

ABOUT THE LAGUNA DE SANTA ROSA

WHAT IS THE LAGUNA DE SANTA ROSA?

The Laguna is a unique, diverse and biologically rich freshwater wetland complex and one of the reasons Sonoma County is such a special place to live! Even though surrounding lands have been converted to agriculture, commerce and housing, the Laguna has retained much of its wildland character and is an intact, functioning ecosystem.

The Laguna's 22-mile water course starts in Cotati, picking up creeks that carry water from the hills ringing the Santa Rosa Plain. The Laguna meets the Russian River outside of Forestville.

The Laguna...

- is a unique ecological system covering more than 30,000 acres and comprised of a mosaic of creeks, open water, perennial marshes, seasonal wetlands, riparian forests, and oak savannah.
- drains a 254-square-mile watershed which encompasses nearly the entire Santa Rosa Plain and includes all or part of the cities of Windsor, Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, Cotati, Sebastopol and the unincorporated community of Forestville.
- is the largest tributary of the Russian River.
- is the second largest freshwater wetland in northern California (Clear Lake is the largest)
- is capable of storing well-over 80,000 acre feet of storm water which helps reduce downstream flooding.
 - It is estimated that floodwaters in Guerneville would be 13 feet higher without the Laguna's ability to slow and hold storm water.
- There are more than 50 named creeks within the Laguna watershed and many more that aren't named.
- As the receiving water of a watershed where most of the county's human population lives, it is a landscape feature of critical importance to Sonoma County's water quality, flood control, biodiversity and quality of life.

WHY IS THE LAGUNA de SANTA ROSA WETLAND COMPLEX CALLED A WETLAND OF INTERNATIONAL IMPORTANCE?

After a lengthy application and review period, the Laguna Wetland Complex was named a Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands in February of 2011.

- The Laguna and surrounding Santa Rosa Plain Wetland Complex are of particular international importance due to the rare and endangered plant and animal species found here, the biodiversity of our region – one of the world's few diverse "hotspots," and our unique vernal pool environments.

- We live in a special place – one recognized not just locally, but internationally!

What is Ramsar?

- Ramsar is the short term for the: Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat. The Convention promotes wetland conservation throughout the world. Ramsar is technically a treaty.

What does the word “Ramsar” mean?

- Contrary to popular belief, Ramsar is not an acronym. The Convention was originally signed in 1971, in the town of Ramsar, Iran. It was ratified by the US Senate and signed by President Reagan in 1987. Because the official name of the Convention is so long, people often refer to it simply as “Ramsar” or “The Ramsar Convention”.

Is Ramsar regulatory?

- Ramsar is not regulatory. The Ramsar Convention has no relation to public access. Landowners can continue to manage their lands exactly as they do now, or change these uses, although they are encouraged to maintain or enhance the wetland values of their lands.

Can landowners add their parcels to the designation?

- Yes, new parcels can be added to the site after a review process and approval.

Why would they?

- The designation promotes the site by increasing scientific and tourist interest, and inspires local pride and awareness. Ramsar sites may be eligible for additional conservation funding and demonstrate active partnerships of private and public landowners.

The Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetland complex is:

- #1930 in the world, #29 in the nation, #5 in California (other CA sites include Tomales Bay and Bolinas Lagoon)

MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND at www.ramsar.org

WHO OWNS THE LAGUNA?

- Approximately 90% of the land adjacent to the Laguna is in private ownership. Individual care and stewardship of the Laguna water and wetlands is important!
- The City of Santa Rosa owns approximately 1500 acres on four properties: Brown Farm, Alpha Farm, Kelly Farm and Stone Farm.
- The City of Sebastopol owns land both south and north of Hwy 12 on five properties totaling ~100 acres and called collectively the Laguna Wetland Preserve. Individually the properties are: Laguna Youth Park, Meadowlark Field, Americorps Trail, Tomodachi Park and Railroad Forest.
- The California Department of Fish and Wildlife also owns several stretches of Laguna lands, totaling approximately 540 acres, including the Laguna Wildlife Area South, outside Sebastopol called the “Cooper Road Unit” and the Laguna Wildlife Area North which is north of the Occidental Road bridge, called the “Occidental Road Unit”.
- Many sections of the Laguna waterway are under the jurisdiction of the Sonoma County Water Agency and are subject to California and Federal use laws.

IS HUNTING ALLOWED IN THE LAGUNA?

