



Laguna future

Report on watershed needs to become a plan of action

Editorial February 9, 2007

The Laguna de Santa Rosa spans 254 square miles, from Cotati to Forestville. It is home to mountain lions, bobcats, river otters and more than 200 species of birds. But despite being Sonoma County's richest and most biologically diverse area, a comprehensive plan for its preservation and restoration did not exist - until now.

On Tuesday, the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors put its stamp of approval on a wetland management plan for the Laguna that has been two years in the making and is worthy of a broad audience. (To see a copy, go to www.lagunadesantarosa.org)

In addition to providing critical wildlife habitat, the Laguna serves the vital function of being a catch basin during Russian River flooding. But for many local residents, it remains something of an enigma, a largely inaccessible natural resource known primarily in reference to battles over Ludwigia and California Tiger Salamanders. This is why this plan for the Laguna's future is so vital.

The watershed needs to be restored. It needs to be preserved, and it needs to be made more accessible so it can be appreciated by this and future generations.

The Laguna Learning Center, now under construction, will serve as a hub for educating the public about the history of the Laguna and its environmental complexity. A trail system in the planning stages also will go far in improving access.

The plan calls for splitting the Laguna into 18 mini-ecosystems, with a restoration and preservation plan to be developed for each one. Laguna Foundation officials are expected to seek county funding to follow through with each plan. But the report also will be used as leverage for federal, state and private funding to help with restoration and access efforts.

Kudos to the Laguna Foundation for putting together this blueprint for the future of this vital watershed. The challenge before everyone will be to ensure this document becomes a plan of action - and not a means for gathering dust on a shelf somewhere.