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City prepares to open up Laguna loop trail to public access

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• New 4,000-foot walking trail next to Highway 12 opens to public May 18

by Corey Young
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SEBASTOPOL — The city will open up more access to its Laguna de Santa Rosa Wetlands Preserve next week with the dedication of a 4,000-ft. walking trail on Saturday, May 18.

The trail will loop around the Barlow Company's apple waste spray field, between the Laguna channel and the Chevron station on Highway 12. It can be accessed from the Laguna Youth Park on Morris Street by crossing the floating bridge behind the park's baseball fields, said Planning Director Kenyon Webster.

The trail "adds a whole lot of area for the Laguna preserve," said Webster. "It really expands the Laguna walking opportunities."

A $258,000 grant from the California Coastal Conservancy made the trail project a reality, said Webster.

Construction on the loop trail started back in early fall 2001, but slowed because of winter rains. The trail is now nearly complete and ready for public use.

The path is made up of decomposed granite and other fine-grained quarry material, and meanders past native oak trees and grasses in the spray field. Volunteers and Barlow Company workers helped planted about 500 additional native trees, including valley oaks, willows, black walnuts, Hawthornes and Oregon Ash trees.

Workers have also removed old fencing and built bird boxes in some of the oak trees around the trail during a series of Laguna restoration days. Those restoration efforts also produced benches and trail markers for the project.

A trail guide with 20 stops will be linked to numbered posts along the path. Bicycles aren't allowed, but visitors can bring dogs on leashes. The trail will be open from sunrise until sunset.

Webster said Barlow Company employees did most of the work on the trail. The company was sanctioned

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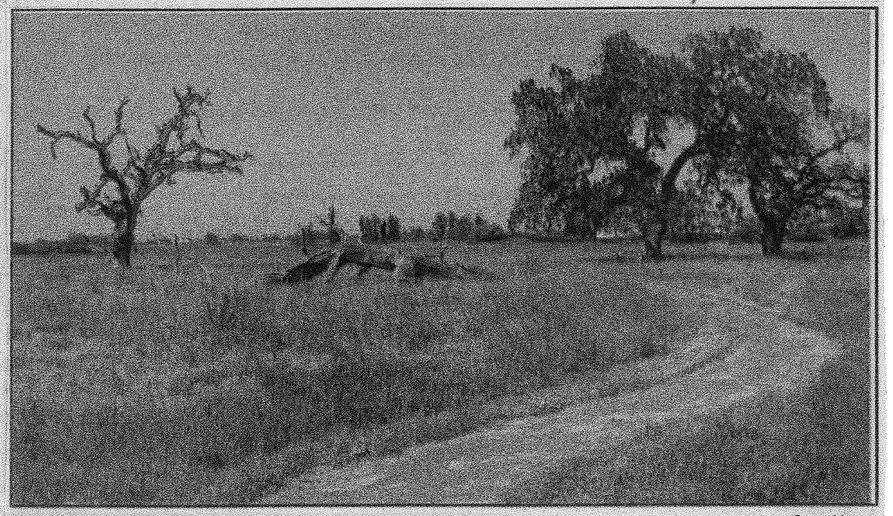

Corey Young

IN THE LOOP — The 4,000-ft. loop trail (seen above) around the Barlow Company's spray field near the Laguna de Santa Rosa is the latest addition to Sebastopol's wetlands preserve. The trail will officially open on Saturday, May 18 with a dedication at 10:30 a.m.

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by the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board after an apple waste line broke under the Laguna channel and had to contribute to Sebastopol's trail project as a result, he said.

Redwood Oil Company, which owns the Sebastopol Chevron station near the trail, also did restoration work at the north end of their property, due to a water quality violation at a different station, said Webster. The native trees the company planted will help screen the station from the view of trail users, he said.

In the future, the trail might connect with other recreational trails near the Laguna, said Webster. The Barlow spray field shares about 100 feet of its property line with one of Santa Rosa's irrigation farms, and the Sonoma County Open Space District has an agreement to allow trails on those farms, he said.

"It appears that's a real good possibility," said Webster, though a trail connection might be a few years away. Property to the north of the loop trail owned by John Balletto might also be opened up for recreation or restoration uses, said Webster.

"There are all these pieces kind of coming together to create a network of Laguna restoration and trails," he said.

Next week's dedication will take place at a new observation mound along the trail at 10:30 a.m. Guests will include State Assemblywoman Virginia Strom-Martin and Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation Executive Director Kim Cordell.

A group of artists who have painted scenes of the Laguna over the past several months will be painting along the new trail that day, said Webster.

To get to the dedication site, members of the public can park at the gravel lot behind the Youth Annex on Morris Street. Signs will guide visitors across the floating bridge to the observation mound. For information, contact the Sebastopol Planning Department at 823-6167.

Rodota trail will extend to SR

SANTA ROSA — The Joe Rodota Trail will be extended into downtown Santa Rosa this year thanks to a $250,000 grant awarded to Sonoma County last month from the California State Coastal Conservancy.

The new extension "will be a key link" in the trail system that connects Santa Rosa's urban population with some of the county's most scenic areas, said state Senator Wes Chesbro, who serves on the Coastal Conservancy.

Eventually the eight-foot wide paved hiking and biking trail trail will continue all the from Santa Rosa to Forestville.