

MANAGEMENT PROBLEMS CONFRONTING
THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE
IN THE LAGUNA DE SANTA ROSA
SONOMA COUNTY, CALIFORNIA

The Laguna Action Committee, appointed by Congressman Doug Bosco, has been meeting for several months to determine a course of action for preservation and enhancement of the Laguna de Santa Rosa in Sonoma County, California.

This rather unique water course and flood basin is the second largest fresh water marsh in Northern California. Covering approximately 7,000 acres, it provides wildlife habitat, open space, a community separator, flood storage and a biological laboratory, adjacent to two large communities - Santa Rosa and Sebastopol.

Since western man arrived on the scene approximately 150 years ago, the Laguna has been encroached upon by agriculture and urbanization to the point where many of its original values have been severely downgraded.

Twelve or more land-use agencies at the Federal, State, County and local level have an interest or responsibility in the Laguna. This fact leads to overlapping and confusion in its management.

One of the most feasible management approaches appears to be establishment of a National Wildlife Refuge, combining lands acquired in fee by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game. A cooperative management arrangement between the two agencies is proposed, with California Fish and Game providing day-by-day management activities. This action is deemed particularly feasible since U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has no personnel based closer than the East Bay area, over 80 miles away.

The Refuge proposed would probably not exceed 5,000 acres in area. Since a substantial amount of land in the Laguna is already owned by the State of California, the County of Sonoma, and the City of Santa Rosa, some of these lands would probably be included in the Refuge Unit.

At this time, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service is showing some objection to proceeding with this type of cooperative management on a National Wildlife Refuge. However, this type of arrangement has a precedent on other National Wildlife Refuges in the United States.

Without this type of cooperative program on the part of U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, it is doubtful that a National Wildlife Refuge of feasible size can be established in the Laguna. An alternative type of program, probably far less effective, would be a second choice.

We urge the Wilderness Society to take up this matter with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service at the highest administrative level. The Sierra Club urges the adoption of the cooperative refuge management concept. This is likely to be the last opportunity to save the Laguna de Santa Rosa.