SWEETWATER SPRINGS WATER DISTRICT

TO: Board of Directors **AGENDA NO. V-E**

FROM: Steve Mack, General Manager

Meeting Date : August 3, 2017

SUBJECT: THE SONOMA COUNTY WATER AGENCY FISH FLOW PROJECT DEIR AND DISTRICT WATER RIGHTS

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Receive a presentation from General Manager Steve Mack regarding the Sonoma County Water Agency draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) on its proposal to change Water Rights Decision 1610 and how that could affect District Water Rights and its ability to provide water supply, and provide direction to staff.

FISCAL IMPACT: none

DISCUSSION:

In mid August 2016, the Sonoma County Water Agency (SCWA) released the long-awaited draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) on the Fish Habitat Flows and Water Rights Project, also called the Fish Flow Project. This DEIR is the environmental document for their proposed changes to Water Rights Decision 1610 which governs how releases from the dams that regulate the Russian River are made and sets a range of required minimum flows at various points in the River. It appears that SCWA wants to achieve two major actions from the proposed changes to Decision 1610:

- Make permanent the flow changes ordered by the Biological Opinion for endangered salmonid species in the Russian River (BO), and

- Change the Decision 1610 hydrologic index so that 1) it is based on Lake Mendocino instead of Lake Pillsbury, has more (from 3 currently to 5) conditions on which to base releases, 3) takes account of the reduced inflows from the Eel River, and 4) has more flexibility seasonally, going from seasonal decisions to monthly decisions.

At the March 2, 2017 meeting the Board approved a comment letter on the DEIR and that was sent on March 6, 2017. The District's principal concern is that the DEIR ignores water rights, specifically the District's water rights which SCWA staff have stated they believe do not allow the District to pump water during Russian River critical dry periods as defined by the D1610 Hydrologic Index which the Project proposes to change. The District does not agree with that position and this Project is an excellent opportunity to fix this issue. At a minimum the DEIR should have a full discussion of the issue, which it ignores.

The only news regarding the Fish Flow Project that I am aware of is the resignation of the SCWA General Manager Grant Davis to take a job (lesser in my opinion) with the State of California. We should use this opportunity to urge our Sonoma County elected officials to select a successor who includes the West County issues in the SCWA agenda and has a commitment to fix the Fish Flow Project.

The solution to our concerns are still best done in county. The EIR and water rights petitions processes will take a long time. We should continue to take opportunities to talk to our elected officials to get our concerns addressed.