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**Local reps tour
Arcata sewer marsh**

A delegation of Sonoma County officials from local governments, chambers of commerce, environmental organizations, businesses and citizens groups toured a working wastewater/marshlands project in Arcata last week, and came back cautiously optimistic that the North Coast example might be modified to help solve the sewage disposal problems this county faces.

"The impressive part of the marsh is that it's a community project," said Richard Nichols, a member of the Sebastopol Laguna Advisory Committee who was among the group of 30-plus people making the two-day bus trip. However, he and others acknowledged that the Arcata marsh model can't be applied directly to the local wastewater situation "because they still have to discharge into the River." The Arcata marsh discharges into Humboldt Bay.

But Nichols added that he was hopeful that the lessons in marshland creation and restoration from the north could still be applied locally to benefit the Laguna as an ancillary part of a larger wastewater treatment project.

"Their needs are not our needs," agreed Juliana Doms of Sebastopol Tomorrow. "So if we go ahead with it, it would have to be modified to meet our needs." Although there remain some key questions regarding the placement of such a marsh project in the Laguna area, "I would say environmentalists would pretty much buy into it."

Tom Lynch, who traveled as a representative of the Russian River Chamber of Commerce, characterized the Arcata wetlands as "a mitigation marsh and a use for the water" in which up to three quarters of the water that flows into the marsh is returned to the atmosphere through evaporation and the "evapotranspiration action of the marshland plants. But while he sees the potential for Laguna enhancement, Lynch was skeptical that Santa Rosa sewer officials have embraced the environmental awareness such a system would embody.

Santa Rosa is still strongly oriented toward a "pump and dump mentality," Lynch said, warning that an anticipated proposal for large wastewater discharges into the Estero Americo will face a "tooth and nail" fight from environmentalists.

Several participants said the details of the marsh project in Arcata were interesting, but the real good from the trip came in the personal contact among the participants from the wide range of diverse groups. "It broke down some barriers," said Doms. "We all went away feeling we were together with this problem, looking for a solution."

Sebastopol alone had representatives from city government (three of the five city council members), the chamber of commerce, Sebastopol Tomorrow, the Wastewater Coalition, and a Laguna protection group. Others on the outing included staff members from the WQCB, CH2M Hill, the North Coast Builders Exchange, and representatives from Guerneville, Windsor, Bodega Bay, Rohnert Park, a coastal fishing organization, the Santa Rosa chamber, and even a Marin County environmental group.

One unexpected consequence of the



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excursion is likely to arise at the next Sebastopol City Council meeting, Sebastopol Mayor Anne Magnie indicated. Council members Nick Stewart and Richard Johnson are expressing interest in a possible return to a wastewater treatment plant just for Sebastopol as an alternative to participation in the regional facility operated by Santa Rosa. Casual conversations with other water officials on the bus suggested that this avenue might be open to Sebastopol, Magnie said.

The entire trip, July 19-20, was organized and sponsored by North Coast Assemblyman Dan Hauser. Hauser was a member of the Arcata City Council and was "very integrally involved" in the creation of the 200-acre marsh, said Hauser staff aide Heidi Gillen. "It was an idea a lot of people wanted to talk about," Gillen added. The trip cost each participant \$80 for the bus, a hotel room overnight in Arcata, plus several meals. The additional costs were made up from a Hauser campaign fund, Gillen said.

Magnie called the outing "exhilarating," and noted the "feeling of goodwill that pervaded the trip. It really did a lot to personalize the relations between the groups," she said. "That, I think, will ultimately be the greatest mileage from the trip."

—BRUCE ROBINSON