

# Season's first mosquito fogging tonight in Biggs

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Tonight will see the season's first fogging to battle mosquitoes that could carry West Nile virus... BIGGS — Many complaints about mosquitoes have been made by south-county residents, so the season's first fogging operation is planned tonight by the Butte County Mosquito and Vector Control District.

"The phone's been ringing off the hook," said Matt Ball, the district's general manager. He said that it was time to respond to the complaints.

Mosquitoes have been zooming off the rice fields and annoying residents of nearby neighborhoods, he said. Most of these insects are the Western malaria mosquito, which love the clear, clean water of the rice fields. These fields also breed the encephalitis mosquito, which can carry West Nile virus.

Ball said the population of Western malaria mosquitoes is "really ready to take off."

So, the district plans to have its pickups spray pesticides in the Biggs and East Biggs areas from about 8 to 11:30 p.m. tonight. The operation could be canceled if the weather is unfavorable.

Each year, to control mosquito populations, the district sprays some rice fields from the air, several weeks after the rice has been planted and the fields flooded.

There are between 90,000 and 110,000 acres of rice in Butte County, Ball said. The district, which is funded by tax dollars, only has enough money to spray 30,000 to 40,000 acres of rice. As a result, plenty of the pests can breed and bother people.

The aerial spraying usually occurs by late June. At that time, the mosquitoes are in their larval stage. They are little water insects without wings, often referred to as "wigglers," Ball said.

As adults, the Western malaria mosquitoes leave the rice fields and migrate considerable distances, he said. "It won't be long — about a month from now — that the city of Chico will start feeling these mosquitoes."

By September a few of them are even found in the Paradise area, he said.

Ball said when the district sprays rice fields from the air, it targets fields closest to populated areas, and especially fields where the encephalitis mosquito has been found.

So far this year, the West Nile virus hasn't been detected in Butte County. However, Ball said it has shown up in neighboring Yuba and Sutter counties, and he wouldn't be surprised if it turned up in Butte by the end of this month or in August.

Besides the encephalitis mosquito, the Northern house mosquito can carry West Nile. It likes to breed in stagnant water around people's homes, Ball said. That's why the district asks people to look around their yards and dump out water standing in such places as flower-pot saucers, bird baths and old tires.