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Golf course foes link up

by Frank Robertson
Sonoma West Staff Writer

SEBASTOPOL — Environmental groups began teaming up this week for a concerted effort to halt the city of Santa Rosa's plan to build a golf course in the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

"A golf course does not belong in the Laguna any more than one belongs in Yosemite or any other unique natural wildlife setting," said Helen Shane, of Sebastopol Tomorrow.

Sebastopol Tomorrow, the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, the Sonoma County Conservation Coalition, and the Audubon Society are among those expressing alarm over the 180-acre golf course proposed just east of Sebastopol.

The coalition of environmen-

tal interests may formally organize to oppose the project, according to opponents who attended a meeting last week with the Santa Rosa City Council's golf course committee.

"A lot of organizations are willing to step forward on this," said Kim Cordell, the Laguna Foundation's executive director. "The groundswell of support from the community has been really strong."

The Laguna Foundation Board of Directors met this week to take up the golf course project and issued a formal statement of opposition to a golf course on the Kelly Farm, said Foundation President Bill Haigwood.

From the Foundation's perspective, "A golf course is not consistent" with the Foundation's goals of "restoration and preservation of the (Please see *Golf* page A13)

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Laguna," said Haigwood.

Last week's golf course meeting drew about 50 people, including Sebastopol Mayor Kathy Austin and Councilman Bill Roventini, who attended as representatives of the city.

Austin and Roventini came away concerned about the lack of civility among some golf course opponents. Roventini called the meeting informative but "lacking of decorum."

Austin found the "intoler-

ance and close-mindedness" of some environmentalists to be "very disheartening," said Austin, in an editorial page commentary in this edition of Sonoma West.

But after last week's meeting Austin said she's convinced the plan is a poor idea even with the proposed restoration of 138 acres as wildlife habitat.

The site between Highway 12 and Occidental Road is on the 318-acre Kelly Farm that Santa Rosa irrigates with treated water produced at the city's Llano Road sewage plant.

"I do not believe the majority

of residents in Sebastopol want a golf course on Kelly Farm," said Austin, in her commentary this week. "I know there are many golfers who would I like it ... I also know there is a core of opposition that is willing to sue and will stick it out as long as it takes to defeat the effort. I told Mayor Wright [Santa Rosa Mayor Sharon Wright] that in my opinion, it is not worth pursuing."

Opponents argue that playing golf at the Kelly Farm would violate the Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP) that spells out long-range goals for managing the

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Laguna's remaining 21,000 acres of undeveloped wetlands and open space.

The 1995 CRMP agreement involved community groups, landowners, and public agencies, including the city of Santa Rosa.

CRMP task force members "were clear that intensive recreational development, such as sports fields and golf courses, were incompatible" with the long-term goals of agricultural preservation and habitat enhancement, said a Laguna Foundation statement.

West County Supervisor

Mike Reilly has also weighed in against the golf course, calling it "a dramatic conflict" with the CRMP agreement.

Reilly has also questioned whether a golf course is compatible with the Llano Road extension (bypass) that is proposed through the Kelly Farm property.

The Sebastopol City Council has made the Llano Road connector "their top transportation priority" to relieve traffic congestion in downtown Sebastopol, said Reilly. In terms of community importance the Llano Road bypass "would take precedence over the golf

course," Reilly has told Santa Rosa officials.

"I would be hard-pressed to support the cumulative impact of both the bypass and the golf course," said Reilly.

It is unclear whether the \$15 million Llano bypass, which is one of the projects that would be funded by a sales tax hike scheduled for a vote this November, will attract the level of environmental opposition gearing up against the golf course.

So far, "The Laguna Foundation has not taken a position on the bypass," said Haigwood.