

Marsh project would enhance proposed wildlife preserve

by Andrew Jowers

In the series of five man-made and managed marshes on 10 acres off Occidental Road, duckweed and bulrushes flourish and crayfish and bullfrogs thrive.

In recent days, double-crested cormorants, herons, egrets, red-tailed hawks, woodpeckers, swallows and 40 other bird species have been spotted; so have

a fresh-water otter and two minx.

The two-year-old Kelly Farm Demonstration Wetland is a thriving marsh environment, created from barren, overgrazed pasture out of highly treated wastewater. And, if the City of Santa Rosa has its way, it could be a preview of a 150-acre marsh created along the Laguna de Santa Rosa, attracting migrat-

ing ducks and other waterfowl.

According to Dan Carlson, projects coordinator with the Santa Rosa Public Utilities Department, a managed marsh "would fit in well" with Congressman Doug Bosco's proposal to have 9000 acres along the Laguna designated a federal wildlife preserve. And, the Kelly Farm project shows, it would also counter (Please see *Marsh* page A10)

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federal opposition to the city's multi-million wastewater disposal plan that would serve several cities, including Sebastopol.

A wetlands "could very well be part of the preserve," said Joel Rogers, Bosco's congressional assistant. "We certainly expect (federal officials) to consider the city's plans to be beneficial to the Laguna."

Bosco's Laguna Wildlife Preserve bill is now stuck before the House Merchant Marine and Fisheries Committee. Pressure from the Bush Administration may prevent action on the bill this year, since committee members adjourn on Friday, said Rogers.

"We're hoping for action on this before the end of the week," he said.

Santa Rosa is touting the proposed marsh, or wetlands as they are often called, as the answer to objections by the federal National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration over the city's long-range wastewater disposal plans.

The NOAA has said it will not approve city plans to discharge water into the Estero Americano if it contains harm-

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ful levels of nutrients and metals, particularly nitrogen and copper.

But water samples from the Kelly project show marsh plants and bacteria remove the nutrients and metals, said Carlson.

"The water is almost completely pure," he said. "Environmentally, the system does just about everything you could want it to do."

Should Santa Rosa's plans be approved, perhaps as early as spring, wastewater will be used to create marshes along the Laguna and, perhaps, along the Estero Americano. Water would be pumped from the Llano Road wastewater treatment plant into the marsh, then to irrigation storage reservoirs or, during winter, into the Laguna or the Russian River.

All discharged water would eventually go through the

marsh system, said Carlson.

The wetlands along the Laguna would not displace agriculture, but would be created on land owned by Santa Rosa or the Department of Fish and Game that is not considered suitable for crops, he said.

The state ordered Santa Rosa to find a long-term method of disposing of wastewater after a spill and two illegal discharges into the Russian River in 1985.

To comply, the city upgraded the Llano Road sewage treatment facility. It is now planning the next stage: a \$124 million reclamation and irrigation program that would eventually discharge wastewater into either the Estero Americano, which empties into the Pacific Ocean near at the Marin-Sonoma county line, or into San Pablo Bay, which empties into San Francisco Bay.