

Volunteers help restore Laguna uplands habitat

by Dawn Pillsbury
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SEBASTOPOL — Some 40 people gathered on Laguna de Santa Rosa uplands property last Saturday to remove fences and invasive blackberry bushes on land that was once slated for a housing tract.

The Laguna Foundation and Sonoma Land Trust organized the work day at the property, which was rescued from development with a forever-wild easement.

A plan in the 1980s to develop the Palm Terrace subdivision on the site drew community protest that resulted in the current open space easement.

"The neat thing about this property is its ability to galvanize the community," said Wendy Eliot of the land trust. "The community saved it from the proposed Palm Terrace development and it's fitting that we should continue in the spirit of this being a community project."

The site at the end of Palm Avenue, off Petaluma Avenue just south of Palm Drive hospital, looks out across the open space toward Santa Rosa. The foundation and trust are

working to restore the property, guided by recollections of what it used to look like before it was divided up for grazing.

"Grant Smith, a Pomo elder — he's 96 — told me that his grandmother's village was down there," said Eliot, pointing down the slope toward the Laguna. "And the tribe summered up here. There's such deep history here."

She said that though they will have to dig up a lot of the property to remove invasive blackberry, that they will not disturb the ground Smith said was a burial ground. They will only plant acorns there, said Eliot.

Dan Sherman, new executive director of the Laguna Foundation, said the foundation is putting the finishing touches on the restoration plan for the property, along with project manager Circuit Rider Productions.

"This is the first restoration of uplands property on the Laguna," said Sherman.

The foundation eventually hopes to create a 10,000-acre preserve connected with wildlife corridors and trails, but that is a long way in the future, said Sherman. Now there are 3,500 acres of



LONG HAUL — Volunteers last weekend helped haul a load of blackberry bushes off the the Laguna uplands site where the Palm Terrace subdivision was once planned.

undeveloped land owned by various groups including Santa Rosa and the state Department of Fish & Game.

In the more short term, Sherman said he hopes to extend the Joe Rodota trail

south to the property.

Sebastopol resident Steve Vallarino compared the work day to when he helped build the Super Playground at Libby Park.

"It's amazing to see people out here on a Saturday,

not cleaning their yards, but cleaning everyone's common yard," he said.

"It's good to be doing something positive rather than just complaining," said Healdsburg resident and forestry biologist Fred

Euphrat.

Eliot said there will be more work days to finish removing blackberry and planting days in January and February when volunteers can help plant native species, including Oregon ash, black oak, coast live oak, valley oak, yellow willow, hawthorne, blue elderberry, California wild rose, California blackberry, rush and sedge.

This winter they also plan to build a trail that will lead to a bench overlooking the Laguna. The bench is a memorial to environmentalist Moira Chatton who died Jan. 1, 2002, said her husband, Greg Chatton. Moira was on the Circuit Rider board, chair of the Sierra Club land use committee, a member of Leadership Santa Rosa and taught English to farm workers, he said.

The project is funded with \$72,000 in grants from the, State Coastal Conservancy, Nature Restoration Trust, Strong Foundation, Sonoma County Community Foundation and the Moira Chatton Memorial Fund.

To help, call the Laguna Foundation, 823-8810.