The California Department of Fish and Game considers Laguna wetlands to be a top priority. The agency has begun to purchase property and easements from willing sellers in the Laguna. Many key habitat sites straddle the channel where late spring flooding reduces their agricultural value, but makes them prime candidates for restoration. The overall goal of these purchases is to once again unify habitats that have been broken into fragments. Eventually these lands will be designated the "Laguna Wildlife Area", and could total more than 1,000 acres.

One of the Department of Fish and Game parcels is located just over a mile north of Sebastopol. Five non-profit groups are working with the agency to restore wetland habitat and improve water quality. Volunteers have installed over 700 plants including box elder, dogwood, elderberry, hawthorn, Oregon ash, valley oak, and local willow.

This project meets the goals to coordinate resource management, restore native habitats, recover native species, improve water quality, improve integrated floodplain management and provide educational opportunities.

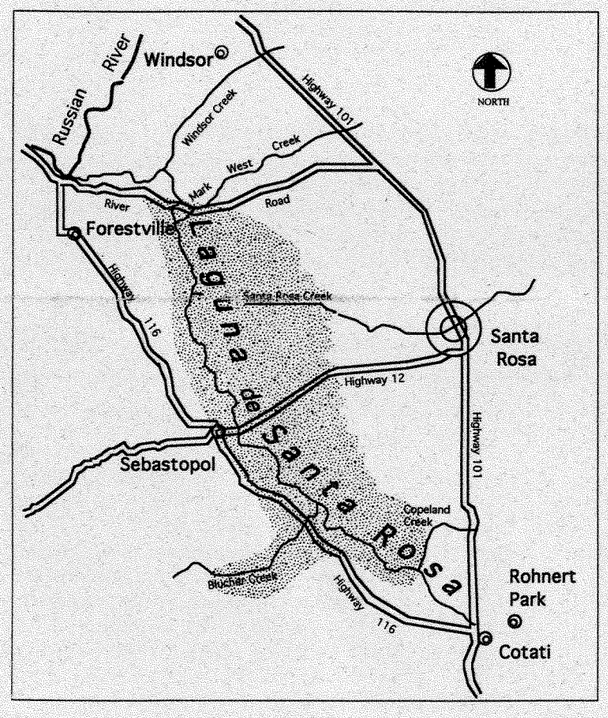
Public Access to the Laguna

A POPULAR WAY to see the Laguna de Santa Rosa is to walk or bicycle along the paved Joe Rodota Trail which stretches from the oak grasslands of west Santa Rosa (Merced Avenue) to downtown Sebastopol (Petaluma Avenue). This trail passes through some of the last riparian forest and is maintained by the Sonoma County Regional Parks Department.

Along Santa Rosa Creek, a gravel maintenance road owned by the Sonoma County Water Agency can be used by walkers, runners, equestrians and mountain bikers. In the Laguna area, access to this pathway is via Willowside Road. Under the Santa Rosa Creek Master Plan, access to the Laguna would be expanded.

Public access to the Laguna is limited and needs to be improved. The Laguna de Santa Rosa Park Master Plan calls for developing a trail system of paved trails, unpaved hiking paths and interpretative trails to meet recreational needs .

These projects help meet the goals to coordinate resource management, improve public access and educational opportunities and preserve and enhance scenic values.



The CRMP Process

Coordinated Resource Management Planning (CRMP) is a process for people with diverse interests to work together to identify resource issues, develop goals and prioritize projects. Cooperation is voluntary and decisions are made by consensus. There are more than 100 CRMP projects throughout California.

Landowners, as well as representatives from agricultural organizations, environmental groups, and federal, state and local agencies make up the 35-member CRMP Task Force for the Laguna de Santa Rosa. The Santa Rosa Subregional System and the Sonoma County Water Agency funded the project.

The Task Force and its subcommittees have identified the key goals and implementation strategies that form the Coordinated Resource Plan for the Laguna de Santa Rosa. The Plan will be reviewed and updated annually. If you have suggestions about the plan or specific projects, please contact the Laguna Foundation.

