

Sidetracks

New park will be a big asset to city

by John B. Burns

For more than ten years, Sebastopol has hoped to establish a park alongside the Laguna de Santa Rosa on the city's eastern edge. At long last, that dream is about to become a reality.

A new committee and consultant charged with designing the park's master plan have begun work and expect to gain approval of the plan early next year in time for springtime development of pathways which will enable visitors to enjoy and appreciate the natural setting and ecosystem, an increasingly rare commodity in this age of increasing population, development and degradation of our environment and natural resources.

Such a public facility will enhance the community in many ways, not the least of which will be increased public awareness of the role played by Northern California's second largest freshwater marsh system which is home to hundreds of bird, animal and plant species. Already, nature and conservation organizations have begun plans to utilize the park for educational and recreational tours.

In its wisdom, city council members also voted to include limited active recreational uses in the park's perimeter nearby the Sebastopol Community Center and Laguna Youth Park, thus addressing human as well as environmental needs in the same package. It will be up to the consultant and the committee to strike a balance between those needs in a creative design which incorporates passive and active recreational uses in a compatible fashion.

Critical to the quality of the park's planning process is the inclusion of representatives from a wide variety of public and private organizations and groups which can all benefit from a well designed park.

91-9

But most significant, according to Ecologist and park consultant Marco Waaland, is that establishment of the Laguna Park represents the first step "in a completely restored ecosystem" which has suffered more than its share of harm over the last several decades.

Given Congressman Frank Riggs' recent abandonment of plans to establish a federal wildlife preserve on laguna land stretching from Rohnert Park to Windsor, the Sebastopol park's creation is all the more critical to the overall goal of protecting and preserving this sensitive natural resource for generations to come.

Our story two weeks ago on the death of plans to establish a federal Laguna Wildlife Refuge drew some belated comments from former Congressman Doug Bosco, original sponsor of the bill, who told reporter Andrew Jowers that he still thinks the legislation stands a good chance of gaining Congressional approval, despite Congressman Frank Riggs' feelings to the contrary. In bolstering his opinion, Bosco pointed to the fact that the House of Representatives had overwhelmingly passed the legislation last year and that the Senate was expected to follow suit.

Since the bill effectively died when Bosco was unseated, the question remains as to whether or not Riggs will ever revive it.

Asked whether it was worth an attempt to revive the bill now, Bosco retorted, "It certainly won't pass with Frank Riggs."

Bosco declined to say whether he planned to recapture the seat from Riggs next year.