

January 18, 2013

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

Humboldt County DPW – Holmes/Larabee Road, Eel River Low-Water Crossing  
WDID No. 1B01145WNHU

Humboldt County

On December 10, 2012, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) received an application from the Humboldt County Public Works Department (applicant), requesting Federal Clean Water Act, section 401, Water Quality Certification for activities related to annual installation and removal of the Holmes-Larabee Low-Water Crossing, a temporary low-flow bridge over the Eel River. The primary purpose of the proposed project is to continue providing safe seasonal access to local residents, emergency personnel, and the general public traveling between the community of Larabee on the east side of the river, and the Avenue of the Giants/Highway 101 corridor along the west side of the river. A Water Quality Certification issued August 27, 2007, for similar bridge installation and removal activities expired on October 15, 2012. The proposed activities will cause disturbances to waters of the United States associated with the Eel River in the Scotia Hydrologic Subarea No. 111.12.

The Holmes-Larabee Low-Water Crossing is located at the crossing of Holmes Flat Road over the Eel River and immediately downstream of the confluence of Larabee Creek. The permanent portions of the existing bridge structure were originally constructed by the Pacific Lumber Company in 1937 to provide access to farms, ranches, residences, and timberland on the east side of the Eel River. Humboldt County acquired the bridge and associated right-of-way in 1959.

The river channel at the low-water crossing location is approximately 800-feet wide with an approximately 300-foot wide gravel bar located approximately mid-channel. During the winter months, high flows average 8,000 to 20,000 cubic feet per second (cfs) and submerge the gravel bars and permanent sections of the existing bridge. During the summer months the average flows are reduced to approximately 60 cfs and the permanent bridge structures and gravel bars are exposed.

Records indicate there was approximately 20 vertical feet of clearance between the bridge deck and riverbed at the time the bridge was constructed. After the 1955 and 1964 floods, severe aggradation of the streambed reduced the clearance to only a few feet and during some years the aggraded riverbed was higher than the bridge deck. Around 1974, an approximately 35-foot long section of the bridge was removed from approximately mid-span to create a gap that would allow rock, sediment, and debris to pass by the structure as it moves downstream during high flows. Removal of the bridge section has not significantly improved sediment transport past the bridge and the elevation of the gravel bar at the gap remained fairly constant since the bridge section was removed. At the

suggestion of the National Marine Fisheries Service and under authorization from the Army Corps of Engineers, in 2006 the applicant filled the gap with large boulders up to an elevation that is slightly lower than the bridge deck.

Proposed activities include annual cleanup of the driving surface on the bridge decks, restoration of the boulder filled gap between the permanent portions of the structure, and annual installation and removal of a 90-foot long by 12-foot wide temporary flatcar bridge crossing over a secondary flow channel feature located along the right (east) bank. The east end of the temporary flatcar bridge will be set on existing rock slope protection along the east bank. The west end of the flatcar will be placed on a temporary abutment that is installed and removed annually. Up to 150 cubic yards of rock riprap is placed in a "U" shape formation on the dry gravel bar to contain native river-run aggregate that is scraped from an approximately 2,025 square foot area of the adjacent dry gravel bar. The native aggregate material is pushed into the rock riprap formation to create a 15-foot wide approach ramp and temporary bridge abutment. After the west abutment is completed, the flatcar is pushed from the right-bank until it extends over the channel to near its balance/tipping point. A bulldozer staged on the west abutment is used to winch the bridge across the secondary flow channel and into position on the abutments.

Proposed activities also include restoring the driving surface over the bridge and boulder filled gap between the two permanent sections of the bridge structure. The gap area is typically refilled annually using native river-run aggregate, and graded to fill any voids and create a smooth driving surface. The aggregate material used to restore the driving surface through the gap area is derived from residual sediment that remains on the permanent bridge decks following recession of high flows and requires removal from the bridge deck to allow for safe passage. In the event that additional material is needed to fill voids in the gap, it will be derived from the same location as the material removed for construction of the west abutment of the flatcar bridge.

The primary low-flow channel under the western span of the bridge has been incising in recent years and currently there is approximately 5 vertical feet of clearance between the streambed and underside of the structure. In the past there have been times when the gap was filled with material excavated from under and alongside the permanent bridge structures. Removal of aggregate was conducted in this manner to improve hydraulic capacity under the bridge. If incision of the channel bed elevations continues to occur or remain near current levels, there is no foreseeable reason to reinitiate the excavation of sediment from under or alongside either of the permanent bridge structures; however, the existing clearance limits the size of large woody debris (LWD) that is able to pass under the structure.

Large root wads and trees that become lodged against the upstream side of the structure have the potential to damage or destroy the bridge, and impede flows and sediment migration past the structure. Proposed activities include relocation of any LWD that is not able to pass under the bridge. LWD that has the potential to damage the bridge, or impede flows or sediment, will be removed from the channel by staging a bulldozer on the dry

streambed and winching the LWD from its location. All LWD that is removed for this purpose will be relocated to the dry channel bank on the downstream side of the structure so it can return to the active channel during high flows.

The proposed project will temporarily impact approximately 2,550 square feet of streambed and 30 linear feet of the streambank annually. The proposed project is not anticipated to result in any permanent impacts to the stream channel and compensatory mitigation is not required. Noncompensatory mitigation includes the use of Best Management Practices (BMPs) for sediment and turbidity control and for operation of heavy equipment in a stream channel.

Implementation of the proposed project begins annually on or after June 1<sup>st</sup>. Removal of the temporary flatcar crossing will occur before flows reach 1,800 cfs at the Scotia gauge or by November 15<sup>th</sup>. Following annual removal of the flatcar, the rock riprap will be removed from the channel and the native aggregate material that was used to build the approach ramps will be returned to the borrow areas and graded to ensure that runoff will drain toward the river channel. Removal of the temporary crossing, mechanical reclamation of the gravel bar area, and winterization activities are typically completed in one day or less.

The applicant has received authorization from the United States Army Corps of Engineers to perform the project under an individual permit (Permit No. 268971N), pursuant to Clean Water Act, section 404. The applicant has previously obtained a Lake or Streambed Alteration Agreement for the project from the California Department of Fish and Game. Regional Water Board staff have determined that this project is categorically exempt from CEQA review (Class 1, Section 15301 – existing facilities) and anticipate filing a Notice of Exemption for this project.

The Lower Eel River Total Maximum Daily Loads (TMDL) for temperature and sediment was established in 2007 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 Lower Eel River are exceeded due to excessive temperature and sediment. 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 Lower Eel River pertain to cold freshwater habitat, primarily anadromous salmonid habitat. The proposed project does not include any impacts riparian vegetation and includes implementation of BMPs for sediment control and other impact avoidance measures as described above. Accordingly, the proposed project is consistent with and implements portions of the Lower Eel River TMDL.

The Eel River from the confluence with Outlet Creek to the mouth at the Pacific Ocean is designated as a recreational reach under both federal and California Wild and Scenic Rivers Acts. These acts require preservation of the river's free-flowing condition; anadromous

and resident fisheries; and outstanding geologic, wildlife, flora and fauna, historic and cultural, visual, recreational, and water quality values. Recreational segments are generally developed, with parallel roads, bridges, and structures. All activities normally associated with public lands are permitted subject to the protection of free flowing conditions and outstanding values. Proposed bridge maintenance, installation, and removal activities would not affect the free-flowing condition of the Eel River and would not affect the extraordinary values for which the segment was listed.

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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