Middle Fork Nooksack River Fish Passage Project Update #36

Sept 2020

OVERVIEW

The City of Bellingham (City), American Rivers (AR), and supporting partners are implementing a multi-benefit project on the Middle Fork Nooksack River. The project provides fish passage to 16 miles of critical habitat for three ESA-listed Puget Sound threatened anadromous fish species by removing the diversion dam while improving the reliability of the City's water supply. The project is now in the construction phase, with the Notice to Proceed issued on January 2, 2020. In-water work began June 1, 2020 and is scheduled for completion in October 2020. Dam removal and channel restoration work was completed in September 2020.

THIS MONTH

- ***Construction Activities***
  - The final small portion of channel restoration work in the regraded dam removal area is complete. The river is flowing through the historical channel where the dam previously stood, and fish can now access an additional 16 – 26 miles of critical habitat.
  - The fish bypass outfall was constructed and completed, and the associated cofferdam required for this work was removed from the channel.
  - In-water and upland work continues for the water diversion facility, including diversion intake, pipeline extension, and fish screen facility.
  - Differing site conditions from those anticipated in design studies and work area dewatering issues have created delays in completion of in-water work at the diversion intake area.
  - An extension of the in-water work window to October 31, 2020 was granted by regulatory agencies for in-water work at the intake structure. Walsh Construction developed a submittal for construction of a secondary intake seal cofferdam capable of withstanding the higher flow events associated with autumn river flows.
  - Additional segments of water supply pipe were placed and backfilled between the new water diversion intake and the future location of the fish screen facility.
  - The first high flow event of the fall occurred on September 23 with a peak of ~4430 cfs.
    - The restored channel responded as expected, adjusting and rearranging substrate. Multiple fish passage routes exist, and we expect the river to continue adjusting in response to high flow events.
    - Walsh Construction filed an ERTS with Ecology to report flooding of the upland work area and associated erosion issues.
  - Whatcom Environmental Services completed a memo documenting the test results, removal, and regulated disposal of a small area of petroleum-contaminated sediment discovered buried at original river grade behind the dam during channel restoration work. The source of the contamination is thought to have originated from construction of the dam and tunnel in the late 1950's.

- ***Outreach***
  - The project received ample media coverage highlighting dam demolition. A list of links to news articles is available here.
  - Photos documenting construction progress were uploaded to the project webpage.
- ***Funding***
  - The City was notified of a pending grant award related to Pacific Salmon Treaty (PST) funding of ~$2M awarded by NOAA through RCO. These funds will be distributed to the City as an amendment to the current RCO Grant for the project, pending City Council approval in October. This key funding completes the anticipated external funding for the project, and we thank the project partners that provided support and assistance in securing this funding.

- ***Monitoring***
  - Topographic as-built surveys were completed to document the constructed condition of the restored channel.

OCTOBER 2020

- The first of several physical effectiveness monitoring surveys to be performed over a 10-year period will be conducted utilizing Terrestrial Laser Scanning (TLS) and Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (UAV) overflights.
- American Rivers and Nooksack Tribe staff will meet to discuss biological effectiveness monitoring.
- Work on the municipal diversion system intake, water supply pipeline, and fish screen structure will continue throughout October.