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Fig. 2

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Laguna

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visit the Statue of Liberty, live in Paris and never go up the Eiffel Tower, Sonoma County residents can be forgiven for being blasé about the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

"The Laguna is a typical example of something so familiar to those of us who live in Sonoma County that we don't truly value it," says Kim Cordell, executive director of the Laguna Foundation, which seeks to preserve and enhance the wetland. "It has innate, intrinsic biological value. We don't have to create something here. It won't be fake, like a Disneyland. There are true rare and endangered species in the area that are truly unique."

Cordell said the Laguna was at one time the second-largest freshwater wetland in coastal Northern California, second only to Clear Lake.

Agriculture and encroaching development changed that, but over the past two decades it has been restored gradually. Water quality has improved, Cordell said, and trees have been replanted to restore the riparian vegetation.

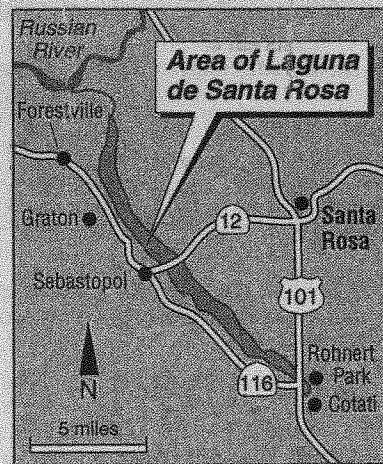
Cordell recognizes there is a delicate balance in trying to attract people to the Laguna and making sure it doesn't get ruined in the process.

"We think it can be done with careful planning and very close monitoring," she said.

The idea, she said, will be to direct the human impact to one area of the Laguna — next to Sebastopol — and keep the other parts as unaffected as possible.

The blueprint for putting the concept into practice is the Laguna Park Master Plan, developed in 1992 by the city. It calls for restoring to a more natural state about 325 acres of the Laguna adjacent to the city.

It designates an interpretive center and a hierarchy of trails, including some that would only be guided. The plan has languished for the most part over the past couple years, essentially because the city



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hasn't had the staff or money to make it a reality.

What's new however, is that last month the Chamber of Commerce decided it was time to try and get the plan rolling because it would help promote business.

Mike Kyes, a member of the Chamber of Commerce who helped pass a resolution urging the city to implement the Laguna plan, said "it's hard being competitive with super malls and discount stores. We need to attract somebody."

Kyes said chamber officials figured why not use Sebastopol's biggest natural resource as a draw, considering it is already one of the

top 10 places in the country for birdwatching and there is general interest in the environment.

The City Council last week embraced the idea. It created a committee that will attempt to implement the master plan, establish priorities and identify funding sources and opportunities for cooperation of public and private organizations.

The members of the committee will be a cross section from the city, business and environmental groups. Applications for an at-large member from the public who lives in Sebastopol are also being sought.

Mayor Magnie is optimistic the committee will produce results. "There's a lot of enthusiasm, incredibly high energy to make a go of this," she said. "It's going to take off, I know it, with the kind of people who are involved."