C will include all the final landscaping activities.

The Project is located along Highway 101 in Sonoma County, from Steele Lane in Santa Rosa to Windsor River Road in Windsor, between post mile (PM) 21.7 and PM 29.3. The Project application includes the proposed work for Phase A only. The Project will impact waters of the State associated with Paulin Creek, Piner Creek, Mark West Creek, Pruitt Creek, Poole Creek, and Windsor Creek all in the Middle Russian River Hydrologic Area No.114.20. The purposes of the Project are to complete one of the remaining portions of the planned continuous Highway 101 HOV system, to reduce traffic congestion, and to address existing roadway and operational deficiencies.

The total Project area is approximately 253 acres, including all staging areas. All of the land to be converted to transportation structure is existing State-owned right of way. The proposed actions for the Project will consist of: widening Highway 101 from four lanes to six lanes; widening the shoulders of Highway 101; modifying and adding new drainage structures; widening, extending, and adding auxiliary lanes; modifying interchanges; modifying bridges at Mark West Creek, Poole Creek, and Pruitt Creek; realigning and reconstructing ramps; installing ramp metering, closed circuit cameras, changeable message signs, overhead signs, new traffic signals, traffic monitoring stations, and a highway advisory radio system; and constructing retaining walls and sound walls.

The Project will result in permanent impacts to 0.47 acres of waters of the United States, 0.392 acres of which are wetland features and 0.078 acres of which are linear features. Temporary impacts will also occur due to the Project; 0.188 acres of waters of the United States, and 1.97 acres of waters of the State. Total permanent impacts are 2.152 acres.

The Project will result in an increase of 39.28 acres of impervious area. Caltrans will address the increases in storm water runoff and hydro-modification of the Project area through various means, primarily through the use of bio-strips that rely on retention and dispersion. The area of hydro-modification mitigation and storm water treatment is 56.5 acres. For soils that are not ideal for these treatment controls, Caltrans will amend the soil so that it is more suitable.

Compensatory mitigation for loss of riparian vegetation will be obtained through revegetation proposed at Pruitt Creek. Willow trees will be planted above the ordinary high water mark (OHWM) between the drip line of the bridge and the line of State-owned right of way. Appropriate native tree species will be planted at higher elevations along the bank to provide shading and diversity, while Himalayan blackberry and other invasive species will be removed. Riparian impacts are estimated to be 0.08 acres. The total area of proposed revegetation is 0.16 acres. On-site mitigation includes the restoration of 1.97 acres of waters of the State (ditch relocation). The required due date of the final on-site mitigation plan will be extended to September 30, 2008.

Compensatory mitigation requirements for loss of waters of the State and waters of the United States associated with the completion of the Project will be fulfilled through the purchase of off-site mitigation credits, and through on-site mitigation work. The USFWS revised Biological Opinion has changed the required acreage of off-site credits to be purchased for California Tiger Salamander (CTS) dispersal habitat from 3.14 acres to 6.46 acres. Compensatory mitigation required for special species plant habitat has been changed from 10.83 acres to 0 acres. Additional off-site credits to be purchased equal 0.47 acres of waters of the U.S., which remains unchanged by the revised Biological Opinion. Mitigation credits will be purchased no later than seven days prior to construction. Caltrans is pursuing the purchase of mitigation credits from a variety of mitigation banks in the project area.

On October 24, 2007, Caltrans certified an Environmental Impact Report [EIR (State Clearing House No.2003062101)] for the Project in order to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Regional Water Board has considered the environmental document.

The Project is scheduled to begin in summer 2008 and end in 2011. 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 notice. If you have any questions or comments, please contact staff member Jeremiah Puget at (707) 576-2835 or at JPuget@waterboards.ca.gov within 21 days of the posting of this notice.

The information contained in this public notice is only a summary of the applicant's proposed road restoration 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 related documents and comments received are on file and may be reviewed or copied at the Regional Water Board office, 5550 Skylane Boulevard, Suite A, Santa Rosa, California. Appointments are recommended for document review. Appointments can be made by calling (707) 576-2220.