

✓ Insects County bows out of battle against mosquitoes

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SANTA CRUZ — The county's mosquito war will be headquartered elsewhere, the Board of Supervisors decided Tuesday.

Over the objections of Supervisor Gary Patton, the board voted down a proposal by county staff to form its own service area to fight the blood-sucking insect.

Instead, it approved a proposal by Watsonville-area Supervisor Ray Belgard for South County to pursue annexation into a Salinas-based mosquito-control district.

Belgard argued that the long-established North Salinas Valley Mosquito Abatement District can get the job done faster and cheaper than forming a county service area.

Speed is important, Belgard said.

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— Supervisor Ray Belgard

lot more mosquitoes," he said. "I would like to see us proceed with the annexation."

Patton worried about handing over control of county concerns to a district based in another county. He raised the possibility of an environmental-impact report, which county staff has said could delay the annexation by as much as two years.

The decision to require an environmen-

tal report would be made by the Monterey County Local Agency Formation Committee, according to county officials.

The mosquito issue came up last spring, when supervisors said they got hundreds of complaints from South County residents that they were being eaten alive by mosquitoes.

Most of the complaints came from the residents in the city of Watsonville, but

most of the mosquito breeding grounds are in sloughs and wetlands in the county's unincorporated areas.

The city of Watsonville decided it wanted to be included in the Salinas district, which has been in existence some 40 years.

Last year's Board of Supervisors balked at handing over control of county lands to the Salinas district. Instead, it voted to try to form its own abatement district, which would be set up as a county service area and would cost some \$7.50 for each parcel in the treatment area.

Hindering that effort has the city of Watsonville's steadfast refusal to be a part of it.

Without Watsonville's participation, said Supervisor Jan Beautz, a project in the non-urban South County is doomed because it would cost too much.

Discussion of the proposed county mos-

quito abatement service area will continue March 16.

Patton said earlier he was worried about spraying pesticides in South County.

County Agricultural Commissioner Dave Moeller said the Salinas district uses a biological control known as BT. Short for *Bacillus thuringiensis*, the material is a bacteria that is eaten by mosquito larvae and clogs their digestive systems, but is harmless to humans. A guppy-size mosquito fish also plays a role, he said, as do educational efforts aimed at getting rid of standing water in drains, tires and backyard trash.

Nevertheless, Patton said it was the theoretical rather than the practical aspects he was worried about.

"It's precedent setting," he said after the board voted. "The Board of Supervisors has said it doesn't want to control what happens in its own county."