



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE
West Coast Region
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Sandra.forrester@noaa.gov
Date: September 23, 2015
Re: Southern Flow Corridor Bottomlands Restoration Project, Tillamook County, Oregon
(HUC 171002030801 and 171002030406)
PROJECTS Restoration Opinion: Approved

The NMFS received the NOAA Restoration Center's PROJECTS notification and approval request on September 11, 2015 for the Southern Flow Corridor restoration project, Tillamook County, Oregon. As a large scale tidal wetlands and floodplain reconnection project (project category #5 in PROJECTS) with a flood gate removal and installation component (project category #18), the proposed action requires fish passage approval, Restoration Review Team (RRT) review, and overall NMFS' approval under the Programmatic Restoration Opinion for Joint Ecosystem Conservation by the Services (PROJECTS) dated December 3, 2013. Received with the project notification and approval request were the following:

1. Northwest Hydraulic Consultants (NHC) Southern Flow Corridor Preliminary Design – June 4, 2015
2. NHC Southern Flow Corridor, Permit Set Plan Notes, 65% Design Submittal – June 4, 2015
3. NOAA RC Southern Flow Corridor RiverRAT responses provided by Megan Hilgart – August 7, 2015
4. ODFW Southern Flow Corridor Fish Salvage Plan – September 8, 2015
5. Southern Flow Corridor Landowner Preferred Alternative Tide/Flood Gate Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan – September 9, 2015
6. Southern Flow Corridor Project Effectiveness Monitoring Plan – January 7, 2014
7. ODFW in-water work window variance approval from Chris Knutsen – September 9, 2015
8. NOAA Fish passage approval from Aaron Beavers, Fish Passage Engineer – September 10, 2015

The primary intent of the Southern Flow Corridor restoration project is to remove, to the maximum extent possible, artificial impediments to flood flows in the lower Wilson and Trask River floodplains for flood hazard mitigation and habitat restoration. The project will accomplish this by removing existing levees and fill material along the edges of the sloughs and rivers that border the project area. New setback levees are required to protect adjacent private lands. Areas outside the setback levees will be restored to tidal wetlands.

The RRT convened on September 8, 2015 to review the proposed action that, when complete, will remove 6.9 miles of levees and modify an additional 2.8 miles of levees, allowing floodwaters to flow across the project area and wetlands restored in the areas re-opened to tidal influences. Overall, the project includes 8 major project elements: 1) Channel construction, 2) tidal channel restoration, 3) wetland restoration, 4) levee/road removal, 5) levee modification, 6)

new levees, 7) flow easement, and 8) drainage ditch fill. All these elements are planned for implementation during 2016.

The RRT had much praise for this large scale channel reconnection project – recognizing it as having tremendous potential to restore hundreds of acres of tidal wetlands through floodplain connectivity, increasing estuarine habitat for ESA-listed OC coho salmon. The RRT also identified the Southern Flow Corridor as a low risk project with high habitat returns, and commended the extensive coordination, design and project review between the project supporters to bring forward a truly valuable project. Project supporters include: FEMA, NOAA Restoration Center, US Fish and Wildlife Service, the Port of Tillamook Bay, Oregon Solutions, Tillamook County, NHC, HBH Consulting Engineers, the Institute for Applied Ecology, Estuary Technical Group, and the Confederated Tribes of the Siletz Indians. The RRT fully supported this project and recommended coverage under the PROJECTS opinion, expecting that Megan Hilgart with NOAA RC will remain involved in the updates of the Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan following project implementation.

In order to complete the project when the land is driest, the applicant requested an in-water work window exception during summer months, July 1st -October 1st. Because this timeframe will allow all major construction activities to take place within one season, and will limit amount of erosion and sedimentation impacts, ODFW's North Coast district fish biologist, Chris Knutsen, supports this request. The NMFS also approves this request, recognizing that (1) the project will not have effects to OC coho salmon and their designated critical habitat outside the scope analyzed in the PROJECTS opinion; (2) there is no change in the type or nature of in-water work to be completed; (3) the proximity of OC coho salmon and designated critical habitat and their use of the action area is not expected to be different than those originally analyzed.

Because of the tide/flood gate element of the proposed action, NMFS fish passage approval was required for the proposed action. With his approval, Aaron Beavers offered his justification, *'Tide gate designs for the project function exclusively as egress corridors for fish entrained behind adjacent levees due to high storm flows, to re-join with tidal waters. Project tide gates do not restrict upstream access to fish habitat'*.

The NMFS has reviewed the information, and I approve the Southern Flow Corridor restoration project as consistent with PROJECTS. My point of contact for this response is Annie Birnie, 503-230-5407.

Reinitiation of consultation on this action is required and shall be requested by the Forest Service where discretionary Federal involvement or control over the action has been retained or is authorized by law and (a) the amount or extent of taking specified in the Incidental Take Statement is exceeded, (b) new information reveals effects of the action that may affect listed species or critical habitat in a manner or to an extent not previously considered, (c) the identified action is subsequently modified in a manner that has an effect to the listed species or critical habitat that was not considered in the biological opinion, or (d) a new species is listed or critical habitat designated that may be affected by the identified action (50 CFR 402.16).

/s/

Kenneth W. Phippen

Oregon Coast Branch Chief

