

# ✓ Mosquito control will sting property owners

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SANTA CRUZ — Who will control the county's mosquito war is still being argued by officials. But two things are increasingly clear: taxpayers will have to reach deeper into their pockets to pay for it; and no relief is coming this year.

After two bad mosquito years, Watsonville and Aptos area residents are still slapping while county and Watsonville officials wade deeper into the swamp of jurisdictional issues that have stalled control efforts.

But both sides say they're getting closer to a solution, but neither expects the fight against mosquitoes will start until next year.

The Board of Supervisors is set to discuss two plans this morning, while the Watsonville City Council is expected to take up the matter next week.

Under the plans before the supervisors, the cost of so-called mosquito abatement is estimated at about \$15 to \$16 annually per property owner, in affected areas of the county.

One of the plans would continue efforts to link up with a North Monterey County mosquito control district. The second would form a countywide service area to fight the mosquitoes. Both propose setting up the service area to

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pay the costs.

County staff estimates the cost of the annexation plan at \$124,000, which would add \$11.25 to each affected property owner's tax bill, plus a \$5 service fee, for a total of \$16.25.

Forming a county service area would cost an estimated \$167,500, for an annual cost of \$15.25 per parcel.

Initially, county staff suggested forming a countywide service area to pay for mosquito control. Watsonville was reluctant, however, saying it did not want to be swallowed up in a countywide group. Instead, it decided to pursue annexation to the North Salinas Valley Mosquito Abatement District.

The board agreed in January with Board Chairman Ray Belgard's recommendation to follow the same course. Belgard represents the

Watsonville area.

He argued at the time that going with an existing mosquito district would be faster, cheaper and more effective. Besides, he argued, participation of the city of Watsonville was essential.

At the time, Supervisor Gary Patton unsuccessfully argued that going with the Salinas group would mean giving control of local decisions to an out-of-county group.

Annexation efforts proved unexpectedly difficult. The mosquito district said it was interested in serving the Watsonville areas only, but not the rest of the county. The problem has been worst in the Watsonville area, but also has been severe around Aptos.

But what both the city and county found unacceptable, however, was the mosquito district's requirement to receive three-tenths of a percent of each area's property taxes.

Because of the difficulties, Watsonville may be closer to going along with the county service area.

"We're getting to the decision point," said Steve Salomon, Watsonville's city manager. "... If it appears that annexing across the county line is going to cause issues which are going to take too much time to resolve we may go ahead with this."