

June 23, 2011

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

Mattole Restoration Council – Ranchlands Sediment Reduction Project

Humboldt County

On April 26, 2011, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from the Mattole Restoration Council (applicant), requesting Federal Clean Water Act, section 401, water quality certification for proposed activities associated with various stream restoration and sediment control projects within the Mattole River watershed. The proposed projects will cause disturbances to waters of the United States associated with the North Fork Mattole River and tributaries to the North Fork Mattole River in the Mattole River Hydrologic Area No. 112.30.

The primary goals of the proposed project are to maintain and restore the natural watershed processes that create habitat characteristics favorable to salmonids. The proposed project will use grant funds, as well as in-kind and cash contributions from landowners to initiate activities that are designed to restore salmon and steelhead habitat. Years of poor land management combined with natural events has altered native habitats and limited the ability of fish to survive and successfully reproduce in coastal streams that historically produced large populations of salmon and steelhead. The proposed project is designed to increase populations of wild anadromous fish by restoring their habitat.

The project objective is to improve spawning success for adult salmon and steelhead as well as to increase survival for eggs, embryos, rearing juveniles, and downstream migrants. Streambank erosion treatments and riparian enhancements will improve spawning conditions and embryo survival by reducing sediment yield to streams. The installation of instream habitat structures will recruit and sort spawning gravel for adult salmonids, and create summer rearing pools and over-wintering habitat for juveniles. Upslope road repair activities will also help to address these widespread problems.

Proposed project activities will occur in sub-watersheds to the Mattole River that have been subjected to significant levels of logging, road building, grazing, and other activities that have reduced the quality and quantity of stream habitat available for native anadromous fish. These watersheds were previously dominated by mature Douglas fir forest and perennial grasslands. The watersheds currently contain extensive road and skid trail systems from tractor logging and annual grasses from decades of overgrazing. These human impacts have destabilized much of the steep terrain throughout the project area. Restoration projects will be implemented within the stream course to improve fish habitat, increase riparian vegetation, and stabilize streambanks. Upslope restoration actions will be implemented to improve fish habitat by reducing the input of fine sediment to the stream environment. All proposed projects are designed to reduce the rate of erosion in the watershed. Although the project may have the potential to cause minor short-term impacts on soil, vegetation, wildlife, water

quality, and aquatic life, the mitigation measures that will be incorporated into the projects will reduce impacts to a less than significant level.

Streambank stabilization activities may include the use of boulder and cobble armoring or willow siltation baffles. Revegetation of riparian habitat will normally involve the use of willow sprigs, or willow or alder seedlings or transplants, to stabilize banks and slopes, promote long-term shade and channel stability, and enhance large-wood recruitment. Indigenous stocks will be used for all planting projects. Upslope earthmoving and culvert replacement activities require large size rock and increased volumes to be moved by heavy equipment and, in so doing, involve certain limited construction activities. The techniques that will be used for these action items have proven successful on many north coast streams and are detailed in the current version of California Department of Fish and Game's *California Salmonid Stream Habitat Restoration Manual* (Manual). The Manual describes in detail how the work will be performed in the field.

Proposed stream habitat restoration activities will typically use dump trucks to deliver logs, root wads, or quarry rock to staging areas, and front-end loaders to deliver material to restoration sites. Existing stream crossings will be used to access the stream in most cases. If stream crossings do not exist, the least damaging access point will be selected based upon the size, type, and density of riparian vegetation. Where use of such access points is necessary, riparian vegetation can be affected, particularly the upper part of plants may be damaged, with the roots and lower parts receiving minimal damage. Plants damaged in this way will usually re-sprout and recover. Access routes to restoration activity sites have been identified and will not create bank erosion or cause the removal of riparian trees. Staging areas at the activity sites will be set up on dry streambanks where there will be a minimum impact to existing vegetation. Disturbed or bare mineral soils resulting from work activities and subject to surface erosion will be seeded and straw mulched.

Excavators or backhoes may be used to excavate trenches or keyways in streambanks to anchor logs or boulder structures. Excavators are used to place materials, construct instream structures, and stabilize streambanks with boulders and logs. Willow cuttings are usually placed into the keyway trenches around the logs or boulders and then the trench is backfilled with cobble and native soil. This procedure anchors the structure into the streambank, accelerates the establishment of willows around the structure, and prevents the stream from scouring around the newly placed structure.

Project activities that are designed to stabilize streambanks or small stream-side landslides will armor and buttress the landslide or streambank using boulders, logs, root wads, and loose rock revetment. Revetments are designed with logs, root wads, and boulders that extend into the stream to provide instream cover and velocity breaks for salmonids. Smooth riprap, however, which accelerates water velocities along the streambank, is not permitted under this program. When practical, the streambank will be sloped back to a minimum 1.5 to 1 slope. A toe trench will be excavated at the toe of the landslide or eroding streambank. The excavated toe trench will be backfilled with

boulders at least three feet in diameter and will extend up to the high-water mark. Rock placed in the bottom of toe trench up to the high-water mark will be of a minimum size capable of withstanding normal high flows. Revetments will extend upstream and downstream of the unstable reach and will be keyed into the stable streambanks.

