

Bosco aims for Laguna protection;

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# Sewage disposal jam hinders efforts to aid environment

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SEBASTOPOL — Congressman Doug Bosco said Tuesday he'll seek federal funding to protect and restore the dying Laguna de Santa Rosa while helping solve Sonoma County's wastewater disposal problems.

The catch, though, is that a number of diverse groups must first reach agreement on the future of the laguna and effluent disposal, and then agree on a plan.

The Occidental Democrat took a bus tour of the laguna organized by members of the Sebastopol Laguna Advisory Committee, along with Sebastopol and Santa Rosa city officials, environmentalists, fish and wildlife experts and others who have an interest in the 14-mile waterway.

The focus of the tour was revival of the fragile 7,000-acre flood basin that plays host to rare plants, animals and birds. Bosco joined Fish and Game officials in asserting that treated wastewater from the Laguna de Santa Rosa could be a critical ingredient of the revival.

"We term it 'wastewater,' but it really isn't. It should be treated as a commodity," Bosco said.

The idea isn't a new one, but Tuesday was the first hint that the federal government may get involved in a project that includes use of effluent.

The city of Santa Rosa currently is doing studies on a laguna marsh plan that could revive dying marshes and create new ones on higher ground.

Bosco said Santa Rosa may get financial help for sewage disposal as part of a wildlife enhancement plan for the laguna, but he cautioned city utility director Miles Ferris not to include it in the city budget just yet.

First, he said, a committee of environmentalists, developers, farmers and government officials must come up with specific proposals for a laguna enhancement plan.

Judging from the divergence of opinions voiced by the members of Tuesday's tour, Bosco said it's not going to be easy to get everyone to agree on a plan.

"If we can agree on a local basis, I think we can get Congress to go along with it. The challenge is to resolve it here," Bosco said.

Agriculture and development have been a threat to the laguna for decades and are resisting attempts to protect the laguna, according to naturalists on the tour.

"The agriculture industry and building industry have not been supportive," said Bob Sharp, a retired wildlife biologist whose committee started making sweeping changes in the Laguna de Santa Rosa's image.

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## Bosco

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Bosco acknowledged that resistance to limiting grazing and building along the lagoon is likely, but he expressed optimism that differences could be ironed out.

The major point of controversy is likely to be wastewater disposal. No sooner was the suggestion about laguna marshes made Tuesday

than the debate began.

California Fish and Game biologist Bill Cox said he's been trying for three years to get Santa Rosa to listen to the idea of upland marshes; this year the city took up the idea.

Santa Rosa Mayor Dave Berto said he is very much in favor of the plan, but downstream residents have remained dubious because a marsh system and the current level of irrigation can't handle the volume of effluent from Santa Rosa's Llano Treatment Plant.

Russian River residents worry the overflow will end up in their back yards, threatening the tourist industry and drinking water. The river area's outcry three years ago was what forced Santa Rosa to upgrade its sewage treatment system and to look for a long-term solution.

Other options studied for sewage disposal have included ocean outfall and a San Pablo Bay marsh plan similar to the one being discussed for the Laguna de Santa Rosa. While not ruled out, those plans are on the back burner after ocean outfall met with overwhelming public opposition and Santa Rosa balked at the expense to study the bay plan.

Sharp said preservation of the laguna should be the first priority, with sewage disposal a secondary issue.

Only 320 acres of the laguna flood basin are being protected and restored. About 2,000 acres are Santa Rosa irrigation fields.

