

Butte County votes to increase mosquito funding

Money will help prevent disease spread by blood-sucking insects

By Heather Hacking

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CHICO >> The votes are in and soon more money will be available to keep blood-sucking mosquitoes at bay.

The estimated increase in cost to most households will be \$9.69 a year, payable with the semiannual property taxes.

The results of the mail-in ballot were announced at the Wednesday night meeting of the board for the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District.

This spring, 60,836 ballots were mailed asking people if they approved of the increased charge and increased countywide services.

The yes votes totalled 54.96 percent of total votes, and 58.44 percent of "weighted votes."

"Weighted votes means that people who own land with multiple homes or larger acreage have a more heavily "weighted" vote.

All told, 20,544 ballots were returned, or 34.33 percent, said Matthew C. Ball, vector control manager.

The revenue will add \$795,000 to the current mosquito control budget of \$2.55 million.

The budget for controlling mosquitoes had reached about \$3 million in 2008, but property values dropped, he said.

Homes of one acre or less pay \$9.69 plus eight cents for each additional acre. Owners of vacant land will pay \$2.42 per parcel. Apartment complexes are assessed \$3.85 per apartment up to 20, and 97 cents after that. Farmers will pay 8 cents per acre and undeveloped rangeland is assessed 2 cents an acre.

Commercial property and mobile homes are assessed \$4.85 per quarter acre, and \$4.85 for each additional acre over five.

Recently, incidents of West Nile virus and Lyme disease have increased.

Malaria is also transmitted through mosquitoes.

The CHIKV virus, Chikungunya, has seen an "explosion in the Caribbean," Ball said. Dengue fever, also transmitted by mosquitoes, is on the rise.

A new mosquito, called the Asian tiger, has been established in Los Angeles County and San Gabriel. Last year the yellow fever mosquito became entrenched in Central California, including counties of Fresno, Madera and Santa Clara.

The Sacramento Valley has hundreds of thousands of rice acreage, which is known to be breeding ground for mosquitoes.

These relatively new insects are not yet in Butte County, but if they arrive Ball said the resources need to be available for control.

When West Nile virus made headlines in 2004, the Center for Disease Control gave Butte County funding for three years, but that extra push is long gone.

Before the recent vote, the district really needed to expand operations, but had no money to do so, Ball continued.

One important aspect will be education, including programs for children and teaching people how to keep ticks and mosquitoes from their bodies and homes.

Simple steps might include education about plastic saucers under plants, where water reserves become breeding grounds for the insects.

During drought, people also fill bird baths for wildlife, which attract birds and mosquitoes.

The mosquitofish program is popular and should be expanded, Ball said. Right now there are no facilities for raising fish during the colder months, when mosquitoes are still biting.

The extra funding will also allow the district to hire additional staff, expand surveillance and apply larvicide. Fogging takes place to knock back adult mosquitoes.

Ball said there are 11 locations to pick up fish, and deliveries are possible if needed.

Call the district headquarters at 533-6038 or 342-7350.

Once placed in a pond, mosquitofish multiply quickly, he said.

To find out more about the district, including answers to frequently asked questions:
<http://www.bcmvcd.com/>

Contact reporter Heather Hacking at 896-7758.