



US Army Corps
of Engineers®
San Francisco District



Sonoma County Water Agency PRESS RELEASE

For Immediate Release
May 2, 2012

CONTACT:

Brandon Beach
415.503.6958 (office)
415.420.9593 (cell)
Brandon.A.Beach@usace.army.mil
Ann DuBay
707.524.8378 (office)
707.322.8185 (cell)
ann.dubay@scwa.ca.gov

Opening of New “Nursery” for Endangered Russian River Salmon

(Geyserville, CA) Congressman Mike Thompson and other key federal, state and local officials today opened a new \$4 million building housing an innovative program to help bring coho salmon back to the Russian River watershed. Funded by American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds, the 25,000 square foot facility at the base of Warm Springs Dam will help sustain and improve the Russian River Coho Salmon Captive Broodstock Program.

The coho broodstock building is one of several ARRA-funded improvements constructed at Lake Sonoma. In total, more than \$13 million was spent on a variety of projects including dam safety improvements, the new broodstock building and the renovation of the Milt Brandt Visitors Center.

“The coho building, the visitor center renovations and other improvements at Lake Sonoma are prime examples of what recovery funds were intended to do. Jobs were created, key public investments were rehabilitated or improved and a species on the brink of extinction is being helped,” said First Congressional District Representative Mike Thompson, who spoke at the ribbon cutting.

“Lake Sonoma reduces the risk of flooding to the lower Russian River and is also a popular spot for boaters, campers and hikers. The money received through ARRA will improve the visitors’ experience at the visitor center, the steelhead hatchery and is a giant step forward for the coho program,” said Lt. Col. Torrey A. DiCiro, District Commander, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, San Francisco District. USACE operates Warm Spring Dam and Lake Sonoma. DiCiro spoke at the May 2 ribbon cutting.

“The Sonoma County Water Agency is proud to be a partner in this program, which is critical to ensuring that our children and grandchildren will have an opportunity to see these amazing fish that represent mankind’s stewardship of our water bodies,” said Sonoma County Water Agency Chairwoman Shirlee Zane.

“The coho broodstock program is one critical component of a plan to help recover the species and to secure water supply for 600,000 people in Sonoma and Marin counties,” said Sonoma County Water Agency Director Mike McGuire, who represents the district where Lake Sonoma is located. “We are thrilled that this program has a permanent home in Northern Sonoma County.”

“Many of the landowners in my west Sonoma County district have restored habitat on historic coho streams to make sure the young fish released through this program have a better chance of success. We are dedicated to this program and its goals,” said Sonoma County Water Agency Director Efren Carrillo.

“The Water Agency has been actively seeking state, federal and grant funding for habitat enhancement projects that will bring coho back to the Russian River watershed, while keeping water rates reasonable,” said Sonoma County Water Agency Director David Rabbitt.

“The success of the broodstock program is the cornerstone of coho recovery in the Russian River watershed. National Marine Fisheries Service has been a strong proponent of this program since its inception and we are extremely pleased with the new building,” said Rodney McInnis, Regional Administrator of NOAA Fisheries Southwest Region.

“As well as their federal listing, the Central California Coast coho are on California’s endangered species list. These fish are a key indicator of the overall health of the watershed, and this broodstock program is sustaining the coho population while creek habitats are being restored and fish passage blockages are being removed. This innovative program is a beacon of hope for the recovery of this important species,” said California Department of Fish and Game’s Bay-Delta Acting Regional Manager, Scott Wilson.

“As one of the organizations monitoring the success of Russian River coho recovery, University of California Cooperative Extension, California Sea Grant, and hundreds of cooperating landowners are thrilled that the coho broodstock program now has a permanent, protected building to conduct its groundbreaking work,” said Paul Olin, Aquaculture Specialist, California Sea Grant.

About the Broodstock Program

The broodstock program was created in 2001, when coho in the Russian River were teetering on the brink of extinction. Remaining Russian River coho were captured by California Department of Fish and Game biologists, in coordination with biologists from other agencies, and brought to the Don Clausen Fish Hatchery at Lake Sonoma, where they were spawned based on a genetic matrix developed to mimic natural spawning. This initial effort to save the last remaining Russian River coho led to the formation of a multi-agency broodstock program. Partnership agencies include the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, National Marine Fisheries Service, California Department of Fish and Game, University of California Cooperative Extension, and Sonoma County Water Agency.

Unlike traditional hatcheries, the broodstock program releases young coho into their historic spawning grounds where, as adults, they return to spawn. The goal of the program is to recover the self-sustaining wild population.

In 2004, more than 6,000 young coho raised from the program were released into three tributaries of the Russian River. The program is currently releasing 172,000 juvenile coho annually into 19 tributaries of the Russian River. In winter 2011-2012, 185 adult coho released as juveniles were counted migrating upstream in the Russian River. Other adult

coho were found in tributaries. Until now, the program has been located outdoors in net-covered tanks that have been exposed to the elements and predators. The new building provides necessary light and air, while better protecting the tanks and allowing for a higher degree of quality control and fish health. The new structure is also designed to allow for expansion of the broodstock program.

###