

89.17.2

Sunday 9-24-89

VV

19.1

The Press
Democrat

REFUGE URGED

Laguna's value, beauty hailed

By CHRIS SMITH
Staff Writer

SEBASTOPOL — It's not all it used to be, but enough people still love the flood-prone marshland between Sebastopol and Santa Rosa to fill an auditorium Saturday and vow to work together to save and enhance it.

State wildlife biologist Allan Buckmann recalled to the crowd of about 200 the days when the Laguna de Santa Rosa was "a dense tangle of forests and willow thickets," and when its unbothered vernal pools "produced waterfowl in numbers so great they would turn the sky dark on passing."

"It is our local equivalent of rain forest," Buckmann said.

Saturday's gathering was the State of the Laguna Conference at the Sebastopol Veterans' Memorial Building. People with a range of interests — biologists, Laguna-area residents, politicians, bureaucrats, environmentalists, builders, farmers, sportsmen — agreed that the challenges to preserving the Laguna are great, but so is their resolve.

Assemblyman Dan Hauser, D-Arcata, inspired the crowd with his tale of how, as a city councilman nearly 20 years ago in Arcata, he participated in a similar project that used reclaimed wastewater to convert a former dump into "a very productive marsh." Hauser said the area is now as popular with waterfowl as it is with tourists.

Rep. Doug Bosco, D-Sebastopol, recounted the bill he introduced last summer that seeks as much as \$20 million for purchasing land along the Laguna and creating the approximately 9,000-acre Laguna de Santa Rosa National Wildlife Refuge.

His bill declares that, "urban development, ineffective land and water management practices, overlapping federal, state and local jurisdictions and inadequate enforcement of existing regulations" have allowed the Laguna to be

89.17.2

The Press Democrat September 24, 1989

Laguna

P.D.

Continued from Page B1

lower, Santa Rosa on the east and the Sebastopol-Forestville area on the west. Conference speaker Suzanne Nelson, who has lived alongside the Laguna for 18 years, called the strip of wetlands, bankside forests and oak-dotted meadows "Sebastopol's almost hidden treasure." She and other speakers said the Laguna was once a thriving habitat for fish, waterfowl, mammals and native plants and trees, but development and uncoordinated use have taken their toll.

Friends of the Laguna said:

■ Areas of valley oaks and vernal pools have been developed for housing developments or vineyards. More than 75 percent of the wetlands have been lost.

■ Past releases of effluent from the regional sewage-treatment plant, most notably the huge illegal release of 1985, damaged the water quality. However, conference participants seemed to agree that current releases of highly treated wastewater are a benefit to the Laguna ecosystem, and that the benefit will increase with the enhancement of bankside vegetation that helps purify the water naturally.

■ Bank erosion has occurred after trees, cat-tails, tules and other vegetation are removed from the central channel for the creation of grazing land or other purposes.

■ There are, on the drawing boards, several transportation plans that could harm the Laguna, including one to extend Todd Road all the way across it and to build a Sebastopol bypass through it.

■ Runoff from neighboring dairies has hurt the water quality and reduced the population of fish.

"There's no reason we can't have agriculture next door," Dwight Caswell of the Sonoma County Farmlands Group told the conference. But, he said, farmers can't be expected to pay all the costs involved in protecting the Laguna out of their own pockets.

His sentiment that cooperative effort and coordinated management is essential if the Save the Laguna movement is to succeed was echoed again and again.

"This needs to be done with some comprehensive planning," said Marco Waaland, a biologist from Santa Rosa.

There seemed to be a consensus that the issues are complex and that a lasting resolution to the spoiling of the Laguna will come

only if the environmentalists, farmers, builders, residents and others involved treat each other as partners rather than adversaries.

The Laguna Committee meets on the fourth Monday of the month. Further information is available at Sebastopol City Hall.