

The Community VOICE



Sunday November 4, 2012

Volume 20 Issue 40

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Opportunities to get to know the Laguna



By Christine Fontaine November 2, 2012 12:00 am

The earliest maps of our region illustrate the Laguna de Santa Rosa as a series of isolated lakes, large and small. No doubt, the survey took place in the dry season because during the winter in 1842, the area would have been impassable on horseback. Through subsequent surveys (and our own modern experiences), we now know those lakes are a mosaic of interconnected wetlands – perennial wetlands, riparian wetlands, seasonal wetlands like vernal pools and the floodplain itself. The Laguna is a unique feature in the landscape that collects and holds water. It is wet but not year round in all places, and it is land – the best of both worlds for wildlife. The Laguna makes open space by creating one of the reasons Sonoma County is a special place to live. And it protects our communities by holding and slowing water during storm events.

Today, most of the Laguna and its floodplain are in private ownership, limiting the public's exploration for modern reasons, but there are places and special opportunities to develop your own connection to the Laguna. The Headwaters Loop Walk in Cotati is a great way to explore the southern reaches. Sebastopol's Laguna Wetland Preserve is located along one of those year-round "lakes" like those illustrated in the mid 1800's and provides year-round access to the Laguna, with often great wildlife sightings. During the winter, and after lots of rainfall, many people take to the water to investigate and experience the Laguna's wonders via kayak or canoe.

Now there is a new opportunity for everyone to learn about the natural world of the Laguna. Last May, the Laguna Foundation opened the Laguna Environmental Center. With Open House events occurring on the second Saturday of each month from 10 a.m.-3 p.m. and a growing list of educational talks, classes and walks, there are many ways to experience and create a deeper connection to the Laguna. The community now has a place where everyone, young and old, can get to know the Laguna, bird watch, picnic, touch the fur of Laguna mammals and develop a sense of place.

The center is located on the City of Santa Rosa's Stone Farm, an area of land that provided all the resources and tools of daily living for indigenous people going back thousands of generations, and a 112-acre remnant of the 1865 Llano de Santa Rosa land grant from the Mexican Government to Joaquin Carrillo. Second Saturday guided tours of the site include tales of the 1872 farmhouse and the agricultural history of the area, plus a peek at a historic barn that was first constructed to dry hops. Hops for the brewery industry were grown in the area as early as the 1850's and were highly prized for their high quality and wealth of pollen. The Laguna Environmental Center at Stone Farm is rich with natural and cultural history.

Our friends in the south watershed have a special invitation to come to the center on Saturday, Nov. 10, when the Cotati Creek Critters are making a group trip for the open house event. Bring a picnic. Participate in some fun, educational activities for the whole family about birds and mammals, and try your hand at weaving with Tule, an important wetland plant. Look toward the Laguna and bird watch over the pastures.

Take a guided tour. Consider making the drive north and visiting on Nov. 10 with your neighbors. The Laguna Environmental Center is located at 900 Sanford Road, a short drive west from Highway 101. We look forward to welcoming you here to celebrate the "Laguna de Santa Rosa – Ours to Protect."

Christine Fontaine is Director of Education Programs at the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation and has been fostering community connections to the natural world since 1996.

For more information about Laguna walks and classes, go to http://www.lagunadesantarosa.org/laguna_walks_classes.shtml.

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