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**Bosco bill
to protect
laguna**

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Bosco

It was considered by many as nothing more than a swamp — a squishy area that people would fix with a little concrete if they wanted a building to stand up.

But the nation's changing environmental values have made their way to the Laguna de Santa Rosa, now recognized as one of the few salvageable wetland areas in the state.

The old swamp is now a candidate for permanent protection and restoration as a premiere wildlife habitat. Rep. Doug Bosco, D-Sebastopol, Tuesday introduced a bill that would designate some 9,000 acres along the 14-mile lagoon as a National Wildlife Refuge.

It carries \$20 million in federal funds, which would be used to buy land along the lagoon from willing sellers, reforest the area with native vegetation, map the resources, and bring in rangers to manage the refuge.

"This has been the dream of a lot of people in our area for a long time," said Bosco on Tuesday.

"There isn't another area with such an abundance of plants and animals," he said.

Bosco said there are an estimated 286 species of plants, 230 birds species, 25 mammal species, 19 fish species, 7 amphibians species and 9 species of reptiles.

Bosco said efforts to protect the lagoon began about eight years ago. A Sebastopol City Council committee came up with some initial ideas for protection and Bosco later appointed a committee to help him draft the federal legislation.

The bill will go to the House of Representatives' Merchant Marine and Fisheries Subcommittee before it goes for a vote.

"It should have pretty smooth sailing on the floor," predicted Bosco.

The laguna would be the first such refuge in Sonoma County. Others are located along the San Pablo and San Francisco bays.

The bill could receive approval from both the House and Senate by the end of the summer, but then the refuge could take a year or so to establish.

"Every day that passes, it will be harder to restore," Bosco said.

In response to concerns from area ranchers about effects on their property, Bosco said the legislation includes prohibitions against buying land from unwilling sellers.

Bosco acknowledged ranchers may balk at prohibitions against the use of some pesticides that could pose a threat to wildlife along the laguna.