Runoff from above the landslide or eroding banks will be diverted away from the area being stabilized. The slide face will be revegetated using indigenous plants. Willow cuttings will be placed in the toe trenches. Browse protectors will be used on seedlings to prevent predation by browsing animals.

Upslope action items in this section will upgrade or decommission roads by implementing all or part of the following tasks: road ripping or decompaction; installing or maintaining rolling dips (critical dips); installing or maintaining waterbars and crossroad drains; replacing, maintaining, or cleaning culverts; outsloping roadbeds; revegetation of work sites; and excavating stream crossings with spoils stored on site or end-hauled. Sites which are expected to erode and deliver sediment to the stream are the only locations where work will be authorized under this category. Work is not authorized to improve aesthetic values only.

Removal of roads and skid trails will include retrieving unstable material sidecast during road construction and excavation of stream crossings and other watercourse fills. Stream crossings will be excavated to original width, depth, and slope to expose natural channel morphology and armor. Side slopes will generally match original contours above and below the road. Culverts that are replaced in fish bearing reaches of streams will be done in a manner that allows unimpeded upstream and downstream fish passage.

When fill material is placed on road benches for permanent storage, the road bench will be ripped or decompacted first. The fill will then be placed against the cutbank and shaped to blend with the surrounding topography that existed prior to road construction. Outsloping of the roadbed will occur as needed to reduce potential sediment delivery to the stream where there is insufficient fill available to recontour the site or where there is evidence that the overall long-term stability of the site does not justify a full recontour treatment. Where practical, fill material will be compacted to the top of the cut to reduce the potential for fill cut failure. Spoil material will be stored in stable locations where it will not erode. If stable spoils storage sites are not available within the project area, spoils will be hauled to a stable storage site outside of the project area. Areas chosen for this purpose will be devoid of tree and shrub vegetation. Upon completion of each site, woody debris will be scattered over the surface of the restored area as mulch.

Culvert replacement requires diverting stream flow around the project site and excavating the existing culvert with heavy equipment. If appropriate, grade control structures are incorporated into the project area to prevent excessive down-cutting of the stream. All work concerning culvert replacement will be consistent with current DFG and NOAA criteria concerning fish passage.

The proposed project is expected to result in 21,000 square feet and 1,250 linear feet of permanent impacts to the North Fork Mattole River channel and banks. The proposed project is expected to result in 3,500 square feet and 1,200 linear feet of permanent impacts to the channel and banks of tributaries to the North Fork Mattole River.

Compensatory mitigation is not required for the proposed project. The project has been designed to avoid and minimize adverse impacts to waters of the United States. Noncompensatory mitigation for this project includes revegetation of disturbed areas, as appropriate, and the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for heavy equipment use near waterways.

All work, except for revegetation activities, will take place during the summer and fall low flow period and shall be completed before the first significant seasonal rainfall. Planting of seedlings will take place after December 1 or when sufficient rainfall has occurred to ensure the best chance of survival of the seedlings. All habitat improvements will be done in accordance with techniques described in the Manual.

The applicant has applied (File Nos. 2010-00437, 2010-00438, 2010-00439) for authorization from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to perform the project pursuant to Clean Water Act, section 404. The applicant has also applied (File No. 1600-2011-0049-R1) for a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement from the California Department of Fish and Game. On June 10, 2011, Humboldt County, as lead agency for CEQA, submitted a draft Mitigated Negative Declaration (SCH No. 2011062035) for this project to the State Clearinghouse in order to comply with CEQA. The public review period for the draft environmental document ends on July 11, 2011. The Regional Water Board has considered the draft 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 Mattole River Technical Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) for sediment and temperature were established in 2002 by the United States Environmental Protection Agency in accordance with section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act, because the State of California determined that the water quality standards for the Mattole River are exceeded due to excessive sediment and temperature. Roads and bank erosion are identified as sources contributing to the sediment impairment. In addition, activities that impact the riparian zone and reduce riparian vegetation are identified as sources contributing to increased stream temperatures. The primary adverse impacts associated with excessive temperature and sediment in the Mattole River pertain to cold freshwater habitat, primarily anadromous salmonid habitat. Activities that will be authorized by the pending certification are designed to increase riparian vegetation and reduce sediment discharges from ranchlands. Authorized activities will also require implementation of BMPs for sediment and turbidity control, and implementation of impact avoidance measures as described above. Accordingly, the proposed project is consistent with and implements portions of the Mattole River TMDL.

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 activities including maps, design drawings, and a list of major action item titles, locations, and descriptions of work that will be implemented at each site. 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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