

# Mosquito control asking property owners for funding

The Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District has sent a ballot to create a tax on property owners that will increase the district's ability to kill disease-carrying insects.

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A new tax would help the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District continue to kill mosquitos and be prepared for other invasive, disease-carrying insects.

The district is using Proposition 218 to attempt to raise \$795,000 per year to meet the demands of the under-staffed, under-funded district, according to Matthew C. Ball, manager of the district.

For the tax to pass, a majority of the ballots returned, from those sent to the roughly 60,000 property owners in Butte County have to be marked "yes" and returned to the tabulator's office on the return address by June 11. Ball recommended people mail their ballots early because the ballots must be in the physically in the office; no postmarked ballots will be accepted.

Between 6,000 and 12,000 ballots have been returned, but the vote won't be tallied until after the deadline. All that is needed to pass is a majority vote.

The tax is different for different types of properties. Owners of a single family home on one acre or less would pay \$9.69 per year. Each additional acre would cost 8 cents. Commercial properties and mobile homes would pay \$4.85 per quarter acre for the first five acres and then \$4.85 for each additional acre. Agricultural lands would have to pay 8 cents per acre while owners of open range would pay 2 cents per acre.

If the vote passes, the mosquito control district is planning to do several things.

**Increase staff** >> The staff has been reduced from 18 full-time employees to 15 and from 14 seasonal workers to 10 over the last few years, Ball said. The district can just barely control the risk of infectious diseases like West Nile Virus and Lyme disease, but if invasive mosquitoes bring new viruses to the county, it won't be able to control the spread by mosquito.

**Educate the public** >> The best way to eliminate mosquitoes is to dump standing water, Ball said. By educating the public, the district can spread the word and remind people to dump standing water.

"We've been open 66 years and in those years we still meet people who have never heard of us," Ball said.

**Expand surveillance** >> The district uses mosquito traps to pinpoint problem areas but doesn't have the resources to detect invasive species like the Asian Tiger Mosquito or the Yellow Fever Mosquito, which carry Dengue Fever and Yellow Fever.

"I just don't have the traps or the staff to put out," Ball said.

**Replace old equipment** >> The district has not bought a new truck in four years. The oldest truck in the fleet is a 1989 Toyota pickup that is used daily, Ball said. The district bought surplus foggers and sprayers when a manufacturer went out of business six years ago and has to cannibalize parts from broken equipment to keep it going.

**Use more mosquitofish** >> The district gives away fish that eat mosquito larvae, but the program has become so popular that the district can't keep up with the demand.

If the tax is passed, tanks to sustain larger amounts of mosquito fish will be purchased, Ball said.

**Use more larvicides** >> When mosquito fish can't be used, the district uses larvicides which kill mosquito larvae.

Next to getting rid of the water source, larvicides are the most effective way to kill mosquitoes, Ball said.

The district covers nearly 1,700 square miles and Ball says the money will be used to accomplish its goals and protect the public health of the people in its area.

"Our district goes to war every year with mosquitoes," Ball said.

The district can be reached at 533-6038.

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