

Federal committee not convinced of Laguna's value

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by John H.K. Riley

When the House Fish and Wildlife Subcommittee reconvenes next month, Congressman Doug Bosco will have to solve the ancient, avian conundrum of which came first, the chicken or the egg.

Only, rather than chickens the Democratic representative will substitute migratory birds — and wildlife and plants.

Before the summer recess, Bosco asked the committee to allocate \$20 million to create a 9,000-acre National Wildlife Refuge Laguna de Santa Rosa, extending from Cotati to Forestville and inclusive of the land

running along Sebastopol's eastern boundary.

The refuge would be managed by the federal Fish and Wildlife Service. Currently, Bosco says, "the Laguna suffers from a hodgepodge of government and private ownership."

Bosco and proponents of the plan envision the refuge to be home to a wide variety of plants, animals and waterfowl, including, they say, more than 230 types of birds and several state and federally listed rare, threatened or endangered species.

Some opponents say the Laguna doesn't merit federal designation while residents of the

lower Russian River are apprehensive about wastewater marshes being created in the Laguna.

During the hearings, held in late July, a spokesman for Fish and Wildlife Service said the area didn't warrant the federal designation, and resultant protection, because it was a minor nesting area and destination point for migratory birds.

But Bosco (D-Sebastopol) countered that given the opportunity the Laguna, which is the second largest fresh water marsh in the state, could again become a major area.

Hence, the question, What (Please turn to page A10)

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Laguna . . .

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comes first? piecemeal restoration of the Laguna then federal funding or the funds to help the restoration.

"If we act immediately, we can restore the Laguna to the days when it was a major stopping point for birds migrating along the Pacific coast ...," he said.

His view is shared by Sebastopol councilmember Anne Magnie, who spoke during the hearings, held in Washington D.C.

Said Magnie, "The hope is with the federal protective designation of a refuge that (the Laguna) will have the opportunity to do some self healing and become more like it once was."

Magnie was joined at the hearings by Bob Sharp, who chaired the Laguna Technical Advisory Committee. It was that committee's report, released in 1989, that was the impetus for Bosco's bill (H.R. 2548).

As well as a refuge for birds, Sharp cited studies showing the Laguna is home to 286 species of plants, 25 species of mammals, 19 species of fish, seven amphibians and nine species of reptiles.

Also, at least 76 archeological

sites have been identified.

Retired from federal Fish and Wildlife Service, Sharp also views the Laguna "... as a unique outdoor school room and laboratory for the study of plant and animal ecology ..." and as a natural storage basin for the flood waters of the Russian River, for which the Laguna is a southern tributary.

Adelman says her group is not opposed to establishment of a wildlife refuge in the Laguna, as long as it doesn't become part of Santa Rosa's long-range wastewater disposal plan.

"We are fearful that this designation will give federal blessings to the increased use of wastewater in this area as 'wildlife enhancement,'" she said.

That fear arises from Santa Rosa Utilities Board members studying the Kelly Farm Demonstration Wetland, an experimental marsh created with treated wastewater on 10 acres just east of the Laguna and Sebastopo.

Santa Rosa is considering the creation of 250 acres of wastewater-treated marshes as a viable option to comply with a Water Quality Control Board directive that Santa Rosa upgrade and expand its wastewater treatment facilities by 1995.