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SR to restore 12 acres of southern marshland

Project to use treated water

By CAROL BENFELL
Staff Writer

Santa Rosa will restore 12 acres of marshes and vernal pools south of the city's sewage treatment plant to showcase the uses of highly treated sewage water.

The project, expected to cost \$220,000, will get under way in the spring off Llano Road and north of Highway 116, along the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

The wetland area, about the size of 12 football fields, also will help reuse the wastewater from the treatment plant, said Dan Carlson, project coordinator for the city Utilities Department.

A similar project on the city's Kelly Farm, now 3 years old, has produced a scenic area with open ponds and tall rushes, where otter, fish, frogs, egrets, swans, ducks and other wildlife thrive.

The 12-acre site, now a degraded

wetland with areas of sandy soil, will eventually provide the same kind of habitat, Carlson said. Like Kelly Farm, it will be managed to assure the growth of plants and wildlife.

"The ground there now is essentially a wasteland. It's just so evident that anything they do there will be a dramatic improvement," said Joan Vilms, an open space and land trust consultant.

Vilms, who is not associated with the city, praised the project's potential for opening the public's eyes to the natural environment. "That's the biggest change we have to make," she said.

Three species of endangered wildflowers, some found only in Sonoma County, will be planted in the vernal pools at the new site. Vernal pools are depressions in the ground that retain water after winter rains have passed and provide a unique habitat for plants and small invertebrates.

Oak and ash trees also will be planted on the high ground, restoring some of the historic woodland that once flourished on the Santa

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Rosa plains.

About \$20,000 of the cost of the project will be provided by Sonoma County, which is legally required to offset the loss of some vernal pools in the path of the Stony Point Road widening, expected to begin next spring.

Federal laws prohibit the destruction of wetlands, which are the cradle for nearly one-third of

the earth's species.

Wetlands also are an important part of the city's long-term plan to dispose of the highly treated wastewater. The marshes and pools need water in winter and spring and complement farmland, which needs the water for irrigation in summer and fall.

The city has long planned a wetland on the site, and jumped at



Where Santa Rosa will restore wetlands

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the county's offer to help with the cost, Carlson said. The city Board of Public Utilities approved the project Thursday.