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# Laguna called flood safety valve

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SEBASTOPOL — Raising the spectre of Guerneville under water 17 feet deeper than the 1986 flood, a Sebastopol group is calling for action at all levels of government to protect the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

The Laguna Advisory Committee has released a report asking the Sebastopol City Council to spearhead regional efforts to prevent development and preserve wetlands along the 14-mile lagoon that stretches from Cotati to the Russian River.

"The goal of the report is to change the perception of how important that waterway is," said committee member Bill Haigwood.

"People aren't aware that it's a safety valve," with the marsh areas collecting flood water that otherwise would flow down the river, he said. "If the Laguna is all filled and

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we have another flood, Guerneville could be wiped off the map."

The committee reached its conclusions about the flood control value of the waterway after interviews with county water officials. In 1964, officials calculated the laguna reduced the flood crest at Guerneville by 14 feet and in 1986 by 17 feet, Haigwood said.

According to the committee's report, 85 to 90 percent of the original forest along the channel has been eliminated since county development boomed in the 1940s. It is still a practice for developers and industries to deposit fill along the lagoon, the report states.

"I think we're up against a timeline," said Haigwood.

Committee members are particularly concerned about new Santa Rosa housing developments in the Fulton area that required fill in areas annually flooded by the waterway, he said.

The report recommends that the city designate staff to monitor the lagoon for illegal fill, pollution or other threats to the lagoon environment. The committee also wants Sebastopol to initiate a countywide laguna land use management plan and ordinance regulating develop-

ment along the wetlands.

The City Council will discuss the report at its regular meeting, 7 p.m. today in the library's Forum Room.

Some committee members undertook the study a year ago because of their concern for the wildlife habitat.

Landscape designer Steve French, who lives near the lagoon, said he wants to see the great blue herons and 235 other species of birds survive. The report states there are some 200 varieties of plants, 20 species of mammals and 20 species of fish that also thrive in the lagoon environment.

The Laguna de Santa Rosa is the second largest freshwater marsh in Northern California, second only to Clear Lake Marsh, the report says.

Among the recommendations is for the city to build a trail along the waterway with information posted at a small interpretive center.

Ultimately, said Haigwood, "there's the potential for a fine park there."

Committee members will urge the city to annex and buy parcels along the waterway and to apply to state and federal park agencies for funding, he added.

They also want the different state and government agencies with jurisdiction over waterways to receive notice that Sebastopol is looking for their help in protecting the resource.