The Department of Fish and Wildlife does allow restricted waterfowl hunting in the Laguna during the regular waterfowl hunting season between mid-October through January on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday, only in the Laguna Wildlife Area, Occidental Rd Unit - just north of Hwy 12 and Lower Stone Farm. The only legally authorized access to this Unit is by boat. There is no foot or terrestrial access. Setting up blinds is not allowed.

All of the DFW lands along the Laguna are collectively known as the Laguna Wildlife Area and more narrowly by Units. Hunting should not occur on the Cooper Road Unit of the Laguna – near Palm Drive and Uplands.

Anyone who sees illegal hunting or trespassing (i.e.: accessing the Occidental Road Unit by foot through Stone Farm) can call CalTIP: 1.888.334.CalTIP

<http://www.dfg.ca.gov/enforcement/caltip.aspx>

Visit the DFW website for more information: <https://www.wildlife.ca.gov/hunting/waterfowl>

I SAW AN ENCAMPMENT ALONG THE LAGUNA. WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Illegal camping can be a problem in the Laguna for a variety of reasons including trash accumulation, fire threat, sanitation and health. Please report camps to the Sonoma County Sheriff's dispatch office at 707-565-2121.

CAN I FISH IN THE LAGUNA?

Yes. A fishing license is required from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife. However, see water quality discussion below.

WHAT IS THE QUALITY OF LAGUNA WATER?

The Laguna waters are listed as “Impaired” with the Environmental Protection Agency for:

Elevated levels of:

- | | | |
|--------------|----------------------|---------------|
| ○ nitrogen | ○ mercury | ○ temperature |
| ○ phosphorus | ○ indicator bacteria | ○ sediment |

Low levels of

- dissolved oxygen

For these reasons, consumption of aquatic wildlife is not recommended.

WHY IS LUDWIGIA A PROBLEM IN THE LAGUNA?

There are many factors contributing to *Ludwigia*'s growth and spread in the Laguna; most of them relating to degradation of the Laguna ecosystem: loss of riparian forests, excess nutrients, hydrological changes and alterations, and accumulated sediments. *Ludwigia* grows best in shallow, sunny, sediment and nutrient-rich water. Unless these factors change, *Ludwigia* will likely be present in the Laguna.

The 2005-07 *Ludwigia* Control Project was successful in the short term but since the overall conditions of the Laguna have not changed, the plant was able to grow back. *Ludwigia* control

remains a priority for federal, state, educational, and local agencies who are working together to search for solutions.

More information can be found on the Laguna Knowledgebase through a search on “*ludwigia*” Look for the *Ludwigia* Final Report for details on the 2005-07 *Ludwigia* Control Project.

WHERE CAN I EXPERIENCE THE LAGUNA?

- The Laguna Trail (see below)
- Sebastopol's Laguna Wetlands Preserve is an easily accessible place to visit the Laguna.
- For sweeping views across the Santa Rosa Plain, visit the Laguna Uplands property, located at the end of Palm Ave in Sebastopol.
- Constructed in 2015, the 1.5 mile Laguna Discovery Trail passes through a large restoration project with interpretive signs. Trailhead located on Stony Point Rd just south of the intersection with Rohnert Park Expressway.
- In winter, after several rain storms, the Laguna can be enjoyed via kayak.
- **The Laguna Trail Guide** and the **Laguna Paddle Guide** are excellent resources.
- Be sure to sign-up for the Laguna Foundation e-news for announcements of special walks and other public education events around the Laguna.

WHERE IS THE LAGUNA TRAIL? What are the trail use guidelines?

- The 1.8 mile Laguna Trail trail extends between a parking area on Hwy 12 just east of the Chevron Station, through Meadowlark field and onto the City of Santa Rosa's Kelly Farm with another parking area on Occidental Rd just west of Hanna Winery.
- The trail is designed to be multi-use for hikers, cyclists & equestrians.
- Dogs on a 6-foot leash are allowed on the multi-use, hard-pack trail.
- In addition to the 1.8 mile multi-use trail, there is a 0.6 mile seasonal dirt trail that is open to pedestrians only (no dogs, bikes or horses) during the dry season. This trail can be accessed through the closed gate downhill from Kelly Marsh.
- The Laguna trail adjoins a loop trail on Meadowlark Field. During the summer months (mid-May through mid-October) a floating bridge is installed by the City of Sebastopol, linking the trail to the Laguna Wetland Preserve on the west side of the Laguna.

