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Laguna Wetlands recognized by international panel



By Hattie Brown February 4, 2011 12:35 am

The Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetland Complex was named a Wetland of International Importance by the Ramsar Convention on World Wetlands Day, February 2, 2011.

The Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetland Complex is located in Sonoma County, west of the City of Santa Rosa and east of the city of Sebastopol.

The main channel of the Laguna de Santa Rosa waterway runs from Cotati/Rohnert Park to the Russian River. The site is within the larger Laguna de Santa Rosa watershed. It is the largest tributary to the Russian River. The majority of the population of Sonoma County lives within the 254-square mile Laguna de Santa Rosa Watershed.

The Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetland Complex is of particular international importance due to the rare and endangered plant and animal species it supports, the biodiversity of the region - one of the world's few diverse "hotspots," and the presence of unique vernal pool environments. Three endangered plants: Sonoma sunshine, Sebastopol meadowfoam, and Burke's goldfields, as well as one endangered animal - the California Tiger Salamander, are found in this important area.

The Ramsar Convention

Since 1971, wetlands all over the world have been designated by the Ramsar Convention to highlight the importance of wetlands and the many ecosystem services they provide. Ramsar is not an acronym. "Ramsar" or the "Ramsar Convention" is the abbreviated name for the "Convention on Wetlands of International Importance especially as Waterfowl Habitat." This treaty was signed in Ramsar, Iran 40 years ago and is known as Ramsar for short.

The Ramsar Convention was born out of the interest in protecting migratory waterfowl, which utilize wetland habitats across national boundaries. Currently, the Ramsar Convention has grown to highlight the many important ecosystem services wetlands provide including flood control, species habitat, and human recreation, just to name a few. The Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetland Complex is the 1,930th site in the world to earn this distinction and the 29th in the United States. Five other sites in California are recognized by Ramsar. Locally, the Bolinas Lagoon and Tomales Bay are listed as Ramsar sites.

The Ramsar Convention protects wetland habitat through non-regulatory means by raising public awareness of the importance of wetlands in our global ecology. The Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation led a group of private and public land owners through a lengthy process of petitioning Ramsar to recognize the Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetland Complex as a Wetland of International Importance. Find out more about Ramsar at www.ramsar.org and the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation at www.lagunadesantarosa.org.

This new distinction underscores the value and uniqueness of Sonoma County. We live in a special place - one recognized as important not just locally, but internationally.

Hattie Brown is Conservation Science Program Manager at the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation. Cotati Creek Critters is fiscally sponsored by the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, a 501(c)3 nonprofit public benefit corporation.

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Mailing Address: P.O. Box 2038 Rohnert Park, CA 94927 Office: 100 Professional Center Dr., Rohnert Park, 94928 Phone: 707-584-2222

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