

# Terrace

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to Indians was a major reason behind the move to preserve it from development.

Beyond its historical value, environmentalists say Palm Terrace is a crucial uplands refuge for wildlife during Laguna flooding. Palm Terrace is seen as the last piece in a plan to safeguard the Laguna, and will provide access to and a view of 1,500 acres that already are under various conservation easements.

Some of the publicly protected land is owned by the Department of Fish and Game as wildlife refuge, and some is owned by the city of Santa Rosa, which uses it for releasing highly treated wastewater.

The recent conflict over Palm Terrace has had unusual adversaries: environmentalists trying to save the land vs. Indians who say they are being left out and that they deserve more say over what should happen with it once it is preserved.

The controversy stunned environmentalists and members of the committee trying to raise the money to keep Palm Terrace as open space, who said they attempted to include Indians early on, but got little response.

Indians, on the other hand, said their heritage and ties to the land are being evoked to raise money, but that they have only nominal

involvement. They object to talk of an Indian cultural center being built on the property without their input, as well as a feather on the letterhead of the Laguna Uplands Project, the organization formed to preserve the parcel.

Joan Vilms, the head of Land-Wrights, the land trust organization working to keep Palm Terrace undeveloped, said the mistrust has been painful.

"They tried to drain our energy when we needed it most," she said. "It hurt our spirits when our spirits needed to be strong."

"The truth is, we don't feel like celebrating. It's been a tremendous struggle. Folks should be joining hands, saying, 'Look what we've done together.'"

"For some reason, it's been a pathological wedge, rather than a bridge. It's ironic and frustrating. I can only believe in time it will all work out."

Members of the Laguna Uplands Project are trying to reach out to Indians, Vilms said, including some who have quietly supported the efforts of her organization.

She and Doms have avoided dealing with their most vocal critic, Anne Maurice of Sebastopol.

Maurice has Carib and Arawak ancestry and represents the Ya-Ka-Ama Indian Educational Center in Forestville. She was unsuccessful in trying to persuade the Sonoma County Board of Supervisors require that Palm Terrace be dedeed to Indians as a condition of allocating \$900,000 in open space money to buy the property.

"It is clearly right to have it native-owned and managed. It's our sacred land. That's what gave it this tremendous value," Maurice said.

Maurice said Indians cannot understand why there would be hesitation to give them control of Palm Terrace, since it once was part of the 4,000-acre Walker Ranch where Indians are known to be buried.

Bill Haigwood, a Sebastopol newspaper columnist who was crucial in helping launch the Laguna Uplands Project, said committee members are trying to concentrate on raising money and avoiding any more controversy. But, he said, "Native Americans are shooting themselves in the foot trying to stop this project."

Haigwood said there has been no decision as to whether a building or cultural center will be built at Palm Terrace.

"Without the involvement of Native Americans it's inconceivable to me we would have any exhibit on that land," he said. "We told them that before repeatedly."

After title is granted to Land-Wrights this week, Vilms said, the next step will be to assemble a group of Indians and a biologist "to look at land stewardship needs."

There are many non-native grasses on the property now, she said, and the hope is to replace them with native grasses and trees that can be used by Indian basket weavers.

"We're all pretty confident in time the dust will settle," Vilms said.