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## **State Agency Approves Plan to Protect Laguna de Santa Rosa August 1, 2003**

The California State Coastal Conservancy has approved a plan that will assist conservation groups in permanently protecting areas of the Laguna de Santa Rosa.

*The Laguna de Santa Rosa Resource Atlas and Protection Plan* contains the most current and detailed maps of information about the natural and social resources of the Laguna, and an action plan that lays out the strategy for protecting the Laguna's critical habitat, floodplain, open space and recreational values. The plan places priority on preserving areas of ecological significance, important habitat for sensitive species, agricultural lands, and opportunities for public access. Specific areas identified for protection are the Laguna floodplain, riparian and oak woodlands, and seasonal wetlands including vernal pool ecosystems.

"The Conservancy considers the Laguna de Santa Rosa a regionally significant area of high priority. It is the second largest freshwater wetland system in Northern California, and is a resource of cultural, archaeological, biological, agricultural, open space and scenic value," said Maxene Spellman, Project Manager for the Conservancy's San Francisco Bay Area Conservancy Program.

Wendy Eliot, a Sonoma Land Trust project director who oversaw the plan's creation, said, "It identifies the highest priority lands of the Laguna so that public and private conservation monies are spent most effectively. The plan will facilitate the Land Trust's outreach to key landowners in the Laguna, so that we can work cooperatively to reach their conservation goals."

The plan's Resource Atlas contains 13 maps that are the result of a two-year study of a 35,000-acre area. The maps detail the natural and social resources of the Laguna and illustrate which specific areas are most important to preserve. There is a composite map showing which areas are the most pristine. The study also revealed that two-thirds of the acreage is either developed or planted in vineyards, leaving only 12,000 acres in a natural state. The Coastal Conservancy funded the \$47,000 study.



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The Sonoma Land Trust and the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation wrote the plan with input from representatives of 13 other public and private organizations.

Dan Schurman, executive director of the Laguna de Santa Rosa Foundation, said, “This is an important step towards achieving the goal of creating a 10,000-acre Laguna Preserve. It will help us focus our preservation efforts on those lands that are home to the most valuable and sensitive natural resources. We're now looking ahead to a companion plan focusing on restoring the Laguna.”

Sonoma County Agricultural Preservation and Open Space District staff participated in developing the plan.

General Manager Andrea Mackenzie said, “The Laguna de Santa Rosa is one of the County's signature landscapes and a high priority for preservation by the District. The Laguna Resource Atlas and Protection Plan will help further partnership efforts among the Laguna Foundation, Sonoma Land Trust and the District to preserve the Laguna's unique resources for the benefit of all Sonoma County citizens.”

The Laguna de Santa Rosa stretches 14 miles from Cotati to the Russian River. 4,028 acres are already protected through public or nonprofit agency ownership.