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PRESS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Friends of the Laguna and some members of the Laguna Study Committee submit this Press Release on behalf of the Laguna de Santa Rosa, its protection and enhancement. It is directed to the City Council of Sebastopol and the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors.

We would like to encourage the Sebastopol City Council to approve the Laguna Advisory Committee Report as originally submitted by the Laguna Committee including the clarifications on areas appropriate for "No Net Fill" and areas appropriate for no development below 76' feet submitted by Bruce Aspinall on March 18th.

Once the City Council has approved the report we ask they send it on, with their support, to the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors.

The Laguna Advisory Committee urges the Sebastopol City Council to create policy that would protect and preserve the lands bordering the Laguna De Santa Rosa, below the 76 ft. M.S.L. elevation. This might take the form of expanding the existing Laguna Youth Park to create a Laguna Linear Park, as provided for in the Sebastopol City General Plan. Once lands have been targeted to become additions to the Laguna Linear Park, steps may be taken to restore the riparian corridor and wildlife habitat. In order to accomplish these goals, land must be acquired and land use policies must be revised.

Friends of the Laguna request the Sebastopol City Council coordinate efforts with the Sonoma County Supervisors in voicing concerns about policies regulating effluent discharge from the regional waste treatment plants. Along with this, the policies

regulating effluent releases should be based on weather patterns and levels of water flow. River water flow levels should be constantly monitored and releases prohibited when flow measurements drop below 1000 C.F.S.

Recently, the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers revised the map of the Laguna De Santa Rosa Floodplain. It is now called the Laguna De Santa Rosa Floodway. This subtle change in wording has a large impact. With the change in status from floodplain to floodway, there will be no development allowed below 75 ft. M.S.L. elevation. The concern over "no net fill" is thus rendered irrelevant by this change in status.

As with the Sebastopol City Council, we ask the Sonoma County Supervisors to accept and promote the Laguna Advisory Committee Report. The suggestions put forward in the Advisory Report might be implemented by the Sonoma County Supervisors via appropriate policy.

Ultimately, we would like to see the preservation of the Laguna De Santa Rosa, the second largest freshwater marshland in northern California. Our laguna is an asset. As a protected wildlife habitat it provides us a local connection to nature, a tranquil recreational area, and a living example of an ecosystem. This aspect can be developed within our local school system to teach environmental issues. We could lose this unique area forever unless we carefully regulate and monitor uses and development that threaten it.

This press conference has been called in part as an attempt to dispel some of the misunderstanding and misinterpretations that have arisen over certain aspects of the Laguna Report.

First of all, there has been misunderstanding over what the Laguna is in the physical sense. It is not just the ten mile channel extending from Cotati to its confluence with the Russian River. It is a 7,000 acre flood basin, capable of storing 80,000 acre-feet of water at the 100 year flood level. Aside from the channel itself, other features include a riparian forest zone,

vernal pools, marshes and extensive lowland grasslands. All in all the area forms a unique fresh-water marsh ecosystem, rare in California, and it is the second largest fresh-water marsh in northern California, second only to the Clear Lake marsh.

In meetings with the Planning Commission to review the Laguna Report, the greatest share of the time has been spent on the "fill" recommendation and their impact on on-going and proposed development in Sebastopol's city limits and sphere of influence. Other recommendations of equal importance have been largely over-looked, i.e., such as those concerning the provision of an adequate water supply and restoring the riparian forest.

To clarify the fill recommendation, it is the position of the Committee that the "No Net Fill" approach be applied in partly developed areas such as along Morris Street and Johnson Street. In natural or undeveloped areas along the Laguna, no development be permitted below the 76' contour. Unrestricted use of the No Net Fill concept can easily alter or damage fragile environmental niches such as vernal pools or small marshes as well as the endangered riparian forest.

We now have two more flagrant violations of the No Net Fill regulations under County Ordinance and Federal Law. These are on Willow Creek Road and Sanford Road. In these two situations thousands of cubic yards of fill have been brought in from outside the Basin. Neither of the sites is in Sebastopol's sphere of influence, but the City may well feel the impact some wet winter.

Sebastopol, of all the communities on the Laguna, has the largest stake of any incorporated city in not only flood control but also in the recreational wildlife habitat of the Laguna. It therefore behooves the city to take a position carrying forward their leadership in appointing an advisory committee.

This means exercising their authority responsibly where the City has legal control. But, it also means participating in County, State and Federal actions and exercising its legitimate

role. It also means showing moral leadership when and where the opportunity arises.

If political considerations are to be the overriding factor in handling the recommendations of the Laguna Report, then Sebastopol should not presume to take the lead in a Laguna wide program of protection and restoration which was the goal of the recommendations set forth in the Laguna Report.

It is evident from actions to date by the City Planning Commission and Planning Staff that Sebastopol does not wish to assume a lead role in protecting and enhancing the resources of the Laguna.

The popular Laguna Slide Show, assembled by Peter Vilms and Associates developed the theme: "The Laguna de Santa Rosa - A Treasure in Peril."

To further stress this theme, we present the following points:

1. How is the Laguna in peril?
 - a. Physical invasion of the flood plain, both legal and illegal.
 - b. Habitat destruction, some legal, some illegal.
 - c. Pollution: much of it legal, because of regulations under which Santa Rosa's wastewater treatment plant operates.
2. Why is the Laguna in peril?
 - a. Lack of a central coordinating agency. A dozen or more have a measure of authority, but no agency has the final word.
 - b. The County General Plan is of little help. Sonoma County does not have a Riparian Vegetation Ordinance, nor does the Revised General Plan provide for one.
 - c. The one city that showed interest in leadership is now abandoning that position in favor of token approval of certain measures and those only if funded by special grants.

- 3. When is the Laguna in peril?
Right now -- this very moment!
- 4. Who can do something?
 - a. The City of Sebastopol.
 - b. The County of Sonoma thru the Board of Supervisors and their land-use agencies, principally the County Water Agency, the County Health Department and the Department of Public Works.
 - c. The State of California thru its land-use and related agencies: the Water Quality Control Board, the State Water Rights Division, the Department of Fish and Game, and the State Department of Health.
 - d. The United States Government thru: 1) The Corps of Engineers/U.S. Army; 2) the Environmental Protection Agency; and 3) the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service/Department of the Interior.
Should local agencies not take action in a reasonable time, one or more of the Federal agencies may take over!
- 5. What do we want the City to do?
 - a. Adopt of the report.
 - b. Push for repeal on modification of rules under which Santa Rosa discharges treated effluent to the Russian River.
 - c. Firm up regulations as to where and how excavation/fill is to be done. No vernal pools scraped up to make poor quality fill for Palm Terrace project.
 - d. Educate its staff to its responsibilities in Laguna matters.
 - e. Push the County and the Federal government to get going if we do not it will be all taken out of our hand.