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A group of officials including Rep. Doug Bosco toured various Laguna sites last May

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Bosco unveils Laguna refuge plan

By STEVE HART
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Rep. Doug Bosco on Tuesday unveiled an ambitious proposal to create 9,000 acres of U.S. wildlife reserve at Laguna de Santa Rosa, a vestige of marshland threatened by Sonoma County urbanization.

Bosco and his supporters said the move is vital to save Laguna wetlands and the unique plants and animals they shelter.

"We can be caretakers of this rich resource or we can ignore it," said Bosco, D-Occidental.

But Bosco's plan could face opposition from an unlikely coalition of interests, including farmers, builders and environmentalists.

Farmers worry that federal status could restrict their operations in the

Laguna. Most of the area between Santa Rosa and Sebastopol is privately owned and devoted to agriculture.

Builders want the Laguna retained for flood control. And some environmentalists are concerned that Santa Rosa will use marshland restoration as an excuse to discharge more treated wastewater into the Laguna, a tributary of the Russian River.

In a press conference at Santa Rosa City Hall, Bosco said he expects disagreement over his proposal, but hopes to bring the various interests together.

"We've gone for too long without paying attention to this asset," said Bosco. In order to save the Laguna, "we'll have to put human uses secondary to natural uses."

Bosco presented the report of an

11-member technical advisory committee that recommends creating a national wildlife refuge at the Laguna, a 10-mile-long remnant of marshlands that once stretched from Rohnert Park to the Russian River.

The advisory committee, including state and county wildlife officials, said the area between River Road and Todd Road "should be considered a high national priority for protection" because it provides habitat for endangered plants and animals.

The committee proposes buying about 6,000 acres of private land in the Laguna from voluntary sellers. About 2,000 acres within the proposed refuge boundaries already belong to the city of Santa Rosa, which operates a sewage treatment plant

See Bosco, Page B2