September 15, 2008

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

USDOT – FHA, South Fork Road Improvement Project, Smith River
WDID No. 1A008118WNDN

Del Norte County

On July 18, 2008, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from the Federal Highway Administration (applicant), requesting Federal Clean Water Act, section 401, Water Quality Certification (certification) for activities associated with the proposed South Fork Road Improvement Project along the South Fork Smith River in Del Norte County. The proposed project will cause disturbances to waters of the United States associated with wetlands in roadside drainage channels, Rock Creek, Boulder Creek, and unnamed tributaries to the South Fork Smith River in the South Fork Smith River Hydrologic Area No. 103.20.

The proposed project is located on South Fork Road (California Forest Highway 112) between post miles 3.5 and 13.6. The purpose of the proposed project is to improve safety along the roadway by widening two single-lane bridges and four single-lane sections of the road. The existing bridges over Rock Creek and Boulder Creek will be removed and replaced with wider bridges. The proposed project also includes replacement of six existing culverts, removal of two existing culverts, and installation of three new culverts. Standard highway construction equipment will be used on this project which may include dump trucks, backhoes, wheel loaders, bulldozers, excavators, and motor graders. Materials to be used include aggregate, rock riprap, asphalt, concrete, steel, sealants, and paints. Planned future projects along South Fork Road include the replacement of the Steven Memorial Bridge and the Hurdy Gurdy Creek Bridge. These future bridge replacement projects are currently scheduled for 2012.

The existing single-lane bridge over Rock Creek will be replaced with a two-lane bridge. The existing bridge structure will be removed and the abutment and wingwalls will be removed to one foot below the girder seat elevation. The remaining portions of the abutments will be left in place for permanent erosion protection. The new two-lane bridge will span the creek channel using pre-stressed concrete girders and drilled shaft foundations at both abutments. The bridge will be widened toward the upstream side of the existing structure. Bridge replacement activities at Rock Creek are not expected to result in any new permanent impacts to waters of the United States.

The existing single-lane bridge over Boulder Creek will also be replaced with a two-lane bridge and the new bridge will also span the creek channel using pre-stressed concrete girders and drilled shaft foundations at both abutments. The bridge will be widened toward the upstream side of the existing structure and the alignment will be shifted slightly to accommodate the wider bridge. Construction and removal activities at both bridge sites will be conducted in stages in order to maintain one-way traffic across the bridges.

The Boulder Creek bridge site is the only project area that involves placement of fill materials below the ordinary high water mark of a perennial stream. The proposed fill materials will consist of rock slope protection (RSP) placed along the left bank of Boulder Creek near the bridge abutment. The RSP will not be placed below the ordinary high water mark on the downstream side of the bridge abutment but the toe of the RSP slope will extend below the plane of ordinary high water near the upstream side of the new bridge and will continue in the upstream direction for approximately 100 linear feet. The proposed RSP will permanently impact 100 linear feet and 340 square feet of streambank. This work will take place during the dry season when flows in Boulder Creek are low.

Road widening will be accomplished by extending the existing fill slopes and cut slopes. In the four slide areas where the roadway is being widened from one lane to two lanes, construction activities will mainly occur on the cut slope side of the roadway. Mechanically stabilized earth walls will be used to stabilize fill slopes and the cut slopes will be stabilized by soil nail walls. Road widening and associated drainage channel realignment activities will result in permanent impacts to 306 square feet of ephemeral drainage channel and 1,051 square feet of wetlands in roadside drainage channels. Roadside drainage channels will be restored and reconstructed adjacent to the new wider road sections.

