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The Press Democrat

# Sunday FORUM

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# Laguna mired in bureaucracy

## Ambitious plan for restoration is barely afloat

By JAMES TINNEY

In 1990, Congressman Doug Bosco's legislation to make the Laguna de Santa Rosa a national wildlife refuge passed the House of Representatives, then stalled in the Senate in the final days of the session.

What's happened since?

"Little or nothing has been done since Congressman Bosco's bill failed to make it," said Robert Sharp, the retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologist who heads the

Laguna Foundation and has been at the forefront of the Laguna restoration efforts.

"There are an assortment of things happening," said Allan Buckmann, state Fish and Game associate wildlife biologist.

The frustrating thing is that both are right. While various planning efforts and some land acquisition is continuing in the Laguna, the most important aim of Bosco's bill, establishing a coordinated management plan for this environmental resource, remains unfulfilled.

Bosco was defeated by Frank Riggs who supported a scaled-down Laguna restoration plan. Riggs, too, was defeated for re-election. Meanwhile, the Laguna has been reapportioned into a different congressional district, and is now represented by Rep. Lynn Woolsey.

That turnover, combined with the

skepticism of federal agencies about the proposal, has stalled any federal action indefinitely. So, the problem identified by Bosco remains.

"You can't have a hodgepodge of agencies, each of which has a different view of what is going on in the Laguna, and expect it to be managed effectively," Bosco said.

Bosco's bill would have created a 9,000-acre federal wildlife refuge for the Laguna, a system of water and wetlands that runs nearly from Cotati to Forestville. Much of that land was then, and remains, in private hands. Bosco's bill, which carried a \$20 million price tag, would have allowed for purchases only from willing sellers.

"I used to say, in 20 years, the Laguna could be our Central Park," Bosco said.

Once, it was a major recreation spot, offering a haven for hunters and fisher-

men and an ideal place for some genteel boating on a sunny afternoon. That was before many of the wetlands were drained by farmers or filled for development.

Today, the signs of environmental degradation are often subtle. That's one reason that the efforts to protect the Laguna don't seem to have much immediacy to the general public.

Sharp stands on the bridge at Occidental Road, pointing to what appears to be a pastoral scene — grasslands, pools of water, scattered mature trees. But his trained eye sees what isn't there as well, the underbrush and young trees that make up a critical part of a true riparian forest. They have browsed away by

*See Laguna, back page*

*James Tinney is editorial page editor of The Press Democrat.*