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REPRESENTATIVE DOUGLAS H. BOSCO
OPENING REMARKS BEFORE THE
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE SUBCOMMITTEE REGARDING
HR 2548, THE LAGUNA DE SANTA ROSA NATIONAL
WILDLIFE REFUGE ACT

JULY 31, 1990

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your willingness to hold this hearing on my legislation to create a National Wildlife Refuge in the heart of Sonoma County's Laguna de Santa Rosa.

I would like to welcome two constituents of mine who have travelled to Washington to help me with this legislation. Sebastopol City Councilwoman Anne Magnie will be testifying before us today, and Mr. Robert Sharp, a former biologist for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, is available to answer any technical or biological questions about the Laguna. I am indebted to both of them for without their hard work there would be no legislation.

As the subcommittee is well aware, a number of highly-contentious resource debates now smoulder along the North Coast of California. Deep community divisions have arisen over how best to protect diminishing resources while still maintaining a viable local economy. Public demonstrations and counter-demonstrations over the fate of old-growth forests, for example, have now become a daily occurrence.

With these debates very much in mind, local governments, environmentalists, and the business and agricultural communities have come together to find common ground in support of protecting and restoring the Laguna de Santa Rosa area. Remarkably, I am

pleased to say that for the most part a consensus protection plan has been achieved. HR 2548 is the culmination of this effort.

Located in the Russian River watershed, the Laguna de Santa Rosa plays an important role in wildlife protection, agriculture, and flood control, and provides critical open space and recreational opportunities. As one of the most significant freshwater wetlands in Northern California, the Laguna supports a wide variety of plants, animals, and waterfowl, including over 230 types of birds and several state and federally-listed rare, threatened or endangered species. Restoring and developing new wetland acreage will return the Laguna de Santa Rosa to the days when it was an important stop for waterfowl along the Pacific flyway.

Unfortunately, urban encroachment, questionable land-use practices, and conflicting government management policies have resulted in a significant loss of Laguna habitats. While much remains, the surviving habitat is at considerable risk. While state and local conservation efforts have improved the outlook, I am convinced that the Laguna and its resources will face irreparable long-term damage unless it is immediately included in the National Wildlife Refuge System.

HR 2548 establishes a 9,000 acre Laguna de Santa Rosa National Wildlife Refuge and sets up a comprehensive and well-coordinated land acquisition and management program to create the Refuge. With the cooperation of the California Department of Fish and Game, this program will be designed to restore and enhance wetlands habitat, protect threatened species, encourage

the maintenance of agriculture, better manage water supplies, and enhance educational and recreational opportunities.

Incorporating concerns expressed by local farmers, HR 2548 achieves our enhancement and restoration goals without substantially increasing the regulatory burden on the farming community. Among other considerations, the bill specifies that land for the Laguna be acquired only from those willing to sell.

Mr. Chairman, while the Laguna de Santa Rosa has clear benefits for the local community, HR 2548's provisions protecting important wetlands habitat, safeguarding threatened and endangered species, and enhancing the area's role in the Pacific flyway earn it a significance far larger than its location in Northern California. The truly unique degree of broad-based community support that exists for this measure offers us the opportunity to take a very constructive step in protecting this valuable area.

I look forward to hearing today's testimony, and again would like to thank Ms. Magnie and Mr. Sharp for their invaluable assistance.

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