

Mosquito fighting proposal would dissolve Oroville district, change Durham district boundaries

By [Steve Schoonover](#), Chico Enterprise-Record

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Know and go

What: Butte County Local Agency Formation Commission

When: 9 a.m. Nov. 2

Where: Board of Supervisors Chambers, 25 County Center Drive, Oroville.

Agenda: <http://buttelafco.org>.

Oroville >> Changes appear to be coming to the three mosquito control districts in Butte County, that may include the dissolution of one of them.

Currently the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District covers all the county (and Hamilton City in Glenn County) except for two areas serviced by the Oroville and Durham mosquito abatement districts.

Their fates have been under review by the Butte County Local Agency Formation Commission since the Grand Jury recommended in May that the three districts be consolidated into one.

The Grand Jury believed the smaller districts cannot provide adequate protection against the increasing public health threat of mosquito-borne diseases.

Since then LAFCO has completed a “municipal service review” of the districts and discussed the matter in three meetings.

The issue is on the agenda for the next meeting Nov. 2, with the staff recommending dissolution of the Oroville district and some boundary changes for Durham’s district.

The Oroville and Durham districts are venerable, dating to 1916 and 1918 respectively. They are also small: 12.7 square miles for Oroville and 60 square miles for Durham.

They also have limited budgets — \$161,000 for Oroville and \$141,000 for Durham — that prevents them from providing a full range of year-round mosquito control.

The districts only fog to kill flying mosquitoes. LAFCO Executive Director Steve Lucas told his board during its Oct. 5 meeting fogging only kills about 30 percent of mosquitoes, and provides six to eight hours of protection.

The Butte County district is more substantial — 1,677 square miles with a budget of \$3.4 million — and can focus on prevention, rather than just killing mosquitoes after they're flying.

Prevention is much more effective, Lucas told his board, killing immature mosquitoes by the “millions if not billions.” It is becoming much more important as the number of mosquito-borne diseases looks likely to increase.

West Nile virus is well established here, and St. Louis encephalitis has recently returned to Butte County. There are concerns about the spread of the Zika virus, as the mosquitoes that can carry it are as close as Merced County.

That's why the Butte County Public Health Department has sent two letters to LAFCO this year backing the consolidation, saying the whole county should get the kind of comprehensive protection only the larger district provides.

The Oroville district has a number of problems beyond the level of its service.

Its only full-time employee, General Manager Jeffrey Cahn, was hit and [killed by a vehicle](#) Sept. 10 on Highway 99 north of Chico. That means there's no one on staff certified to combat mosquitoes.

Two of its five-member board of directors were found to live outside the district and were removed by the Board of Supervisors on Oct. 10.

And the district has not prepared required financial reports for several years. The staff report for LAFCO's Nov. 2 meeting says the district's accountant apparently has all the financial records but is not responding to communications from the district.

There wasn't much support for maintaining the district at LAFCO's Oct. 5 meeting. A letter from the city of Oroville backed consolidation and Supervisor Bill Connelly of Oroville, a member of the LAFCO board as well, said, “I think it's time for the Oroville mosquito district to go away.”

The Durham district has substantial support within the community, but limited resources.

The district has agreed to cede 14,000 acres of rice lands in its southeast corner it is not treating to the Butte County district, which has the aircraft that are needed to treat the area. “We see some of the limitations we have,” Lance Smith, a member of the Durham district board, told LAFCO on Oct. 5.

But another area of contention was the Butte Creek Country Club, which is split between the Durham and Butte County districts.

The Durham district has been fogging the entire area, and Smith said that was through an agreement with the Butte County district. But Butte County district General Manager Matt Ball denied there was any agreement in a letter included in the Nov. 2 agenda packet.

LAFCO staff had been suggesting it would be more effective to have the Butte County district take over the whole country club, but that would cause a reduction in tax revenue that would probably leave the Durham district inviable.

The district's \$141,000 budget would take a hit of almost \$15,000 from the loss of the rice lands. Loss of its half of the country club would cut another \$8,700.

Smith asked LAFCO to give the two district boards a chance to meet and see what could be worked out, but the Butte County district board later declined such a meeting.

The proposal that is included in the Nov. 2 agenda packet would instead add the Butte County district's part of the country club to the Durham district. That would shift about \$7,700 in tax revenue from the Butte County district to the Durham district.

The LAFCO board meets at 9 a.m. Nov. 2 in the Board of Supervisors Chambers in the County Administration Building, 25 County Center Drive in Oroville. The [whole agenda](http://buttelafco.org) is available at <http://buttelafco.org>.

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