Two of the six culverts that will be replaced are located on jurisdictional ephemeral streams. These culverts will be excavated, removed, and replaced following removal of the overlying asphalt pavement. The existing 50-foot long and 18-inch diameter culvert at station 517+63.95 will be removed and replaced with a 43-foot long and 24-inch diameter culvert. Rock riprap will be added to the area of channel that was previously filled by the longer culvert to provide erosion protection below the new culvert outlet. The existing 38-foot long and 24-inch diameter culvert at station 405+95.01 will be removed and replaced with a 41-foot long and 24-inch diameter culvert. The proposed culvert replacement activities will result in new permanent impacts to approximately 6 square feet and 3 linear feet of ephemeral stream channel. Proposed culvert replacement activities at both locations will also result in temporary impacts to approximately 176 square feet and 88 linear feet of ephemeral stream channel that is currently filled by existing culverts. The remainder of the culvert removal, replacement, and installation activities do not involve any impacts to waters of the state. Culvert removal and replacement activities will be conducted during the dry season.

The proposed project will result in a 5 percent increase in the amount of impervious surface area within the project vicinity by increasing the existing 3.40 acres of impervious surface by approximately 0.17 acre. The change in impervious surface area occurs at the two bridge replacement sites and the four areas where the road will be widened to two lanes. Projects that increase the amount of impervious surface area can increase the volume of storm water runoff from the area, the duration of elevated storm water flows, and the runoff flow rate. The applicant has evaluated the potential impacts associated with increasing the amount of impervious surface. At Boulder

Creek, there will be a net decrease in impervious area resulting in a reduction in runoff at this location. At Rock Creek there is an increase in impervious area of 2,396 square feet and in the four slide locations there will be a net increase of 5,816 square feet. The applicant determined that the change in runoff from these locations was very slight and not measurable.

Although only a slight increase in runoff is expected, the applicant evaluated the feasibility of installing post-construction mitigation measures. Installation of treatment measures were determined to be infeasible because treatment measures located at any particular site would only treat a small fraction of the project. Numerous treatment areas would be necessary which would require significantly more grading impacts. This would be especially problematic at the four road widening area where slides have historically been an issue.

Compensatory mitigation is required for the permanent impacts to 1,051 square feet of existing wetlands in roadside drainage channels. Compensatory mitigation mainly involves establishing wetlands in the new roadside drainage channels. The proposed project is not expected to significantly affect the hydrology along the roadway so new wetlands are expected to develop within the realigned channels. The applicant will conduct a field survey of the reconstructed channels one year after project completion. If a sufficient amount of new emergent wetlands is observed during the field survey, a wetland delineation will be conducted to quantify the area of total wetlands on the project site to confirm that the 1,051 square feet of wetland area that was lost due to construction has been replaced by new emergent wetlands. If the first survey indicates that new wetlands are emerging but are not yet extensive enough to fully replace the lost wetlands, the process will be repeated a second year. If the second survey indicates an insufficient amount of wetlands, the process will be repeated a third year. If after three years, sufficient wetlands have emerged in the reconstructed ditches to replace the lost wetlands, the applicant will conduct a wetland delineation to quantify this replacement and confirm no net loss of wetlands. If sufficient wetlands have not emerged after three years, the applicant will submit an alternative compensatory mitigation plan to replace the remaining area of wetlands to ensure there will be no net loss of wetlands as a result of this project.

Noncompensatory mitigation includes the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for sediment and turbidity control and for operation of heavy equipment near stream channels. Temporary erosion and sediment control BMPs will be implemented during construction to prevent offsite sedimentation to streams and wetlands. The applicant will require the bridge contractor to submit an acceptable bridge removal plan and construct structurally adequate debris shields to prevent debris from entering waterways, open travel lanes, and any other areas that are not to be disturbed.

The applicant has applied for authorization from the United States Army Corps of Engineers to perform the project under Nationwide Permit Number 14 (File No. 200700699), pursuant to Clean Water Act, section 404. The applicant has also applied for a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement from the California Department of Fish

and Game. On July 3, 2008, Del Norte County approved a mitigated negative declaration (SCH No. 2008052126) for the project in order to comply with CEQA. 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. Construction is scheduled to begin in January 2009 and finish in August 2010.

The information contained in this public notice is only a summary of the applicant's proposed road and bridge widening 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 Clean Water Act (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, please contact staff member Dean Prat at (707) 576-2801 within 21 days of the posting of this notice.

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