



State of California – Natural Resources Agency

DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

Bay Delta Region

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April 29, 2020

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Subject: Letter of Support for a Permanent Crossing of the Russian River at Washington School Road, Cloverdale (Asti Crossing), Sonoma County

Dear Board of Supervisors:

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) is submitting this letter in support of the effort to replace temporary low-water crossings of the Russian River at Washington School Road, Cloverdale (Asti Crossing), with a permanent bridge.

The temporary bridges at the Asti Crossing are installed annually during the beginning of the summer season by Sonoma County Department of Transportation and Public Works and are removed in the fall when the fire season is deemed to be over. In Lake and Streambed Alteration (LSA) Agreement 1600-2009-0109-R3 issued in June 2009, and a subsequent LSA Agreement 1600-2018-0380-R3 issued in May 2019, CDFW evaluated the project impacts to aquatic and riparian habitat, California Endangered Species Act (CESA) state listed species, and federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) federally listed species. These activities associated with annual bridge installation include placement of gravel fill within the wetted channel, gravel bar skimming, dewatering and fish relocation, fish stranding, and bridge removal. Impacts to these species and critical habitat that could occur due to the proposed project include: hazing and relocation of salmonids, increases in turbidity, alteration in flow, change in floodplain composition, change in composition of channel materials, soil compaction, loss of bank stability, increase of bank erosion, disturbance of nesting birds and other wildlife, and loss of other aquatic organisms including prey for salmonids. CDFW's LSA Agreement includes best management practices and minimization and avoidance measures to reduce ecological impacts, yet all impacts may not be avoided. CDFW's LSA Agreement does prohibit the take of CESA state listed species.

Seeing as these impacts occur biannually in connection with the installation and removal of the temporary bridges at the Asti Crossing, a permanent bridge would prevent further recurring impacts once construction of the permanent bridge is completed. An appropriately designed

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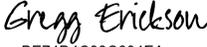
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bridge would eliminate the need to disturb the streambed, stockpile gravels, and reconfigure the stream channel. A bridge spanning across the Russian River may allow a more natural stream process, allowing the flow of the river to meander freely within the stream banks. The elimination of associated construction activities would eliminate disturbance of aquatic organisms and the habitat they rely upon. Therefore, CDFW supports the development of a project to construct a permanent bridge at the Asti Crossing site that would replace the temporary, seasonal low-water crossings currently in use. A project such as this would require California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review, an LSA Agreement, and potentially an Incidental Take Permit for CESA state listed species. The National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) should be consulted as well to determine what federal approvals are appropriate.

CDFW supports a permanent bridge and is committed to continue to work with the Sonoma County Department of Transportation and Public Works and other stakeholder groups on the project's design, planning and implementation phases to reduce recurring biannual impacts to the Russian River, and the state and federally listed salmonid species present, as well as provide safe and effective egress for residents in eastern Cloverdale in the event of wildfires. If you have any questions, please contact Mr. James Hansen, Environmental Scientist, at (707) 576-2869 or by email at James.Hansen@Wildlfe.ca.gov; or Mr. Ryan Watanabe, District Fisheries Biologist, at (707) 576-2815 or by email at Ryan.Watanabe@Wildlife.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:


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Gregg Erickson
Regional Manager
Bay Delta Region

cc: Alecia Van-Atta, National Marine Fisheries Service – alecia.vanatta@noaa.gov
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