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Bosco: Locals must lead in Laguna preservation

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Congressional protection and restoration of the Laguna de Santa Rosa is a strong possibility, Congressman Doug Bosco said Tuesday, but only if local interests can first agree on a program to accomplish that objective. The probable vehicle for such legislature would be as part of a larger \$2 million bill to upgrade the Russian River and its tributaries.

Fresh from a 90-minute bus tour of "one of the great treasures our area has," Bosco met the press on the deck of a High School Road home overlooking the Laguna's main channel and admitted he, like many other Sonoma County residents, had largely taken the waterway for granted. "I didn't realize how extensive this whole system was," the congressman told reporters.

Sharing the forum with Bob Sharp, chairman of Sebastopol's Laguna Advisory Committee, Bosco praised the group for its study, which he called "a good foundation for us to start from" in creating a broader protection mechanism. The next step, he

suggested, should be the formation of a regional panel with representation from all local governments as well as the dairy and building industries and other interested groups, which would "fashion our own plan for preserving the area."

While acknowledging the potential conflicts arising from "the human needs that have to be accommodated" within the Laguna floodplain, Bosco predicted that "we're going to be able to agree on about 90 percent" of the recommendations to preserve the Laguna. "The remaining 10 percent will be very controversial," he added.

Sharp concurred with those figures, which closely reflect the experience of the Sebastopol committee. Despite the generally congratulatory reception their study has received, Sharp noted that "the ag industry has not been completely supportive, and neither has the building industry." The Laguna Advisory Committee's most controversial suggestions, if fully implemented, would curtail the planned or existing activities of both industries within the Laguna area.

Overcoming those conflicts will be the hardest part of winning any Congressional support or funding for Laguna preservation, Bosco warned. With a local consensus established, "it's a real easy job getting Congress to go along," the Occidental Democrat said. "The controversy isn't in Washington."

Wastewater is likely to play a continuing part in the local debate before any kind of agreement reaches Capitol Hill, however. Responding to a question from a reporter, Bosco said that the creation of an artificial marsh for effluent disposal along the edges of the Laguna channel is "something we should consider." The Irrigation/Bay/Marsh proposal that would carry the treated water to San Pablo Bay is something that could be adapted to the Laguna, the congressman suggested.

At that, Supervisor Ernie Carpenter quickly stepped to the congressman's side to add a firm caveat that any such notions would have to win the agreement of downstream water users before they could be seriously considered. Pointedly noting that such speculation is "not a project" yet, Carpenter insisted that the political and environmental viability of any such marshland development "depends on how it's defined."