Are More Laguna Trails Planned?

The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District (SCAPOS D – which is funded by a ¼ cent sales tax that was voted in by Sonoma County citizens in 1990 then again in 2006) did develop a proposal for trails on Brown Farm and other sites back in about 2005. However, it remains to be seen if the proposal will gain footing or funding. There are many logistical hurdles to overcome and it seems unlikely that more trails will come to fruition in the near future.

WHERE CAN I SEE A VERNAL POOL?

- Most vernal pools are located on private or protected property not open to the public.
- Youth Community Park at 1700 Fulton Road in Santa Rosa does have some pools at the back of the property in the open space area. Best time to visit is March-May.
- Some created vernal pools can be seen from the road on Occidental Road near its intersection with Fulton Road.
- When conditions allow, the Laguna Foundation offers guided access to select locations.

I WANT MY LAGUNA PROPERTY TO BE PROTECTED. WHAT CAN I DO?

Consider obtaining an open space or conservation easement. For information, visit:

- Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District:
 - <http://www.sonomaopenspace.org/Content/10002/faq.html#question3>
- The Laguna Foundation does also have a planned giving program. Contact Development Director, Bev Scotland: 527-9277 x 106

ABOUT THE LAGUNA FOUNDATION

WHAT DOES THE LAGUNA FOUNDATION DO?

The Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation is a non-profit organization, established in 1989. Since then, the Laguna Foundation has been the voice for Sonoma County's most spectacular land and water asset - The Laguna de Santa Rosa.

Working closely with our partners and collaborators on conservation, restoration and education programs, we focus our efforts to:

- Collaborate with landowners, government agencies, businesses and the agricultural community to improve water quality and groundwater resources for all.
- Protect threatened and endangered plants and animals by restoring habitat.
- Attract ground-breaking scientific research to the Laguna watershed.
- Bring together technical experts, land managers and policymakers to create effective climate adaptation strategies that preserve natural resources, biodiversity, and ecosystem services.
- Remove invasive species including water primrose, pepperweed, Harding grass and pennyroyal mint.
- Educate and inspire people of all ages to appreciate the Laguna through school programs, walks, talks and classes, and volunteer opportunities.

WHAT DOES THE RESTORATION DEPARTMENT DO?

The primary focus for restoration and management in the Laguna is to enhance populations of desirable plant and animal species in order to maintain or restore ecosystem processes such as water recharge and purification, soil retention, and biological diversity. Controlling weedy plants is a necessary part of land management, but the fundamental goal is to increase the ability of the Laguna's ecosystems to resist invasion by weedy species, and to prevent the introduction of new weeds.

Staff, plus interns and other volunteers have installed thousands of native woody and herbaceous plants over hundreds of acres. Major projects sites include: Duer Creek, Gravenstein Creek, Irwin Creek, Laguna Middle Reach, Southern Laguna and soon Colgan Creek. On-going projects include removal of invasive species such as perennial pepperweed pennyroyal mint, Harding grass and Himalaya Blackberry, plus trash and debris removal from Laguna waters and monitoring plant survivorship, growth of invasives and endangered species.

- **Where do the plants come from?** We grow most of the native plants used in restoration work in our own nursery at the Laguna Environmental Center. The seeds, starts and cuttings are selected for their ability to thrive in the conditions of the Laguna.

WHAT DOES THE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT DO?

The primary focus of the education department is to inspire stewardship and appreciation for the Laguna. Currently we work with elementary school children in the Learning Laguna program and the whole community through our public education program.

What is Learning Laguna?

Learning Laguna is an environmental education program for 2nd-4th grade students throughout the watershed. Trained docents lead the 2 hour classroom visit with special activities designed specifically to teach about the wetland environment. A 2.5 hour field trip to either the Sebastopol Preserve or Stone Farm follows the following week and gives students the opportunity to explore, make discoveries and experience the wonders of the Laguna for themselves. Learning Laguna began serving students in 1999 and has run continually ever since.

- **How many children have participated in Learning Laguna?** As of spring 2016, over 15,500 children in 618 classes have participated in the classroom visit and Laguna field trip. Currently the program serves approximately 50 classes each year, reaching 1400 students.

What is the Public Education Program?

