

1002.13

The Press Democrat

June 7, 2002

TRAIL: Restoration plan took 4 years, nearly a million dollars

CONTINUED FROM PAGE B1

guna restoration at Sebastopol was launched in the 1980s by citizens' groups who realized the area's potential.

The city incorporated the restoration plan in its 1992 general plan, but there was no money for any work until 1998, when Sebastopol resident Emmett Blincoe donated \$200,000 in memory of his nature-loving wife.

Four years, and \$750,000 — in donations, grants and city funding — later, the land is beginning to return to the wild.

Mallards and cattails have taken up residence in the rain-water-filled ponds. Snow geese wheel overhead. White black-

berry flowers, golden California poppies and the pale pastels of wild radish color the fields. Bird calls and the hum of insects fill the air.

"When you get out there, you're far away from a lot of people and things, and it just gives you a whole different feel for what the Laguna used to be like 200 years ago," Webster said.

The loop trail will eventually connect with a trail system to be built by the city of Santa Rosa over its 1,400 acres of farmland near the Laguna.

The city hopes to complete the trails within the next five years, said Miles Ferris, director of the city Utilities Department.

The Laguna de Santa Rosa is a broad natural wetland stretching from Corati to the Russian River. It once teemed with wildlife and vast oak woodlands.

Since settlement of the area began in the 1800s, however, the Laguna has been drained for farming and channeled for flood control. Much of its original wildlife was driven out and most of the oak trees were cut down.

As part of the Sebastopol restoration project, volunteers and workers from the nearby Barlow Co. have planted hundreds of valley oaks and other native trees and shrubs, including willows, black walnuts, hawthorn and Oregon

ash.

Old fencing has been removed and bird boxes installed. An aluminum floating bridge carries hikers across the Laguna itself, deep, dark and green in this location and hidden among a tangle of trees and vines.

The entrance to the loop trail is behind the Laguna Youth Park or from the parking lot of the Sebastopol Community Center, both on Morris Street.

Bicycles aren't allowed, but visitors can bring dogs on leashes.

You can reach Staff Writer Carol Benfell at 521-5259 or cbenfell@pressdemocrat.com.