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Flood

Continued from Page B1

and instream vegetation. We'd like to preserve a diversity of habitat," Cox said.

Engineers have known since the 1960s that the laguna channel would have to be widened as Rohnert Park grew and runoff to storm drains increased. The Sonoma County Water Agency began planning the project in 1987, but put dredging on the back burner when it was unable to find a cost-efficient place to dump the excavated dirt, said Randy Poole, the agency's general manager.

The project also had to wait until the Stony Point Road bridge over the laguna was widened, which was done last year, said Robert Morrison, deputy chief engineer at the water agency.

But the delay has caused considerable grief to Rohnert Park homeowners, because some of the catch

basins in their streets are lower than the laguna's high-water level.

In March 1995, and again on Jan. 27 and Feb. 4 this year, the rain-swollen laguna began to back up into creeks and channels in the northern half of the city, said Ron Brust, city public works director.

The flow in the drains then reversed, carrying water from the creeks and channels onto city streets.

At the storms' height, water swirled three to four feet deep on Flores, Fescue and Fauna avenues near the golf course. Marin Avenue and the Rancho Verde Mobile Home Park also were flooded.

The waters covered intersections and swept into attached garages. Some residents said their cars were ruined by the high water.

Residents of Flores Avenue, a cul-de-sac, were completely cut off, homeowners told the City Council on Feb. 13.

"At 2 a.m. about a half-dozen of us were trying to clear debris from

the storm drain," said homeowner John Grubb. "The water stood at my waist as I stood in the street."

Some said their emergency calls got a cold response from City Hall.

"I was told we were living in a flood zone and we could expect to be flooded," Pete George said. "Do you know how helpless a person feels?"

Morrison said he believes the widening project can move forward now because the county seems willing to accept the dredged dirt at the landfill, where it would be used daily to cover refuse.

If all goes well, the dredging could get under way by spring 1997, Morrison said.

Flooding also occurred in January and February on three streets in the city's G section, so-called because the street names all begin with that letter.

The problems there were not caused by the laguna, but by overflowing storm drains that had become one-third to one-half

clogged with silt, rocks and gravel.

The sediment problem is a new phenomenon for Rohnert Park, said City Manager Joe Netter.

In past years, the small amount of silt carried into the storm drains was easily flushed away by the rain. But landslides on Sonoma Mountain during recent wet winters have resulted in enormous amounts of rock and gravel being washed into the drains, Netter said.

The city already has cleaned out the affected drains and removed about 2,000 cubic yards of sediment. The \$300,000 cost is being split between the city and the water agency.

To eliminate the problem, the water agency plans to build a large silt basin on Coleman Creek at Petaluma Hill Road. The basin would allow heavy materials to settle before water reached storm drains. The basin would have to be cleaned regularly.

The project could not be finished before 1998 or 1999 and will cost hundreds of thousands of dollars.