More than 40 walks, talks and classes plus open house events at the Laguna Environmental Center are offered annually. Opportunities include birding and natural history walks, presentations on Laguna cultural history, wildlife, hydrology and geology, plus natural fiber basket making, colored pencil, watercolor and other art classes, plus events for families. Additionally, trained Laguna Guides table at LagunaStewards work days and community events and support all the programs offered in the field at in Heron Hall

- **How may people participate in the walks, talks & classes each year?** Over 2200 people take part in the programs annually.

WHAT IS THE LAGUNA ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER?

The LEC was built and opened in 2012. The Center was constructed with a grant from the California Coastal Conservancy, individual donations, and in partnership with the City of Santa Rosa who owns this 112-acre property known as Stone Farm. Many people also volunteered their time to complete the project.

The Laguna Foundation leases 4 acres of Stone Farm from the City of Santa Rosa for the LEC, which includes the farmhouse, Heron Hall, pond, observation deck, the nursery, hopbarn, milking barn, milkshed and the land in between.

What else happens on the Stone Farm property?

- About 40 acres are left alone as a wildlife area (along the Laguna on the west side of Sanford Rd.)
- Some, mostly along Irwin Creek, is actively being restored
- Approximately 7 acres is leased to Stone Horse Farm, an organic grower of fruit and vegetables for sale at local farmers markets.
- About 70 acres are leased to a dairy farmer to pasture young cows
- Approximately 80 acres are being irrigated with recycled water
- The Laguna Foundation leases the 4 acres we are on now for the offices, the Environmental Center and for a Restoration Plant Nursery.

How old is the farmhouse?

- The house, which is now the Laguna Foundation office was constructed in 1872 and is believed to be the oldest farm house in its original location in Sonoma County.
- The house was unoccupied for about 20 years before the Laguna Foundation resurrected it and moved its offices here in the summer of 2009.
- It is called the Churchill Farmhouse after previous Board Director Ken & Susan Churchill who donated significantly to the project both financially and with volunteer hours.

Can I rent Heron Hall?

- Yes! The Hall is available to rent for educational trainings, symposiums, professional development workshops, seminars, conferences and classes. Heron Hall is not available to rent for social events. Details are available on the Laguna Foundation website.

Are the Laguna Environmental Center and Stone Farm Protected?

Yes! There is an open space easement on the property through the Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District. The Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District permanently protects the diverse agricultural, natural resource, and scenic open space lands of Sonoma County for future generations. Sonoma County voters approved Measures A and C to create the District and enable a quarter-cent sales tax to fund District operations until 2011. In 2006, with 76% of the vote, Sonoma County residents approved Measure F to extend the quarter-cent sales tax through 2031.

HOW IS THE LAGUNA FOUNDATION FUNDED?

Donations and contributions from individuals comprise approximately 50% of the Foundation's annual income. Another 38% of the funding is generated through grants and contracts with another 12% coming from program fees, rentals, and merchandise sales.

HOW CAN I GET INVOLVED WITH THE WORK OF THE LAGUNA FOUNDATION?

- **Join the e-news list!** All our education, restoration and volunteer opportunities are posted in our monthly e-newsletter.
- **Volunteer!**
 - **Laguna Stewards** – Restoration work days, 1 per month from September-May.

- Contact Brent Reed: brent@lagunafoundation.org
- **Learning Laguna Docents** – teaching school children about the Laguna. Training occurs over 10 weeks from March-May in odd years (2013, 2015, 2017, 2019)
 - Contact Christine Fontaine: christine@lagunafoundation.org
- **Laguna Guides** – supporting and teaching public education programs. Eight Session training in May-June in even years (2014, 2016, 2018)
 - Contact Christine Fontaine: christine@lagunafoundation.org
- **Internships** for college students in education, restoration and conversation science. (contact department directors)
- **Laguna Environmental Center:** Monthly and as needed:
 - garden volunteers
 - site maintenance volunteers (handyman)
 - Contact Maggie Hart: maggiehart@lagunafoundation.org
- **Administrative** volunteers help in the office
 - Contact Maggie Hart: maggiehart@lagunafoundation.org
- **Citizen Science** (in development)
- **Become a member!**
 - The Laguna Foundation relies on financial support from the community to continue our work to restore, conserve, and educate children and the public about the importance of the Laguna.
 - Please consider making a donation of any amount and become a member today!
 - Laguna Legacy Society members provide lasting support for the work of the Laguna Foundation by remembering the Laguna Foundation in their will or estate plan. Contact Development Director Bev Scotland: bev@lagunafoundation.org or 527.9277x106.

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