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Sebastopol support on Laguna study

By EILEEN KLINEMAN
Staff Writer

SEBASTOPOL — In front of a standing-room-only crowd, the City Council Tuesday enthusiastically received a detailed study of the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

Although council action on the proposed plan for preservation of the waterway is months away, committee members already are finding support.

"The first steps have already been taken," said Bob Sharp, chairman of the group that prepared the report.

The study by 12 residents proposes not only city monitoring and enhancement of the wetlands, but countywide efforts to do the same. And those already have begun.

A new county committee also is taking up the cause of preserving the 12-mile lagoon that is the second largest marshland in Northern California.

Among the goals of the group that met earlier this month are to halt fill and dumping into the lagoon and "to turn it into a world class wildlife marsh," said George

Snyder, a member of the Sonoma County Wildlife Advisory Board and one of the founders of the county laguna committee.

Wildlife enthusiasts said their first goal is to preserve the habitat, but other outcomes of their efforts could be maintaining open space, educating the public and developing recreation areas.

"Bird watching is becoming a great industry. This is could be a boon to Sebastopol," observed Snyder.

Committee members also stressed the flood-control function of the marshlands, which absorb water that otherwise would go into the Russian River.

The study calls on the city to obtain federal and state funding to annex, buy and enhance parcels along the laguna.

West county Supervisor Ernie Carpenter, who is helping form the countywide committee, told the council Tuesday that money could be available if a state park lands bond act passes on the June ballot.

Committee member Helen Libeu predicted the laguna will be ahead

of the race for the bond funds because of the council's action to form the laguna committee last year.

"Everyone's going to be scrambling for that money and fortunately you all went and initiated something. We appreciate your taking a leadership position," she said.

The council, in turn, presented each of the committee's 12 members with a certificate of appreciation.

The study was referred to the Sonoma County Planning Commission, which will hold a public hearing within the next few weeks. Then the report will come back to the council for action on specific recommendations, including hiring someone or authorizing a current city staff member to monitor the laguna for illegal development or dumping.

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