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JOHN BURGESS/PRESS DEMOCRAT

*The Laguna de Santa Rosa near
Occidental and High School roads.*

Luring 'eco-tourists'

Sebastopol hopes Laguna will attract business

By CLARK MASON
Staff Writer

Sebastopol leaders, searching for novel ways to attract business, believe the answer may lie in the adjacent Laguna de Santa Rosa, a wetlands and wildlife haven that could become an "eco-tourist" destination.

They believe the Laguna could help put Sebastopol on the map, making it more than just a town people pass through on the way to Bodega Bay or the Russian River.

Sebastopol and the Laguna may not be in quite the same league as say, Costa Rica or Ecuador when it comes to attracting ecologically oriented visitors. But the 13-mile wetland on the city's eastern border is home to a surprising assortment of birds and mammals that are making a comeback as a result of successful efforts to restore the Laguna habitat.

Laguna watchers say there are river otters, along with a healthy population of badgers. Bobcats are present, as well as migrating birds that make a stopover.

Canadian waterfowl are the primary migrating birds and can be seen with peregrine falcons, hawks, egrets and blue heron.

While it's an obvious attraction for birdwatchers and naturalists, Sebastopol government and business leaders say the Laguna could be a magnet for families and anyone looking to escape the urban clamor.

They envision it as comparable to the Arcata Marsh on Humboldt Bay, which attracts 100,000 visitors annually.

Sebastopol Mayor Anne Magnie said visitors to the Laguna, who might come from all over the Bay Area and farther, presumably would do some shopping and leave some retail dollars in Sebastopol.

"A lot of people in a recessed economy don't have the big bucks to see the wildlife in Costa Rica," Magnie said. "Maybe they've got \$20 to come to Sebastopol to see river otter, trout, herons and egret."

If people can live in New York City and never
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