

A drive ^{ECOLOGY} to save sloughs

By Bob Johnson

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The growing movement to preserve Watsonville area sloughs could lead to a joint city-county land use plan to protect Pajaro Valley wetlands.

The Watsonville City Council has asked for recommendations for financing a cooperative effort with Santa Cruz County to devise plans to protect the marshy areas around Watsonville.

Sloughs cross boundaries

"The sloughs know no political boundaries," said Lowell Hurst, a council member whose district on the northwest end of town embraces portions of Harkins Slough, Struve Slough and Watsonville Slough. "It is an integrated system, and what happens at one end affects what happens at the other end."

Although jurisdiction over development near the sprawling 800-acre slough system is divided between the city and county, the two have rarely cooperated on land use.

The proposal to ask the county to join a slough protection effort first came from Watsonville Wetlands Watch, a citizens group that formed last summer and successfully opposed a plan to build more than 900 homes 50 feet from Struve Slough.

A unique habitat

"During the past year there has been a heightened awareness and appreciation of local wetlands, especially the 800-acre Watsonville slough system," Watch member David Leland wrote to the council. "This natural resource — with its unique wildlife and fish habitat, diverse plant life and recreational/aesthetic values — provides the basis for much of what is esteemed about the Pajaro Valley and its quality of life."

While council support for preserving the wetlands has increased tremendously in recent months, the program will compete for scarce funds in the 1992-'93 budget.