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LAGUNA

# Proposal for golf course faces suit

By MIKE MCCOY Staff Writer

In a meeting that quickly turned contentious Monday, Laguna de Santa Rosa preservationists told Santa Rosa and Sebastopol city leaders they will sue to stop any attempt to build a golf course next to the wildlife-rich waterway.

The threats were made during a study session of an eight-member golf course subcommittee composed of two council members from each city, golfers, and property owners near the proposed site of the golf course — the 320-acre Kelly Farm located on Sebastopol's easterly doorstep.

The meeting was part of an effort proposed by Santa Rosa to find out what objections it must overcome to build the course and whether it would be financially feasible to do so.

After two hours of testy debate and no consensus, Santa Rosa Mayor Sharon Wright said, "The

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next step is do we want to proceed and spend \$300,000 to \$400,000 on an environmental study of the site."

Wright said that decision, following further discussions with Sebastopol council members, likely will be made by her council in the next 30 days.

Kelly Farm was purchased by Santa Rosa in the 1970s as part of its wastewater disposal program and the land is leased by a farmer for silage production. The land became the top choice for a second city golf course in mid-1996 after plans to add another 18 holes next to the Bennett Valley Golf Course ran into wetland problems.

But the problem is Kelly Farm resides next to the meandering laguna, a 22,000-acre waterway that extends from Cotati to the Russian River and is home to hundreds of species of plants and birds. Nearly two-dozen people, mostly

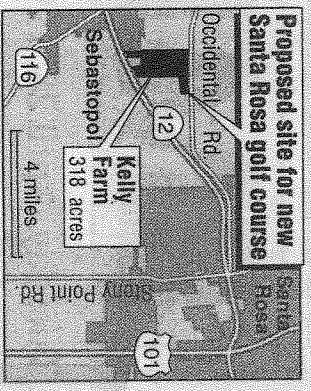
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representing the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation and Sebastopol Tomorrow, showed up Monday to claim that an 18-hole, 160-acre course could not be built without disrupting hundreds of different animals and plants that call the laguna home.

Laguna foundation member Bill Halgwood, a real estate broker and convert to the laguna's preservation, rejected Santa Rosa's overtures to sit on the committee noting that it would be "a conflict of interest" to his mission to restore the laguna to its historical status.

"I don't think the Indians had golf courses in the laguna," he said. But contentions that the laguna would be better off without a golf course were disputed by Marco Waaland, a founding member of the Laguna Foundation and a biologist who conducted a 1996 study of the site on Santa Rosa's behalf.

Waaland's study concluded that Kelly Farm is large enough to build a full-sized, 160-acre golf course while still providing a large enough buffer to protect the laguna and wetlands from its impacts.



Waaland said the land adjoining the meandering portion of the laguna near the proposed course is "already degraded (due to farming) and doesn't have a lot of habitat value."

Waaland said allowing Santa Rosa to build a golf course, much of it at least a quarter mile from the waterway, would result in the city putting money toward restoring the laguna and surrounding high-quality wetland habitats as part of the overall project.

But foundation member Kim Cordell said allowing any intensive recreational use within the laguna's environs "would be a foot in the door to break up this land."