

90-4

Seba. T. & N.

7-5-90

Congressional hearing this month on laguna preserve

by John B. Burns

A Congressional hearing in Sebastopol is planned for sometime this month to gather local input on a proposed 9000 acre federal wildlife preserve for the Laguna de Santa Rosa wetlands, according to an aid for Congressman Doug Bosco.

Joel Rogers told the *Times & News* this week that five to ten congressional representatives of the Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee would be in Sebastopol later this month to hear public input on proposed legislation to protect and preserve the state's second largest freshwater marsh system which a state biologist has characterized as "our local equivalent of a rain forest."

A bill authored by Bosco and introduced in Congress two years ago seeks \$20 million to pur-

chase land along the laguna to create the Laguna de Santa Rosa National Wildlife Refuge.

According to Rogers, the hearing will provide a forum for area residents to voice their ideas and concerns about the legislation. "We want those who oppose the legislation, particularly farmers, to have meaningful input on the proposal. We also want to convey to the committee members the widespread level of community support for a wildlife sanctuary."

A similar meeting last September attracted more than 200 people to the Sebastopol Veterans Memorial Building to review the legislation and identify potential issues needing to be resolved. The consensus from that meeting was that residents, farmers, environmentalists, builders and others would need to work closely together to en-

sure the final proposal balances agricultural, environmental and community needs.

The proposed refuge would extend roughly from western Cotati on the southern end to the community of Windsor on the north, with Santa Rosa on the east and Sebastopol and Forestville bordering it on the western edge.

It would serve to protect the marsh system which is a natural flood control valve and home to numerous plants and wildlife that are threatened by "urban development, ineffective land and water management practices, overlapping federal, state and local jurisdictions and inadequate enforcement of existing regulations," according to the legislation.

No firm date has yet been set for the hearing, according to Rogers.