Replanting the Riparian Forest

THE RIPARIAN FOREST of the Laguna de Santa Rosa floodplain has nearly disappeared. Woodland restoration is the key to increasing wildlife because this habitat type is biologically productive and provides more diversity than any other. The valley oak (*Quercus lobata*) is the crown jewel of the Laguna's riparian forest. These stately trees rise above the smaller box elders, ashes and willows of the tree canopy.

Through the Laguna Tree Care Project, 250 student and 100 adult volunteers have cared for over 100 valley oak seedlings at Department of Fish and Game property at Walker Avenue in Sebastopol. Third through sixth grade students and adults planted, water, weed and monitor the young trees. They have also planted many other native plants that are important for wildlife habitat including hawthorn, rose and willow.

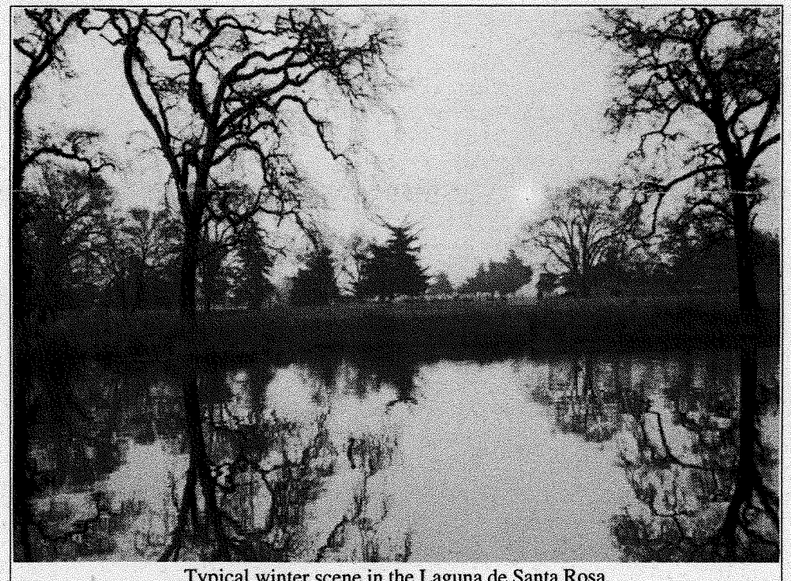
The project has demonstrated that tree care and stewardship are easiest to teach when students are involved over a period of time. Many students began by cutting and assembling the screens and collars and weed cloth, and planting acorns. Site visits and classroom lessons gave project organizers the opportunity to engage the interests of the students. Teachers have also looked for ways to integrate the field trips into the class curriculum.

Acorns to Oaks is another project to restore the riparian forest of the Laguna. For the past four years, interns from Sonoma State University (SSU) have planted and cared for over 1,000 oak trees on properties owned by the City of Santa Rosa Subregional System. The interns also collect and germinate native oak seed stock from the Laguna and provide plant protection to naturally regenerating oaks.

Each year, between two and five interns from SSU's environmental restoration program participate in the Acorns to Oaks project. Student involvement ranges from one semester to two years. Circuit Rider Productions and the City of Santa Rosa provide supervision and guidance to the interns. Circuit Rider also provides training and nursery stock, and the City of Santa Rosa contributes supplies and land. The Sonoma County Fish and Wildlife Advisory Board and the City of Santa Rosa help fund the project.

These projects meet the goals to restore native habitats, accomplish recovery of native species, improve educational opportunities and enhance scenic values

To find out how you can become involved with projects in the Laguna de Santa Rosa, see page 4.



Typical winter scene in the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

LOCAL OAK STOCK

USING LOCAL genetic stock for restoration work is important because these species are adapted to specific environmental conditions. Oak trees in the Laguna are adapted to saturated soils and can tolerate winter flooding. Local plants are also part of the complex web connecting native insects, birds and other wildlife species.

Although it's not clear why, not all oak trees are good acorn producers. It is especially important to preserve and protect the more prolific oak trees.