

# Wildflowers vs. SR development

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## Study holds hundreds of acres in limbo

By CAROL BENFELL  
Staff Writer

Another round of wildflowers versus developers plays at the Santa Rosa Planning Commission this week.

In one corner, weighing in at 40 houses and wearing an alternately furious and bewildered expression, is Burbank Housing Development.

In the other corner, wearing bright yellow and white petals and standing knee-deep in rainwater, are wildflowers that grow nowhere else in the world but Sonoma County.

Step right up, ladies and gentlemen, place your bets, because this could be one of the last battles of its kind.

County, state and federal agencies are working to end this kind of countywide brawling that has pitted environmentalists against developers from Windsor to Sebastopol.

The key to it all is in the hands of the county — a report that for the first time shows the locations of most of the vernal pools — the seasonal puddles, pools and streams that are the only places the endangered wildflowers can live.

The plan is to determine the richest, most productive pool and flower sites and preserve them permanently, freeing up much of the other pool land for development.

"We're going to have a pretty good inventory of existing sites and a proposed preservation strategy" for the best of them, said Richard Lehtinen, a senior planner with Sonoma County. "If people take this to heart, it might break the logjam."

A development that goes before Santa Rosa's Planning Commission



MARK ARONOFF

*A vernal pool in a field owned by Phil Flowers off Waltzer Road in Santa Rosa is the home of three endangered species of wildflowers*

on Thursday seems to be floating out ahead of the logjam.

Some 8½ acres near the corner of San Miguel Avenue and Waltzer Road in northwest Santa Rosa are slated to become lots for 40 single-family homes and duplexes.

Burbank is proposing a "sweat equity" program, similar to one used elsewhere, where low income families can earn the down payment for their homes by helping to build them.

The three- and four-bedroom homes will carry mortgages of some \$65,000, considerably lower than market price, said Russ McCubbin, Burbank's executive director.

But there are vernal pools on the land, and Santa Rosa requires a developer to get clearance from the proper agencies before ap-

proaching the city.

So first Burbank had to get approval from the federal Army Corps of Engineers, which has jurisdiction over wetlands. Wetlands are areas that are periodically or permanently covered with water and have distinguishing soil, water and plant characteristics.

Burbank next had to obtain approval from the state Fish and Game Department, which has authority over endangered species. Three endangered wildflower species are found in Sonoma County vernal pools — Burke's Goldfields, Baker's Sticky-Seed and the Sebastopol Meadowfoam.

After investigation, the Army Corps of Engineers said the pools provided less than an acre of wetlands, so Burbank didn't need a

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