

88.124.2

West Sonoma County Paper, Dec 1-7, 1988

The depressing state of S'pol's creeks

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BY JERRY WEIL

"I watched Calder Creek die," said long-time Sebastopol resident Helen Libeu.

The history of Sebastopol's major creeks is one of trashing, polluting, and paving over.

An attempt to grapple with this problem is being made by councilman Richard Nichols, who submitted some guidelines and suggestions for drafting wetlands and riparian ordinances at Tuesday evening's Sebastopol City Council meeting.

Riparian zones are heavily vegetated strips along stream banks that provide cooling for fish and shelter for wildlife. Nichols is primarily concerned with the four

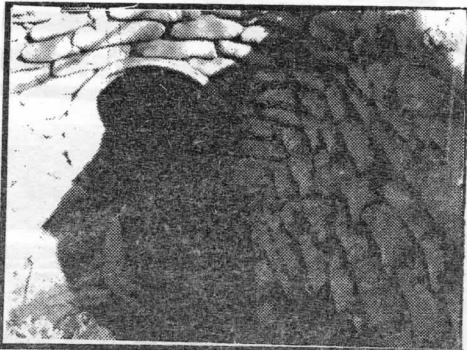


Photo by Jerry Weil

ZIMPHER CREEK— disappears into the city's nether world.

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CREEKS

FROM FRONT PAGE

major Sebastopol waterways: 88.124.2

- Calder Creek. Contained in a stone culvert, it vanishes under High Street in the downtown area.
- Zimpher Creek meanders through back yards, then feeds into an underground pipe on Murphy Avenue in the town's residential center.
- Laguna de Santa Rosa, a large, complex, and highly damaged wetlands that borders the eastern side of the city.
- Atascadero Creek forms a portion of the city's western boundary, passing through farms and orchards.

Complex ecological systems such as Laguna de Santa Rosa and Atascadero Creek may require system-wide restoration efforts, while smaller streams like Calder and Zimpher Creeks can be helped by establishing setback areas along the routes of the streams, which would be scaled to the sizes of the creeks and their riparian zones.

A riparian ordinance might well have prevented the destruction of Calder Creek as witnessed by Helen Libeu. When she first bought her property at First Street and Leland in 1954, she remembers the creek connecting a series of ponds, one large enough to pass for a lake, where sportsmen fished for bass.

"There was an artesian well on my property that flowed under natural pressure all year round," said Libeu. "But that's all gone now." Libeu remembered references to an even earlier time when it was possible to paddle a canoe right down Calder Creek into the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

A well drilled by the city was the beginning of the end of Calder Creek, according to Libeu. Next came the Swain Woods development resulting in the felling of a dense growth of fir trees followed by asphaltting. Run-off from the property resulted in flooding that undermined houses in the area. Asphaltting followed, which resulted in flooding that undermined houses in the area, and actually caused the collapse of First Street.

"I don't know how many tax dollars had to be spent for culverts and new drainage to alleviate a situation that was predictable," said

Libeu.

In recent years Calder Creek, or what's left of it, has been polluted with motor oil and by TCE, a chemical used in dry cleaning. Its ducks long since departed, today it trickles through a stone and cement culvert that can be seen in Ives Park before it vanishes under High Street and makes its way underground to the Laguna.

Zimpher Creek can also be seen, almost stagnant, near Brookside and Winding Wood before it disappears into a giant cement pipe on Murphy Avenue, directing its flow into the nether world under the Bank of America, across Main Street, toward the Laguna.

The restoration of the Laguna de Santa Rosa is a huge undertaking involving a diversity of agencies and interests, perhaps extending to federal government. It has been defoliated, drained, in-filled, and used for a dumping ground. Nichols, along with councilpersons Anne Magnie and Nichols Stewart, is currently participating in an ad hoc committee which is attempting to draw together a wide range of people, organizations and ideas to revive the Laguna.

"Atascadero Creek, at the moment, is something of a step child," said Nichols. A small portion of the creek forms the western boundary of the city. Restoration of this creek would also involve interests outside Sebastopol.

Julianna Doms of Sebastopol Tomorrow agreed, and called for bringing in the county to make a concerted effort on behalf of Atascadero Creek. "In a sense it might be too late for a riparian ordinance," said its sponsor, Richard Nichols. "But we have to try, not only for Sebastopol, but as part of the larger Laguna, county, and even regional environmental efforts."

Sebastopol biologist Bill Cox also wonders about the practical effect of such a law. "It will, however, carry a message to the county and that makes it important," said Cox.

But Marco Waaland, an independent ecologist, was more optimistic about the effects of a riparian ordinance. "In Arcata, several creeks, some of them in worse shape than the Sebastopol creeks, were restored and, once again, salmon and steelhead are spawning in their waters," said Waaland.

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