

Laguna committee reforms to protect original study plan

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STIMES

By Mike Jasper

They're mad as hell, and they're not taking it anymore.

Disappointed by what they see as a dilution of the original Laguna report, several members of the Laguna Advisory Committee held a press conference Monday to lobby for complete adoption of the report by Sebastopol City Council.

The press conference took place at the home of Suzanne Nelson, one of the original committee members. Nelson's home is perched on a hill overlooking the laguna.

"Welcome to the most scenic overlook of the Laguna de Santa

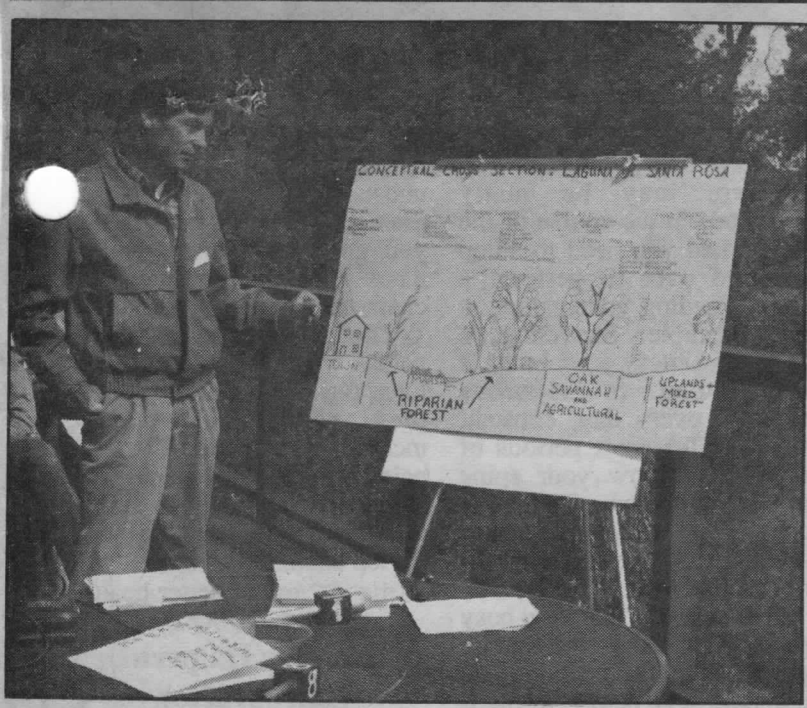
Rosa," said Bob Sharp, former chairman of the committee.

Sharp said the theme of the conference was simple: the laguna's in trouble.

Many members expressed dismay at the treatment the laguna study received from the Sebastopol Planning Commission, specifically what they saw as compromises on "no net fill" of the laguna and no development within the 76-foot flood plain, which serves as an outlet for the Russian River during floods.

The committee members charged

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MAPPING STRATEGY — Harold Appleton points at a chart that shows an environmental cross-section of the Laguna de Santa Rosa. Committee members spoke with the press Monday to urge City Council to embrace the original report.

Laguna . .

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that the planning commission and city staff had emphasized "no net fill" but had allowed for exceptions to the construction below the 76-foot flood plain.

"The city that has shown leadership is now apparently abandoning this position," Sharp said.

Helen Libeu, who Sharp introduced as a "great leveler of bureaucrats," said that recently the Army Corp of Engineers revised the map of the Laguna flood plain to a flood way. In a floodway, no development below the 76-foot elevation would be allowed at all, thereby making the "no net fill" requirement meaningless.

Libeu further charged that city staff had been meeting with the Water Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers to have Sebastopol's laguna redesignated a flood plain, according to a conversation she had with Bill Brick of the Army Corps of Engineers.

Brick could not be reached for comment.

Committee members also charged that "no net fill" was to be applied only to projects already under development, such as on Morris and Johnson streets. However, the planning commission interpreted a new development called Palm Terrace to be qualified for a no net

counter lobbying, we won't get it changed," she said. Terrace to be qualified for a no net fill construction below the flood plain.

Another former committee member, realtor Bill Haigwood, criticized Paul Schoch's earlier estimation that if all of the flood plain were filled in the areas zoned for construction, it would only raise the level of the laguna by five-eighths of an inch.

"If it's the five-eighths of an inch that ruins your \$20,000 oriental rug, then it's an important five-eighths of an inch," Haigwood said.

Members of other organizations, such as Sean Webb of Sebastopol Tomorrow and Brenda Adelman of

the Sierra Club, supported the committee in their concerns.

Committee members think the Laguna is in immediate danger of being destroyed, because of habitat destruction, physical invasion of the flood plain by development and pollution, much of it legal pollution from wastewater discharge.

They believe the Laguna needs a central coordinating agency and that Sebastopol should be the lead agency to save the Laguna.

Libeu said a public hearing on the planning commission's recommendations would not be enough to change the minds of city council.

"If we don't get it changed by counter lobbying, we won't get it changed," she said.

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care of Sebastopol

As many of you know the recent report by the Laguna Advisory Committee was 160 pages long. It took quite a lot of discussion and compromise to create the document. The chair of the committee, Bob Sharp, a retired biologist, was given a plaque by the members of the group for "his vision, dedication and exemplary leadership." I understand that the project would not have been as successful without his dedication.