

Laguna . . .

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some of these permanent, perennial marshes in the laguna," said Waaland.

Santa Rosa, under a tight deadline to find a long range wastewater disposal solution, agrees that wetlands restoration may figure prominently into those plans.

"Wetlands has always been one of the primary pieces of any of the puzzles we put together (for reusing treated wastewater)," says Dan Carlson, director of Santa Rosa's Public Utility. "And it is easier than most to get consensus on."

Establishment of wetlands and marshes will be part of many alternative scenarios for the storage and disposal of Santa Rosa's treated wastewater, according to Carlson.

Other considerations are urban landscaping and irrigation (golf courses), irrigating farmlands in the west and south sections of the county and increasing discharges into the Russian River.

"If you recognize that to fully restore the laguna you need water, then it is a kind of a last-ditch effort to make sure that can be a reality, by making sure that the water isn't pumped over to the West County (specifically Two Rock, Valley Ford and Bloomfield areas) or pumped to the South County, and making sure that a certain increment of water is always reserved for the laguna," said

Carlson.

The city is currently allowed to discharge about 1 percent of its treated wastewater into the Russian River (via the laguna) during winter months (summer discharges are forbidden). And while the city will review a variety of reuse projects coupled with different discharge rates of up to 20 percent, the state's North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board has specified that the long range wastewater disposal plan not rely primarily on river discharge, no matter how clean the wastewater is.

Last year, Santa Rosa—which operates the sewage treatment plant on Llano Road—reused about 51 percent of the 6.8 billion gallons of treated wastewater generated by the system's customers, which includes Sebastopol. This figure is down from 60 percent during the preceding two years, when a lot of the tertiary wastewater was used for winter irrigation because of the drought.

But now the city is under state and community pressure to investigate a variety of alternative reuse projects for the wastewater and to find the necessary storage facilities for the winter months. (Storage in summer is not a problem because all the wastewater is reused through irrigation.)

Santa Rosa must have a preliminary plan ready for the State Water Quality Control Board by Mar. 1.

While creation of marshes

and wetlands will not solve the winter storage problem, they could resuscitate the dying and polluted Laguna de Santa Rosa, seen as the biggest polluter of the Russian River during summer months.

"Marshes take a high grade of (waste)water and make it better," says Waaland, an authority on wetlands and marshes who works as a consultant for the city of Santa Rosa.

Citing the 21-acre Kelly Farm demonstration wetlands east of Sebastopol, Waaland says that marshes and their riparian vegetation have already proven to be effective natural filters of wastewater.

Marshes, whose vegetation grows rapidly, are also home to

tends from Rohnert Park to Windsor, the city could discharge purified wastewater into the laguna. In turn, that wastewater would cleanse the contaminated water in the laguna, polluted with urban runoff and agricultural waste (ie. cow and horse manure).

"Fact is you don't need reclaimed wastewater, but there is an opportunity that presents itself where some of this land is available (owned by Santa Rosa or public agencies), where their policies would allow some restoration to occur on that land," says Waaland.

Locally, the possibility for wetlands/marsh creation is just beyond Sebastopol's eastern boundary on either side of state

the wastewater locally could spark an agricultural revival in Sebastopol.)

That the marshes could be used to purify the laguna could be a benefit to those on the Russian River who are opposed to having wastewater flowing into the river, says Waaland.

"People should be thinking of marshes as something to enhance the water quality that is coming down their way," said Waaland, noting the marshes would trap urban and agricultural waste.

But remembering Santa Rosa's illegal discharge of millions of gallons of partially-treated wastewater in the mid-1980s, Russian River residents have railed against any discharges into the river—and this includes through the laguna.

Some people, including Waaland, believe River residents' strident opposition to river discharge is what prompted the Corps of Engineers to decide against restoring about 1,000 acres of riparian vegetation and marshland in the laguna as a mitigation for lost wetlands when Warm Springs Dam was constructed in the late 1970s.

Said Waaland, "I feel like sometimes people in Guerneville are holding the laguna hostage for a political agenda.

"Their argument (against restoration) is not based on real biology, because any attempt to restore the laguna is being interpreted as something that is going to harm the people down on the Russian River. And I'm

saying that is not the case; I'm saying by restoring the laguna we are going to be improving water quality for people down in Guerneville."

Tom Lynch, a River resident and opponent of river discharge, endorses restoration of the laguna to ensure cleaner water flowing into the Russian River, but only if Santa Rosa addresses the need for more wastewater storage facilities and if there are no increases in the amount of effluent dumped into the river.

"We will be revisiting this issue over and over (if there is no storage increase)," said Lynch, who was dubbed "Manure Man" after he dumped a load of manure on the steps of Santa Rosa's city hall to protest the city's illegal wastewater discharges.

Kim Cordell of Sebastopol, president of the Laguna Foundation, lauds any effort to restore the laguna. She says that while the Laguna Foundation has not decided whether it will lobby the city of Santa Rosa, either as group or individually, for wetlands and marsh creation, she encourages Sebastopol residents to write letters, noting the success of letter-writing campaigns by River residents.

And Sebastopol support remains almost as vital to the restoration of the laguna as the wastewater.

"If the Sebastopol City Council was not interested in this at all, then it would not go anywhere," said Carlson.

"I feel like sometimes people in Guerneville are holding the laguna hostage for a political agenda."

—Marco Waaland

wildlife and numerous plant species. River otter, mallard and pintail ducks, trumpeter swans, and crayfish can be found at the Kelly Farm and, Waaland says, could become far more plentiful if more of the laguna were restored.

"You could build berms and small dikes to confine the reclaimed wastewater," says Waaland. By establishing the marshes and wetlands in the Laguna watershed, which ex-

Highway 12 (the Barlow field to the north and Brown Farm to the south) and just inside city limits at one of Sebastopol's former sewage ponds on Morris St. (included in the proposed Laguna Youth Park plan).

Reusing the wastewater for irrigating apple orchards or other crops in the West County could work hand-in-glove with a wetlands restoration project, says Carlson. (Farm experts have predicted that re-use of