

# Butte County mosquito district changes advance



The Butte County Local Agency Formation Commission recommends the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District absorb the mosquito district in Oroville and take control of some of the area currently under the Durham district. Bill Husa — Enterprise-Record

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

Posted: 11/03/17, 7:00 PM PDT | Updated: 2 days ago

Oroville >> The wheels were put in motion this week toward eliminating the Oroville mosquito district and shrinking Durham's, but the biggest point of contention was left unresolved.

Technically, the Butte County Local Agency Formation Commission Thursday gave instructions to staff on what to include in a document called a municipal service review of the three mosquito abatement districts in the county.

But the document they called for does not include the Oroville Mosquito Abatement District and transfers about 14,000 acres of rice land from the Durham Mosquito Abatement District to the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District.

LAFCO can't initiate either action — one of the districts would have to apply to do so — but seemed to be in agreement among the three that would happen.

LAFCO had been working on this since the Butte County Grand Jury issued an emergency report in May calling for absorption of the Durham and Oroville districts into the Butte County district.

The smaller districts didn't have the resources to provide comprehensive mosquito control, the Grand Jury said, and that was a public health problem due to an increasing threat of mosquito-borne diseases.

The Butte County Public Health Department has weighed in a couple of times since then, agreeing there is a threat and laying out a minimum level of service it thinks should be provided countywide. Only the Butte County district currently provides that level of service.

LAFCO chairman Carl Leverenz dubbed that a "standard of care" during Thursday's meeting.

The Oroville Mosquito Abatement District has problems beyond a lack of resources. Its general manager was killed in a traffic accident in September so there's no one on staff certified to provide mosquito control.

Two members of its five-member board were removed in October because they don't live in the district. The terms of two other directors expires on Dec. 31, LAFCO Executive Steve Lucas told his board Thursday.

Attorney Jeff Carter spoke for the district Thursday, expressing a concern about loss of some tax revenue if the district were dissolved, but said the district board's focus was to "make sure the residents of Oroville are protected."

There wasn't any disagreement that having the Butte County district take over was the best way to accomplish that.

The district's general manager, Matt Ball, said it would provide the same level of service in Oroville as it provides elsewhere. He urged quick action because the district would have to map the area, place traps and conduct surveillance to determine where mosquitoes are.

"I'm ready to go to war," Ball said, "but I need to know my enemy."

He wanted to be ready before West Nile virus season begins in the spring.

There were three issues regarding the Durham Mosquito Abatement District, and only one of them was simple.

That was the transfer of 14,000 acres of rice lands in the southeast part of the district. The Durham district did not oppose that as it didn't have the resources to treat it. Ball said it would cost about \$350,000 a year to control the mosquitoes there, which is more than double the Durham district's total budget.

A second question was whether the district could provide the "standard of care" laid out by the Health Department.

Durham General Manager Aaron Amator initially argued that every district was different and suggested some of the things the health department listed didn't apply. He said the district was providing the level of protection the people in Durham wanted.

But he later said the district was "trying to make things better, to come up to the level you and the Health Department think we need. Some of the things don't apply, but that's what you want us to do."

LAFCO approved giving the Durham district a year to make the improvements.

LAFCO commissioner Steven Onken asked if the district could be required to hold a couple of public meetings in that time to make sure the threat was understood by most of the residents of the town.

County Supervisor Steve Lambert made that unnecessary: "That's my district; I can hold the meetings."

The final issue involved the Butte Creek Country Club. The northern part of the development is in the Butte County district; the southern part is in Durham district.

Durham has been fogging the whole area, and LAFCO staff had suggested putting it all inside the Durham boundaries to partially offset a loss of tax dollars from detachment of the rice lands.

That would have added a level of complexity and cost, and the board decided to leave things as they were.

The municipal service review will be coming back to the LAFCO board next month for final approval. At some time after that, the Butte County district would apply to annex the Durham rice lands and the Oroville district.

Hearings would be held and comment periods would be opened. If less than 25 percent of the property owners object, the changes would take place. If 25-50 percent of property owners objected, there would be elections. If more than 50 percent objected, the proposals would die.

Lucas said if all went smoothly the rice land transfer could be done in three months. The Oroville case is a bit more complex and could take four to six months at least.

*Reach City Editor Steve Schoonover at 896-7750.*