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Laguna park plans progress

A second meeting of the informal committee developing plans for a park incorporating lands along the Laguna de Santa Rosa concluded with a two-step plan of action, and hopes that some wetland restoration measures could be underway by mid 1989.

Sebastopol City Councilman Nick Stewart, who chaired the session Monday night, expressed pleasure at the progress and said he expects to see such easily implemented measures as installing fences around grazing lands and tree planting commencing "in six months or a year."

A key factor in the prospects for quick action is the substantial portion of the wetlands property that is already in public ownership, through Santa Rosa, Sebastopol, Fish & Game, Sonoma County and other agencies.

Consequently, the group will not have to focus extensively on land acquisition, although some work in that area is still anticipated. Joan Vilms of the Sonoma Land Trust expressed optimism that several of the private landowners along the Laguna will be willing to work with the park planning efforts, possibly through such mechanisms as conservation easements.

The immediate need, the group agreed, is the preparation of a set of land use objectives and a management plan based on them. Because the Laguna includes a variety of uses, many with conflicting needs, that plan will have to be as diverse as the uses, with different priorities applied to neighboring parcels.

"You have to manage some areas for wildlife and other areas for wastewater," said Fish & Game Biologist Bill Cox. He suggested that the planning process attempt to define "areas of flexibility" that could serve as buffers between the conflicting uses.

Among the other uses that must be accommodated are bird and animal habitat, flood control, a few areas of urban development, and public recreation, ranging from the softball fields in Sebastopol's Laguna Youth Park to hiking and hunting. This raised another important question, according to Miles Ferris, Santa Rosa's Public Utilities Director: "What level of public access can we allow before we have damage to the environment?"

To begin developing answers to that and other key planning questions, the committee will contact all of the agencies and individuals owning lands along the Laguna channel, request input and seek their "buy-in" to the wetlands park concept. Stewart volunteered to write letters, which will be accompanied by maps of the area showing public ownership, and a draft list of management practice ideas.

In addition, a list of goals that has been developed by the Laguna task force appointed by Congressman Doug Bosco will be included as a preliminary set of objectives for the project. That list, considered an "action plan" by the task force,

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