November 19, 2010

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

California Department of Transportation
Highway 101 – Richardson's Grove STAA Project
WDID No. 1B10077WNHU

Humboldt County

On June 15, 2010 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 – Richardson's Grove Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982 (STAA) Project (project). The proposed project will cause disturbances to waters of the United States (U.S.) and waters of the State associated with unnamed intermittent tributaries to the Eel River located within the Eel River Hydrologic Unit (HU) No.111.00 (Benbow Hydrologic Sub-Area 111.32).

The proposed project is located on Highway 101 from post mile (PM) 1.11 to 2.20, in Humboldt County. The purpose of the proposed project is to upgrade the above-referenced section of Highway 101 by adjusting the current alignment to accommodate STAA trucks travel, and thereby removing the current restriction to STAA traffic. The intended purpose of the project is to improve the safety and operation of the highway, while also improving the movement of goods. The majority of the work would take place within the boundaries of the Richardson's Grove State Park.

Caltrans proposes 1.07 acres of ground disturbing activities including: slope excavation; minor widening at various locations; culvert repair and replacement at five locations; construction of a retaining wall; and implementing erosion and sediment control. The project will result in an additional 0.3 acres (approximately 13,000 ft^2) of new impervious surface, primarily as a result of widening the shoulder widths. Caltrans has evaluated post-construction storm water treatment Best Management Practices (BMPs); however, Caltrans and Regional Water Board staffs agree treatment measures are not feasible within the park limits. During the evaluation of potential impacts to hydrology and water quality, in cooperation with multiple resource agencies, Caltrans included several design components to avoid, minimize, and mitigate those impacts. In addition, Caltrans has incorporated measures to decompact and replant an abandoned roadbed (former highway alignment c. 1942) within the project limits to improve vegetation growth and storm water infiltration. Additionally, Caltrans will aide in the several park improvements that directly and indirectly benefit water quality, including: providing food lockers, trash bins and drain grates; and removing a park restroom, thereby reducing the load to the septic system adjacent to Durphy Creek (tributary to the Eel River).

The proposed project will result in temporary and permanent impacts to waters of the U.S and waters of the State. The scope of work proposed may require the installation of a water diversion and may require dewatering activities. Construction will also include vegetation clearing, excavation, utility relocation, revegetation, and erosion

control activities. The proposed project activity is scheduled to begin in February 2011 through November 2012. The entire project is expected to take approximately 180 working days to complete; however, the proposed in-channel work will only be conducted between May 15th and October 15th, when flows are low.

Caltrans has determined that impacts to waters of the U.S. and State would total 0.11 acres (520 ft^2) and 293 linear feet of permanent impacts. Based on field reviews by Regional Water Board staff and modifications to project design, these impacts are considered minor and do not require compensatory mitigation. Caltrans will utilize BMPs to provide erosion control and pollution prevention throughout the project area during construction. In addition, all graded areas within the project affected by the construction activities will be appropriately stabilized and BMPs will be implemented to ensure erosion is minimized and controlled.

Caltrans has applied for authorization from the Unites States Army Corps of Engineers to perform the project under their Nationwide Permits No. 14 (linear transportation projects) and No. 3 (Maintenance) pursuant to Clean Water Act, section 404. Caltrans has also applied for a California Department of Fish and Game Streambed Alteration. On May 18, 2010, Caltrans certified Environmental Impact Reports (State Clearing House No. 2009012070) 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.

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 comments submitted in writing and received within 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.

The information contained in this public notice is only a summary of the applicant's proposed road construction 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.