

Laguna plan won't wash

CLOSE TO HOME

By BRENDA ADELMAN



Adelman

Proponents of Rep. Doug Bosco's wildlife preserve bill present compelling reasons to support legislation that would ostensibly preserve the Laguna. There are some serious problems, however, that need to be resolved before this legislation can receive broad-based support.

Bob Sharp, in a July 27 Close to Home column on Laguna preservation, states "Our much-abused Laguna may be getting a new lease on life after a century and a half of abuse and neglect." The article does not define the causes of that abuse, however, nor describe how the current legislation is going to stop it.

The magic word "wetland" conjures up images of pristine bucolic scenes. Yet the Laguna is still degraded. It is degraded by cows walking in the creek and by their destruction of riparian habitat. It is degraded by nutrients loading from wastewater and animal wastes. It is dewatered as a result of channelization by farmers wanting to extend their growing season.

The committee established by Bosco followed his recommendation to ignore these issues. That committee "interviewed" certain pre-selected groups in secret to get their opinions on the proposed legislation. At no time was any lower river citizen input solicited.

It is important to view the Laguna as only part of a vast watershed emptying into the Russian River. While Mr. Sharp alludes to flood-control aspects, he says nothing about how this legislation will affect that situation. In the planning process, committee members refused to address this issue and the issue of wastewater discharges into public drinking water supplies.

Those Laguna supporters who want to return the Laguna to where it was at the turn of the century neglect to mention that, instead of re-channelizing the dechannelized creeks, they would support massive wastewater marshes.

We can't go back to where we were. It is that unspoken artificial plan to "restore" the Laguna as well as the legislative process that cuts off all dialogue which we object to. Bosco promised our committee an opportunity to give testimony on this proposal and then he set up a Washington, D.C. hearing in order to "speed up the process." Further, he announced the meet-

ing date just two weeks before and sent no notice to the concerned parties.

Here is the plan as seen from our perspective: Santa Rosa's long-range wastewater plan is in jeopardy; ocean outfall is highly unlikely because of unified opposition. The Bay plan appears rejected by city officials. The Board of Public Utilities is saying they will put millions of dollars into studying a project that is unlikely to succeed (the Estero Plan) because they have to prove to the North Coast Water Quality Control Board that their only option is river discharge.

At the very time that these issues are being decided, along comes Mr. Bosco with a sexy idea. Offer a sacred cow (wetlands) and you have environmentalists on your side. Coincidentally, the designated refuge is contiguous with Santa Rosa's wastewater system.

Of course, the Phase 2 draft report on the development of a reclamation alternative calls for development of 300 acres of wastewater marshes in the flood plain. This is far greater than the Arcata marsh, which is about 150 acres and discharges into a bay.

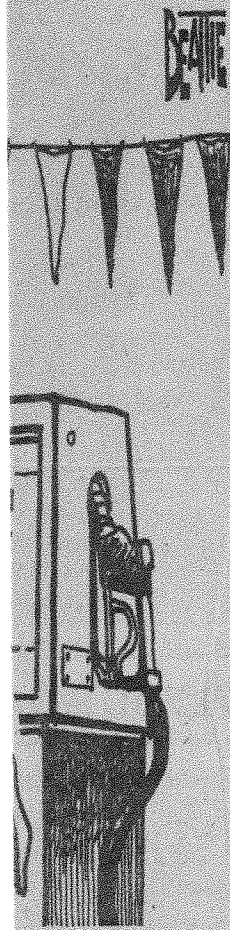
One of the developers of that marsh, Frank Klopp, advised against planning a marsh that discharges into a drinking water supply. There are many thus far unidentified problems with doing this. Further, the report talks about river discharges of up to 15 percent if other plans cannot be implemented.

While it is true that Santa Rosa has made vast strides in wastewater treatment and disposal since the big spill of 1985, there are many unknown concerns about putting wastewater into drinking water. There are concerns about unknown effects of additives (i.e. alum and chlorine); concerns about virus and parasite removal as well as inorganics, concerns that discharge standards do not address cumulative nutrient and toxic loadings into the river.

There are no epidemiological studies planned to determine possible impacts on health.

In short, this legislation to preserve the Laguna is a vague attempt to give federal blessing to a plan without discussing the drawbacks of the plan. Concerns of how wastewater wetlands will impact the lower Russian River both in terms of discharging greater amounts into our drinking water supply and decrease of flood capacity to allow for wastewater capacity simply have not been addressed.

Brenda Adelman of Guerneville is a member of the River Citizens Sewer Committee.



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