

# Laguna bill's modification angers local farmers

by Andrew Jowers

Unless land earmarked for a wildlife refuge along the Laguna de Santa Rosa is to be obtained from willing sellers only, the bill authorizing the national wildlife preserve "will not become law," Congressman Doug Bosco vowed this week.

The Sebastopol Democrat, responding to criticism from Laguna farmers and the Sonoma County Farm Bureau, reiterated his promise that no land owner will be forced to sell property in order to create the 9,000-acre preserve.

"As long as the promise I made

to the Farm Bureau is not in the bill, the bill will not become law," he said, but added that he still thinks "there is a very good chance" that Congress will approve the measure with the willing-seller provision.

Bosco said he will try to have the provision put back in the bill before the Senate considers it when Congress reconvenes early next year. But, if he cannot guarantee against eminent domain proceedings, "I'm not going to move the bill and it is not going to become law," he said. "I don't want people to feel threatened."

Even if his attempts to change

the Senate version prove unsuccessful, Bosco said he is confident "some other protection" can be applied, and the national refuge will be created.

"What I'm saying is, let's go back to the drawing board and see if there is some other way we can accomplish this," he said.

Judy Van Winkle, Farm Bureau executive director, said the Bureau would not accept any measure to protect property owners other than the willing-seller provision.

"There is no alternative," she said. "Eminent domain must be (Please see *Laguna* page A11)

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deleted."

To allay fears of Laguna property owners, Bosco had struck an agreement that the bill would specify that land for the refuge would be obtained only from people willing to sell it.

But before the House of Representatives unanimously approved the \$20 million bill last week, that provision was deleted.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which would manage the refuge and had held up the bill for months, insisted on the change, because the willing-seller provision would have set a precedent, since no other bill creating a national refuge allows for that, said Bosco. The bill was changed in committee, and Bosco said he could not stop that.

Reaction from the Farm Bureau and property owners was swift.

**"He (Bosco) sold us down the river. The willing-seller provision was promised to us over and over and over."**

"He sold us down the river," said one Laguna-area farmer, who asked not to be identified. "The willing-seller provision was promised to us over and over and over."

## Bosco . . .

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laws.

"Any member of Congress is governed by both the law and

the ethics rules of Congress, and I have never been accused of violating either and I've never violated either," he said.

Bosco's real estate transactions have been under press scrutiny since the 1985 Federal Home Loan Bank Board takeover of the Centennial and Golden Pacific thrifts, but no improprieties on Bosco's part have been reported by federal authorities.

Bosco, who like many investors took advantage of the Sonoma County real estate boom in the 1980s, said he would no longer invest in local property.

While acknowledging the need for reporting on the personal affairs of Congress, he said, "what I want to know is, when's it going to get across what we've done over the years to help our constituents?"

(ED. Note: See Section C for more on Doug Bosco and his two challengers, Frank Riggs and Darlene Comingore.)