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## **Getting a Handle on Water Quality in the Laguna**

A report released today launches a new era in addressing the challenge of poor water quality in the Laguna de Santa Rosa. Representatives of the Laguna Foundation, the City of Santa Rosa and the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) announced publication of a report which is a first step toward the long-delayed development of a control plan to address water quality impairments for the Laguna, known as a Total Maximum Daily Load, or TMDL.

The Laguna, largest tributary of the Russian River, is designated by the federal Environmental Protection Agency as impaired under the Clean Water Act for six pollutants—more than any other water body on the North Coast. They include sediment, reduced dissolved oxygen, elevated temperature, nitrogen, phosphorus and mercury. The Laguna has long been a subject of concerns relating to urban and agricultural runoff, wastewater discharges, loss of flood control capacity due to sedimentation and impairment of conditions for wildlife and endangered species.

But that could finally begin to change with the release of today's report and launching of the TMDL planning process by the Regional Board. Entitled "The Altered Laguna", the report presents a "conceptual model" of the Laguna's hydrology and water quality dynamics, and dovetails with the watershed-scale Laguna Restoration and Management Plan published by the Foundation in 2006. The report identifies key processes and related management questions as well as current data gaps and key uncertainties of the Laguna ecosystem, and recommends next steps in developing and implementing the TMDLs.

“Given the complexity of watershed dynamics in the Laguna, this report is a significant step forward,” said Dr. Christina Sloop, the Foundation’s Research Director. “Without this work, we would certainly be looking at a much longer timeframe for completion of the TMDLs, and delay real improvement in the Laguna’s water quality.”

Matt St. John, lead staff for the Regional Water Board’s TMDL Unit, said “We appreciate the partnership with the Laguna Foundation in launching the development of the Laguna TMDLs. This report serves as the foundation from which we will develop a strategy to attain healthy water quality conditions in the Laguna watershed”.

Contributors to the report included expert consultants from TetraTech, Inc. and Philip Williams and Associates, a technical advisory group with experts from the City of Santa Rosa, the Regional Water Board, NASA Ames Research Center, UC Cooperative Extension, United State Geologic Survey, California Department of Fish and Game, Sonoma County Water Agency, Sonoma Ecology Center, the Occidental Arts and Ecology Center, and Sonoma State University. The document was peer reviewed by a group of outside experts at the San Francisco Estuary Institute.

Regional Water Board staff expect the public input process for development of the Laguna TMDLs to begin within the next year.

Copies of the report are available for download from the Laguna Foundation’s website, at [http://www.lagunafoundation.org/Data/Conceptual%20Model/Final\\_Report.htm](http://www.lagunafoundation.org/Data/Conceptual%20Model/Final_Report.htm).

**About the Laguna and the Foundation.** A complex of creeks, marshes, wetlands and oak woodlands extending from Cotati to Forestville, the Laguna de Santa Rosa is the largest tributary of the Russian River and Sonoma County’s richest area of wildlife habitat. Home to over 200 species of birds and many rare and charismatic species such as river otter, mountain lion, bobcat, gray fox, coyote and bald eagle, the Laguna drains the entire Santa Rosa Plain, including the cities of Windsor, Santa Rosa, Rohnert Park, Cotati and Sebastopol. Most of Sonoma County’s population lives in the Laguna watershed and relies upon it as our most significant local flood control feature.

Founded in 1989, the nonprofit Laguna Foundation is devoted to preserving, restoring and increasing understanding and appreciation of the unique ecology and beauty of the Laguna. The Foundation’s collaborative strategic approach involves landowners, business leaders, scientists, and educators as well as environmentalists. The Foundation conducts a celebrated wetland science education program for local youth, implements large-scale wildlife habitat restoration efforts and scientific research, and is in the midst of a capital fundraising campaign to rehabilitate a historic 19<sup>th</sup>-century farmstead to become the Laguna Learning Center.

***More information on the Laguna and the Laguna Foundation is available at [www.lagunafoundation.org](http://www.lagunafoundation.org)***