

California. The waters of the Laguna support a diverse population of fishes, including largemouth bass, catfish, and carp, as well as anadromous steelhead trout and a few coho salmon. In its pristine condition, the Laguna likely provided good habitat for steelhead and coho salmon.

In addition to its cultural and biotic value, the Laguna de Santa Rosa performs an important function in watershed management and flood control. According to the Sonoma County Water Agency,

The Laguna de Santa Rosa is a natural waterway and overflow basin connecting Mark West Creek and other smaller creeks with the Russian River...During floods, direction of flow may be either to or from the Russian River. Although a natural feature, the Laguna de Santa Rosa very effectively attenuates flooding on the Lower Russian River. The total watershed of the Laguna de Santa Rosa encompasses 254 square miles. It is the largest watershed tributary to the Russian River.

Historically, during the flood peaks on the Russian River, the Laguna de Santa Rosa stores approximately 80,000 acre-feet of water, reducing the flow which otherwise would occur in the Lower Russian River.

The Need

Past agricultural and urban development have adversely affected the Laguna. Riparian forests and oak woodlands have been cleared, past flood control practices have negatively affected the Laguna, and waste disposal practices have affected water quality. Even though a significant portion of the Laguna habitats have been lost or degraded, much remains. The remnant habitat must be protected against further loss, and restoration must occur to damaged habitat.

According to the March 1997 Russian River Action Plan published by the Sonoma County Water Agency, there is a need for "...preservation, restoration, and enhancement of riparian, oak/vernal pool/grassland, and historic wetland habitat in the Laguna de Santa Rosa area." These efforts will "...improve water quality, improve integrated floodplain management, maintain

and enhance native habitat values, assist recovery of plant and animal species, enhance scenic values and coordinate resource management." (Russian River Action Plan, page 18.)

Citizen efforts to protect and restore the Laguna began in the 1970's, including in the City of Sebastopol. Lands of the Laguna directly adjoin the City of Sebastopol. In 1986, the City of Sebastopol appointed a broad-based citizens advisory committee regarding the Laguna. This committee produced a comprehensive report in 1988. Continuing these efforts, in 1990, the City initiated the development of a master plan for restoration of the Laguna in the vicinity of Sebastopol. The Laguna de Santa Rosa Master Plan was adopted by the City Council in 1992.

In 1998, the City Council funded preparation of a Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetlands Preserve Implementation Plan for City-owned land. This Plan will be the basis for actual construction of improvements and restoration projects. Using a donation from a local resident and contributions from other members of the community, and in a cooperative effort with the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, the City started construction of the first elements of the Preserve in November 1998, and completed these improvements in January 1999, using plans prepared for the Implementation Plan. Volunteers as well as workers from Americorps have conducted a number of Laguna cleanup and non-native plant removal events, which also performed an important educational function. Using volunteers from the community, over 1000 native trees and shrubs were planted for this project in Fall 1998. More work is scheduled for Summer/Fall 1999 and beyond.

The City of Sebastopol's Laguna Wetland Preserve is the only publicly-designated natural park in the Laguna. While there are scattered restoration efforts and projects by other entities such as the State Department of Fish and Game, the City of Santa Rosa, and the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, the City of Sebastopol's Wetland Preserve is the only area specifically designed for public access and passive recreation and educational uses.

The City expects its modest beginning to act as a lightning rod for efforts in the entire watershed to restore, protect, and provide public access.