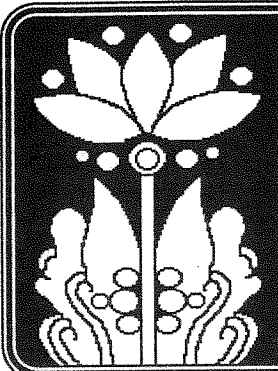


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NEWSLETTER OF THE SONOMA COUNTY CONSERVATION COUNCIL

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Make the Laguna a Wildlife Refuge

Robert Sharp

Our much-abused Laguna may be getting a new lease on life, after a century and a half of abuse and neglect. On July 31st, the Committee on Merchant Marine and Fisheries held its first hearing on H.R. 2548, Congressman Bosco's bill to establish a National Wildlife Refuge on approximately 9,000 acres in the Laguna Basin.

Since 1976, four separate studies of the Laguna have been carried out by various citizen's groups. The most recent being the report by the Laguna Technical Advisory Committee, appointed by Congressman Bosco in August 1988. This body, consisting mainly of representatives of the land and water use agencies, completed its study in January 1989. The main thrust of this report was the firm recommendation for the establishment of a National Wildlife Refuge.

There exists an immediate and compelling rationale for using federal funds to acquire lands within the Laguna de Santa Rosa as a National Wildlife Refuge. Despite the loss of hundreds of acres of laguna wetlands, much wetland habitat remains, and considerable acreage can be restored to wetland status. Existing wetlands are under increasing threat from advancing urbanization. While state and local preservation efforts are underway, only the federal government possesses the resources capable of providing the type of sustained extensive land acquisition program necessary to halt the degradation of this valuable wetland area. Inasmuch as wetland preservation and an increase in wetland acreage has been recognized as a national goal, the Laguna de Santa Rosa should be considered a high national priority for protection. It has the distinction of being the second largest fresh water marsh in Northern California, second only to the Clear Lake marshes in Lake County.

The capacity of the Laguna to support and enhance specific fish and wildlife populations also warrants federal involvement. With the passage of Public Law 100-653, the Congress and the president have initiated a major federal commitment to restoring the salmon and steelhead resources of the Russian River basin. As a major southern tributary of the Russian River, the Laguna was at one time an important nursery area for these fisheries. Properly managed it could be so again. Restoration

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A Wastewater System is Not a Pristine Refuge

Brenda Adelman

Proponents of Doug Bosco's Laguna Wildlife Preserve Bill present seemingly very compelling reasons to support legislation that would ostensibly preserve and restore the Laguna de Santa Rosa. Upon closer investigation however, there are some very serious problems that need to be resolved BEFORE this legislation can receive broad-based support.

Bob Sharp states, "Our much-abused Laguna may be getting a new lease on life, after a century and a half of abuse and neglect". He does NOT define the causes of that abuse and neglect however, nor describe how the current legislation is going to stop it. Further, it is not stated that the two main causes of Laguna abuse is related to certain agricultural practices as well as a long history of wastewater discharges into that body.

The magic word is wetland conjuring up images of pristine bucolic scenes with waterfowl flapping around a water body surrounded by picturesque reeds bending in the wind. If one were to go strictly by appearances, one could still find scenes like that today. Yet the Laguna is still degraded. It is degraded by cows walking in the creek and by their destruction of riparian habitat. It is degraded by nutrients loading from wastewater and animal wastes. It is dewatered as a result of channelization by farmers wanting to extend their growing season. It is contaminated in unknown ways by the multitude of chemicals that make up the wastewaters for "reuse".

The committee established by Congressman Bosco followed his recommendation to sidestep these and other issues. That committee "interviewed" certain preselected groups in secret to get their opinions on the proposed legislation. The lower river community was consciously eliminated and at no time was any lower river citizen input solicited. Further, committee members and supporting environmentalists ignored the issue of possible flood impacts on the lower river communities resulting from this legislation.

It is important to view the Laguna as only part of a vast water shed emptying into the Russian River. While Mr. Sharp alludes to the flood control aspect of the Laguna, he says nothing about how this legislation will affect that situation. In the planning process, committee members refused to address this

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