

Midetracks

92-13 Laguna bill holds great promise

by John B. Burns

A bill introduced by Congressman Doug Bosco last week, which would create the county's first and only national wildlife refuge in and around the Laguna de Santa Rosa, has far reaching and very positive implications for West County residents eager to preserve one of northern California's most treasured environmental habitats.

Bosco's proposed legislation, which would dedicate approximately 9000 acres of land just east of Sebastopol to permanent protection, would mean much more than protecting the hundreds of species of birds, plants and animals that inhabit northern California's second largest freshwater marsh system. It would also mean a permanent greenbelt, or community separator, between Sebastopol and the rapidly sprawling megalopolis of Santa Rosa.

The advantages for such greenbelts are enormous, both from a quality of life standpoint and economically given the increasing role tourism plays in the Sonoma County economy. With Sebastopol's current lack of any singularly notable tourist attraction, a National Wildlife Refuge nearby could provide a much needed boost to that segment of our small but vibrant local economy.

City plans to establish a park in the Laguna area, and county plans for a hiking and biking trail from Santa Rosa to Sebastopol, could integrate beautifully with a wildlife refuge, providing Sebastopol residents with a carefully preserved and highly cherished source of recreation, education, beauty and pride for generations to come.

City leaders should be praised for taking the lead role in gaining Bosco's support for a wildlife refuge. Sebastopol should keep its collective fingers crossed in hopes that his legislation is approved.

•The shooting of a rare peregrine falcon in Sebastopol last week is representative of the public's general disrespect for laws protecting less powerful creatures from the indiscretions of man. In this case, the perpetrator believed he had a valid economic reason for shooting one of America's rarest and most wondrous creatures. And although members of the Wildlife Center stated that the bird's stomach was empty when it arrived for emergency care, thus absolving it of any perceived "guilt", there can still be no valid justification for taking the life of an animal so gravely endangered with extinction. Each time someone kills a rare bird or animal, each time we obliterate a species, however small, we eliminate a part of our country, our planet and, ultimately, ourselves. When will we ever learn?