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# Battle looms over plans for Laguna links

by Frank Robertson  
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SEBASTOPOL — Golfers and nature lovers all pledged concern for the sanctity of the Laguna de Santa Rosa wetlands last week but differed sharply over the environmental benefits of a proposed Laguna golf course.

Golfers say the links could complement the goals of preserving and restoring the Laguna as a nature park and wildlife refuge, but Laguna preservationists remained skeptical that an 18-hole golf facility could be environmentally compatible.

"It's just not negotiable" said Laguna preservation advocate Helen Shane after Santa Rosa city officials outlined the golf course plan for the Sebastopol City Council last week.

Santa Rosa officials last year began talking about opening a 180-acre public course on the city's 315-acre Kelly Farm located east of Sebastopol between Highway 12 and Occidental Road. The farm is now used to

irrigate hay crops with highly-treated wastewater from the city's Llano Road subregional sewage plant.

Santa Rosa City Councilman Dave Berto last week assured the Sebastopol Council that Santa Rosa hopes to create an environmentally-sensitive golf course. His fellow Santa Rosa Council members "would be the last ones who want to trample that site," said Berto. "I'd like to keep it as a park."

If done right, the golf course would "open up" the Laguna for public enjoyment "and still keep the virgin land for whatever would be there," said Berto.

The course is badly needed because other public golf facilities are jammed, Santa Rosa's assistant City Manager Ed Brauner said last week.

The city-owned Bennett Valley golf course is accommodating record crowds, and when the city surveyed golfers about possible places to put a new course, said Brauner, Kelly

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## Golf ...

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Farm "was the preferred site."

Golfers at last week's Council meeting applauded the project as an environmentally-friendly way to offer more public golf facilities and preserve open space in the Laguna.

"Everybody gets something out of this," said Scott Cannon-Reese, of Sebastopol.

One Sebastopol-area golfer described himself as a "passionate environmentalist" who nevertheless favors the Laguna course to help relieve "jammed" conditions on the county's existing public links.

A new course west of Santa Rosa "would be real handy," said another local player, Dick McDonald. "This is a real opportunity for Sebastopol," he said.

One of the Kelly Farm's nearest neighbors, Jim Searles, said a golf course would be less intrusive than agricultural operations now permitted on land adjacent to the Kelly Farm.

Bright lights, truck traffic, and the noise of workers and machines loading produce all night are now routine activities at the nearby Balletto Ranch operation, which is closer to the Laguna's marshy habitat area, said Searles. "I can't imagine a golf course would be more detrimental."

As proposed, the golf course would be located on the east edge of the Kelly property, above the 100-year flood plain. The remaining acreage could be used as a nature preserve, with a possible hiking and biking trail connection to the West County Trail.

Sebastopol Councilmembers