February 22, 2012

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

Humboldt County Department of Public Works – Dry Creek Bridge, Sediment Removal for Flow Capacity Maintenance
WDID No. 1B12003WNHU

Humboldt County

On January 11, 2012, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from the Humboldt County Department of Public Works (Applicant), requesting Federal Clean Water Act, section 401, Water Quality Certification for activities associated with removal of accumulated sediment (aggregate) from the Dry Creek stream channel to maintain flow capacity under an existing bridge crossing. The proposed project will cause disturbances to waters of the United States associated with Dry Creek in the Capetown Hydrologic Area No. 112.2.

The Applicant maintains a bridge crossing over Dry Creek on Mattole Road at Post Mile 25.03. County records indicate the original crossing consisted of two large culverts. The culverts were both blocked with sediment during winter storm events of 1981-82 and 1982-83 and resulted in the stream changing course with considerable damage to the roadway just north of the crossing. A single-lane railroad flatcar structure was installed to replace the culverts in 1984 as a means for allowing sediment to pass unrestricted beneath the roadway and into the nearby surf line of the Pacific Ocean. The single-lane bridge was later determined to be a public safety hazard and another flatcar was added to widen the bridge crossing. The existing crossing consists of a double-wide railroad flatcar structure approximately 18 feet wide and 60 feet long.

Dry Creek is a first order ephemeral stream that flows directly into the Pacific Ocean approximately 150-200 linear feet downstream of bridge crossing and Mattole Road. Dry Creek drains approximately 48.5 acres. The road and bridge are located on a narrow shelf of relatively flat land located between the shoreline to the west and the steep slopes to the east. The headwaters of the stream channel are located within a landslide area. All land within this small watershed is privately owned.

The proposed project involves periodic removal of accumulated sediment from the stream channel for the purpose of maintaining flow capacity under the bridge structure. Moderate to large storm events continue to transport large volumes of sediment and debris downstream, which results in a significant amount of deposition upstream, under, and downstream of the bridge. Periodic removal of sediment is necessary to protect Mattole Road and the bridge structure, and to assure roadway continuity for the local populace, emergency personnel, and general travel to the southwest portion of Humboldt County. Proposed activities would occur as often as annually and as necessary during emergency situations. The timeframe for completing annual project activities is typically 3-5 days. In the years following major storm and/or landslide events the project may require more time to complete.

Removal of the excess sediment from this channel has been conducted in the past to protect the bridge structure and provide a safe travel route. Past activities have been conducted under a Lake and/or Streambed Alteration Agreement issued by the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG). The proposed project will continue sediment removal activities consistent with the terms and conditions of the Lake and/or Streambed Alteration Agreement.

Sediment removal from the stream channel will only occur in late summer or fall when the channel is dry and the capillary fringe is at or below the finished elevation of the streambed within the excavated portion of the channel. Sediment removal will typically involve a bulldozer to push sediment and debris to central locations adjacent to the bridge where it can be removed with an excavator or front-end loader and placed in dump trucks. Sediment removed from the downstream portion of channel will be pushed in the upstream direction and will begin away from the surf line to avoid potential impacts to the local marine environment. The proposed area of potential excavation extends 650 linear feet upstream of the bridge and 150 linear feet downstream from the bridge. The average width of the final extraction area is approximately 12 feet. Streambed elevations under the bridge area are typically reduced by 2-8 vertical feet to provide 6-10 feet of vertical clearance between the finished streambed and the underside of the bridge deck. Heavy equipment will access and exit the channel from existing designated locations adjacent to the road and bridge.

Proposed activities will temporarily impact 0.22 acre and 800 linear feet of stream channel. Approximately 1,000 to 3,000 cubic yards of sediment will be removed during each maintenance event. Larger amounts may be removed following very large storm events. No riparian vegetation will be disturbed or removed during the project. Proposed activities may occur as often as annually.

Excavated sediment is typically hauled offsite to a temporary storage near the extremely mobile slide area known as Coyote Gulch. All suitable material will be used for roadway fill material in the Coyote Gulch slide area. Excess material may also be transported to a SMARA permitted Bear River processing and stockpiling area located on Prescott Drive near Capetown.

The Applicant has applied for authorization from the United States Army Corps of Engineers to perform the project under a 10-year Individual Permit, pursuant to Clean Water Act, section 404. The Applicant has obtained a Lake and/or Streambed Alteration Agreement (R1-04-0436) from DFG. Humboldt County determined that this project is categorically exempt from CEQA review (Section 15301 – Existing Facilities). Regional Water Board staff have determined that this project is categorically exempt from CEQA review (Section 15301 – Existing Facilities) and anticipate filing a Notice of Exemption for the proposed project. The proposed activities are expected to begin in 2012 and may occur as necessary to maintain flow capacity under the bridge.

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 photos. 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.