

Wetland considered at former dump site

Commission votes to restore 10,000 square feet of land

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An old illegal dump near the Watsonville Airport may soon be restored to the canyons native plant life — and the new owners may also create a wetland where there may never have been one before. The Planning Commission voted Monday night to allow the city redevelopment depart-

ment to begin to restore about 10,000 square feet of land southwest of the Watsonville Municipal Airport that were used as an illegal dump since the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989. Because the dump is located partially in the unincorporated section of the county, the county Planning Commission will also have to vote on the issue and present the results to the Coastal Commission.

But because of a quirk of the Coastal Commission's ruling on this restoration project in 1998, Airport Manager Don French said the airport is planning to create a wetland.

"We had one biologist look at some pictures and say that there may have once been a wetland there, so we spent \$200,000 to create a wetland, sloping the land above it and diverting water," French told the Planning Commission Monday night. The airport bought

the land in 1995 to use it as a clear zone that gives planes the clearance to begin landing sooner than they were allowed to before.

"Since we bought the land, we've put more money into satisfying the Coastal Commission than we spent to buy the land," French added.

The land, known as the Gilbertson property, is filled with construction debris, mostly from the 1989 earthquake, French said. But since the quake, about 635,000 square yards of debris have been dumped at 854 and 852 Airport Blvd.

Besides filling in the landfill with 142,000 cubic yards of clean soil, the city plans to:

- Remove debris from the canyon slopes;
- Replant native species such as the Santa Cruz tarplant;
- Monitor to ensure that the land no longer

pollutes Harkins Slough;

■ Permanent preservation as open space of the renovated land; and

■ Public education about the site and the Harkins Slough wetlands habitat.

In other action, the Planning Commission agreed to allow a temporary residential permit in a commercial building at 375 Hushbeck Ave. The building, previously the Carpenters Hall, had been empty, but a family moved in after leasing it as an electrical repair shop. Now the family, whom building owner Jim Barsi declined to name, has been given a 30-day eviction notice. In the meantime, the city will allow the building to be used as a business-and-residential property.

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