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**Foundation
funds pilot
restoration
project**

by Dawn Pillsbury
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SEBASTOPOL — The Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation has pulled together money from several sources to fund a new pilot restoration project for the beleaguered waterway.

"We want to create more ponding of the water, to slow down the flow and create habitat," said Kim Cordell, president of the foundation board and manager of the \$130,000 project.

She said the Laguna has suffered from human activity in its uplands, including Santa Rosa and Cotati, as well as along its banks.

"It's been intentionally

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filled in in the past," she said, explaining that before the Clean Water Act came into effect in the '60s, farmers and grazers would bulldoze fill into the streambed for more land or to speed water runoff from their properties.

The project will use heavy equipment to try to undo some of that damage in from two to four acres on Department of Fish & Game land, just northeast of where High School Road meets Occidental Road. Work will start in August or September, she said.

"There used to be swales and little mounds" in the Laguna, she said. "It was kind of rolling, not flat like it is now." She said this fall they will move clear out former swales and move streambed silt into mounds. In the spring, they will plant vegetation to hold the new formations.

But because silt is still moving in from upstream, mainly due to the Sonoma County Water Agency's flood control measures in Santa Rosa and Cotati and natural siltation from the highly erodable Sonoma Mountain, the Laguna will continue to

silt up. The newly cleared area will serve as a baseline for figuring out how much silt gets deposited in the stream.

"We don't know how fast it's happening, just that it is," said Cordell. The Water Agency and Army Corps of Engineers have been studying siltation on the Laguna for years and have been unable to answer that question, she said.

Funding for the project comes from state habitat enhancement grants, mitigation funds from development projects in Santa Rosa and fines levied against the Water Agency by the Regional Water Quality Control Board for a silt spill into the Laguna, she said.

The foundation's goal is to preserve and restore at least 10,000 acres of the Laguna with connected riparian corridor, deep water lake habitat, seasonal wetlands and vernal pools, she said. Rising real estate prices stand in the way of that goal, she said.

"The land value is going up, even if that land is not suitable for vineyards or houses," she said. "We support our long-standing farmers. But when they sell, it would be great if they could sell to a public agency or a non-profit so the land can be restored."

She said some of the 10,000 acres will be on private property, but only if the owners agree to forever-wild easements.

"We're doing this restoration for our children and grandchildren," explained Cordell.

If a solution is not found for siltation problems on the Laguna, Cordell said

Sebastopol will face flooding problems as bad as those of the River communities.

"The Laguna is what Sebastopol depends on for flood control," she said. "If silt keeps being deposited, the winter flood level will keep rising."

For more information on the Foundation, call 823-8810.

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