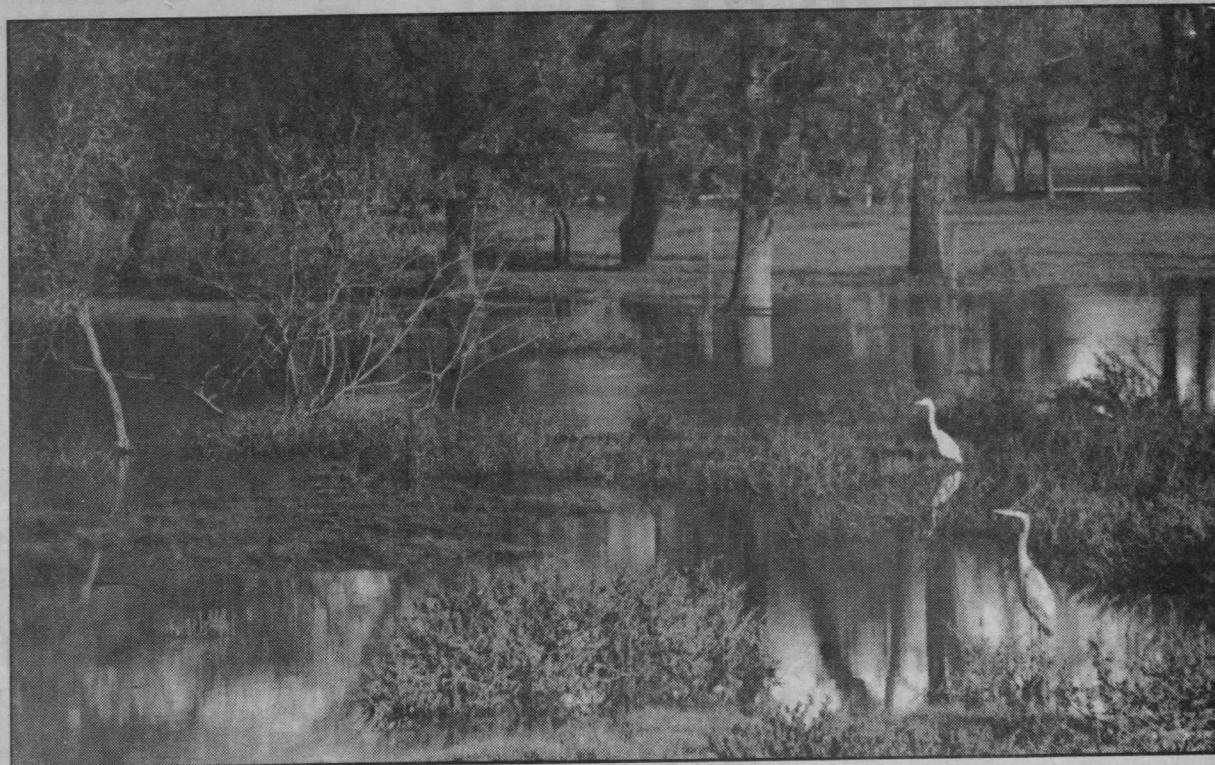


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WET OR DRY — There appears to be no middle ground when it comes to saving the Laguna or preserving property rights. See story at left for peoples' reactions.

(Times & News photo by John H.K. Riley)

VOLUME 99 NUMBER 31 • 25 CENTS PER COPY • SEE

Laguna report spawns town debate at council

Environmental vs. commercial concerns argued

By Mike Jasper

Four hours of discussion on the Laguna de Santa Rosa. Four hours of impassioned testimony. Four hours of the Sebastopol City Council's undivided attention. Four hours of polarized citizens, caught between nature and the pocketbook.

Four hours and it could have lasted four more.

Some wore blue badges that read "Friends of the Laguna." Some wore stern faces, expressing fears of declining property values or businesses.

"Let's keep the wetlands wet and the drylands dry," said Guenter Meiberg, owner of Sebastopol Ready Mix which is situated within the floodplain on Morris St.

Some said they knew where to draw the line — especially realtor Bill Haigwood.

"We need help," said Haigwood of his committee's efforts to preserve the Laguna. "We think it's going to have to come from possibly as high as the Federal government."

Over 100 people filled the Community Center (also in the floodplain) Monday night to either save the Laguna or their property. Few spoke of compromises between the two.

Mayor Tom Miller was quickly disqualified from the proceedings. Cole Ford, the company he works for, owns property in the disputed Laguna flood plain. Since it could represent a financial conflict of interest, City Attorney Larry McLaughlin advised Miller that he should sit in the audience during the public hearing.

This is an issue that hits home quick.

Sebastopol's planning consultant, Bruce Aspinall, kicked off the

meeting, summarizing the past public hearings undertaken by the city's planning commission.

The commission, he explained, had addressed the executive summary of the report, commenting and amending the 48 recommendations suggested by the Laguna committee.

Many committee members believed their recommendations had been watered down by the planning commission. However, just as many felt that the planning commission had only amended the "idealistic" suggestions for adoption to a very real world of dollars and cents.

Aspinall said the commission had agreed that the Laguna needed a "long-range plan," but that it focused on "identification of properties that are appropriate for no development below the 76-foot

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