



## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Sonoma's Eel River Diversion Plan Risks Extinction of Humboldt Fisheries *Plan Would Delay PG&E Removal of Eel River Dams***

*Eureka, CA* – Yesterday, a group led by Sonoma Water proposed a new plan to maintain diversion of Eel River Water to the Russian. Humboldt County fishermen, Tribes, and conservation groups were blindsided by the proposal. “The only reason to leave out conservation organizations, fishermen, and Humboldt County interests would be to advance a plan designed to keep the fish killing Eel River dams in place as long as possible,” said Alicia Hamman, Executive Director of Friends of the Eel River. “The fish have no time to wait.”

For well over a century, Russian River water users have benefited from dams that divert precious Eel River water to the Russian River Valley. This Potter Valley Project (PVP) no longer generates power, or profit, for PG&E.

After PG&E abandoned its attempt to relicense the project with FERC in 2019, a group of interested parties formed the Two Basin Partnership to relicense the project themselves, but conceded failure in 2022 due to a lack of funding. Next, PG&E attempted to ‘orphan’ the project, effectively trying to give it away. No entity stepped forward to ‘adopt’ it. Now, with PG&E poised to surrender the license and decommission the project, Sonoma Water is leading efforts to advance a last-minute scheme that could derail or delay dam removal.

Eel River steelhead only return to the Van Arsdale Fish Station by the dozens in recent years; Chinook salmon don't fare much better. Both runs are listed as Threatened under the federal Endangered Species Act, but FOER's Conservation Director Scott Greacen says that designation fails to reflect the peril Eel River runs face. “PG&E reported 145 adult steelhead climbing the ladder over Cape Horn dam this year. We are nearing an extinction event on the Eel River.”

While Sonoma's Diversion Plan describes possible alternatives for removing Scott Dam and Cape Horn Dam, the document provides no certainty other than more negotiation. “Sonoma's proposal looks like a plan for years of delay while they figure out what their plan is. My family's boat was not able to fish salmon for a living again this year. Slowing down a major salmon restoration project at the last minute when they've had decades to plan for this moment is

unacceptable,” said Vivian Helliwell who, with her husband, owns a commercial fishing boat out of Humboldt Bay.

Already, several attempts to take over the project and operate it in a way to meet the needs of fish and Russian water users have failed. The dams are over a century old and pose significant seismic risks. The diversion tunnels are largely constructed of century old redwood. Juvenile fish face daunting obstacles and predators on their downstream passage. These factors make owning and operating the project very expensive and their environmental harms difficult to mitigate.

“While we will listen to any creative solutions to meet the region’s water needs, we will oppose any proposal to maintain a diversion that delays dam removal or fails to meet the needs of Eel River fisheries.” said Hamann.

Noting that much of the diverted Eel River water fuels an ever expanding wine industry, Hamann adds, “At the end of the day, I’d rather eat fresh salmon than drink cheap wine.”

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