

SONOMA COAST

October 27, 2000
The Press Democrat

\$580,000 for restoration OK'd

Laguna de Santa Rosa, other projects get boost from state conservancy

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THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

The state Coastal Conservancy on Thursday approved \$580,000 for restoration of the Laguna de Santa Rosa and three other Sonoma County projects.

State money will be combined with local funding, according to state Sen. Wes Chesbro, a nonvoting member of the conservancy board.

In addition to the laguna, money was set aside to upgrade Monte Rio's septic system, expand a preserve on the Estero Americano and study potential land acquisitions on the northern Sonoma County coast.

"We've had a lot of success in moving acquisitions on the Mendocino Coast in the last two years

and it's time that we did more in Sonoma County," Chesbro said.

The conservancy, a state agency, typically buys natural habitat along the coast.

The largest grant approved Thursday is \$350,000 to upgrade the septic system in Monte Rio. Chesbro, D-Arcata, said the project has implications for water quality in the region.

Also approved was funding for the Russian River/North Coast Parcel Analysis, a study of approximately 100 square miles from Duncans Mills and Jenner to Mendocino County aimed at identifying key properties to preserve important habitat.

"There is a lot of incredible biodiversity up there to protect," said Aimee Carroll, project manager with the Sonoma Land Trust, which will conduct the study. "The point of the study is to really see what's out there and to see what the possibilities are."

The conservancy is contributing \$50,000 for the study, to be matched

by \$18,000 from the Sonoma Land Trust, as well as private donations.

The conservancy and land trust also are collaborating with the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation on a plan to purchase land to protect the wetland near Sebastopol from encroaching development.

The laguna already has been greatly diminished but still provides habitat for rare and endangered species, said Wendy Eliot, land trust project director. The conservancy approved \$80,000 to prepare a plan to protect and restore as much of the area as possible.

The state agency also is contributing \$100,000 to add 40 acres to an 87-acre preserve on the Estero Americano near Valley Ford. An additional \$200,000 in county open space district funds will go toward the deal, providing land for public parking and trails for uses such as bird-watching, Chesbro said.

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