



CHRISTOPHER CHUNG / The Press Democrat

Kenyon Webster, planning director for the city of Sebastopol, stands at the site of the extension of the Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetlands Preserve trail.

Loop trail set for lagoon wetlands

\$258,300 grant will pay for work on Sebastopol preserve

By **MATT WEISER**

THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

A grant from the California Coastal Conservancy will allow Sebastopol to build a loop trail in its Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetlands Preserve.

The conservancy board approved the \$258,300 grant at its meeting last week in Tiburon. The grant allows Sebastopol to continue restoring its preserve property and expanding amenities within the preserve.

"It's pretty nice," city Planning Director Kenyon Webster said about the grant. "It's going to be a significant additional trail segment."

Construction of the new trail segment is expected to begin this summer.

An existing trail runs for about a mile along the west edge of the preserve, which borders the lagoon channel itself.

But as Webster said, this trail "doesn't really go anywhere."

The new trail, using the grant funds, will run for about three-quarters of a mile and connect both ends of the existing trail to form a loop around the perimeter of the preserve, he said.

"When you get out there, you're far away from a lot of people and things, and it just gives you a whole different feel for what the lagoon used to be like 200 years ago," Webster said.

Laguna de Santa Rosa is a broad natural wetland stretching from Cotati to the Russian River.



It once teemed with wildlife and vast oak woodlands.

Since settlement of the area began in the 1800s, however, the lagoon has been drained for farming and channelized for flood control. Much of its original wildlife

was hunted and driven out, and most of its oak trees were cut down for firewood and construction material.

Sebastopol officials have been working for years to restore their small 20-acre patch of city-owned lagoon. Recent improvements include an outdoor classroom, interpretive signs, and a floating bridge across the channel to reach the existing trail.

The city also has replanted native grasses and oaks, and that will continue using a portion of the Coastal Conservancy grant. "I believe that area was historically an oak woodland environment," Webster said. "We'll be planting a lot of valley oaks, I expect."

You can reach Staff Writer Matt Weiser at 521-5257 or e-mail mweiser@pressdemocrat.com.