

***Mendocino County Russian River Flood Control &  
Water Conservation Improvement District***

**STAFF REPORT**

To: Board of Trustees  
From: E. Salomone, General Manager  
Meeting: Monday, June 5, 2023  
RE: Agenda Item 5: Russian River Water Forum Update

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The Strategic Plan relevant priority is (1) **Security** through fair and reliable inter-basin diversions from the Eel River by engaging with stakeholders and consultants in the formation of the Russian River Water Forum; and (2) **Collaboration** through building trusted relationships with community partners for regional water security to build the Russian River Water Forum.

Background

The Water Forum seeks to identify water-supply resiliency solutions that respond to PG&E's planned decommissioning of the Potter Valley Project while protecting Tribal interests and supporting the stewardship of fisheries, water quality, and recreation in the Russian River and Eel River basins. More broadly, the Water Forum supports ongoing regional collaboration on water supply and watershed restoration issues in the Russian River and Eel River basins.

The Water Forum is supported by a Planning Group representing a cross-section of interests in Sonoma, Mendocino, Lake, and Humboldt Counties.

The Water Forum also serves as a venue for inclusive community engagement, outreach, and education on these topics. Visit the web page to learn more: <https://russianriverwaterforum.org/>

As a reminder, goals for the Planning Group include:

- Bring together interested parties in the Russian River and Eel River basins in a collaborative, solutions-oriented process.
- Improve understanding of water reliability uncertainties in the Russian River and Eel River basins.
- Problem-solve around the future of the Potter Valley Project, water supply resilience, and fisheries in both river basins.
- Identify funding sources to support water supply resiliency solutions and environment benefits in response to the planned decommissioning of the Potter Valley Project.

Discussion

The Planning Group held its first meeting on Wednesday, May 17, 2023. Meeting agenda, materials, and recording are now available on the Forum website. A comprehensive meeting summary and an executive summary are being prepared by the facilitator and may be available by the day of this Board meeting. Planning Group representatives will provide a report from the first Planning Group meeting.

Water Forum Working Groups are kicking off with technical briefings. A schedule of these and all other Forum meetings can be found on the Forum website.

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The Leadership Council and Steering Committee will be formed in the coming weeks and District representation needs to be considered.

Planning Group members and alternates represent an identified caucus. Each caucus is encouraged to hold meetings and discussions outside of the Planning Group meetings. The Mendocino Caucus has a meeting scheduled for Friday, June 2, 2023 and attendees will provide a report at the Board meeting. A Russian River Watershed all caucus meeting is being organized for June 6, 2023.

The following are Board discussion points to provide feedback and guidance to Forum representatives.

- A) Are your stakeholders generally supportive of a continued transfer of water from the Eel River to the Russian River?
- B) Are your stakeholders willing to financially participate in ensuring that the water transfer continues?
  - a. Should there be a charge for water for water supply? If so, would your stakeholders be willing to pay that charge?
  - b. Should there be a charge for flows that provide benefits only for fisheries and/or recreation? If so, would your stakeholders be willing to pay that charge?
  - c. Would your stakeholders be willing to contribute to funding for Eel River restoration if it resulted in the transfer of water continuing?
- C) What are your stakeholder's concerns regarding water rights?
- D) Who do you think should own the new operating entity? How much representation should your stakeholders have on this entity?
- E) Are your stakeholders generally comfortable with the two-basin solution objectives? (Below, including draft modifications suggestions by other caucus groups.) If not, which items give you heartburn?
  1. Minimize ~~or avoid~~ adverse impacts to water supply reliability, fisheries, water quality and recreation in the Russian River and Eel River basins;
  2. Improve fish passage and habitat on the Eel River, **while maintaining diversions necessary for fish habitat and passage on the Russian River**; ~~sufficient to support recovery of naturally reproducing, self-sustaining and harvestable native anadromous fish populations including migratory access upstream and downstream at current project dam locations;~~
  3. Reliance on best available science and engineering **and financial** analyses as the basis for evaluating options for restoration, water delivery, and **possible** hydroelectric generation pursuant to a ~~new~~ **non-FERC licensed project**;
  4. Collaboration on funding, **proportional to the benefits received**.
  5. Active participation of tribes and other **collaborators** ~~stakeholders~~ who are willing to support the other Shared Objectives;
  6. Economic welfare of both basins;
  7. ~~Continued hydroelectric generation; and~~
  8. Protecting tribal cultural, economic, and other interests in both the Eel and Russian River basins.

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Prepared and submitted to the Board of Trustees by: *Elizabeth Salomone, General Manager*