



WHAT'S THE RUSH? Daniel Harder, head of the UCSC Arboretum, believes the moth invasion does not constitute an emergency.

Mothra vs. Moose

Santa Cruz tries to halt aerial spraying for Light Brown Apple Moth

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Light Brown Apple Moth

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The Light Brown Apple Moth (LBAM) is the gift that keeps on giving. Seemingly seconds after firing off an update on its invasion of the Central Coast, more and more developments roll into the newsroom forcing further analysis and digestion.

Actually, it's not the moths—which have been dubbed an invasive species by state and federal regulators—that seem to be the epicenter of the debate, but rather the process of either managing or eradicating the Australian stowaways.

While the California Department of Agriculture and their federal overlords, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, insist that the invasive pest be completely eradicated, a number of local politicians and scientists are begging for better process and better science before such an action is undertaken using a synthetic pheromone sprayed from fixed wing aircraft. The pheromone, which mimics the scent of female moths, confuses mating males, theoretically leading to a crash in the breeding population.

In their closed session on Oct. 23, the Santa Cruz City Council, in a 3-2 vote (councilmembers Madrigal and Rotkin were absent) decided to step up their efforts to halt the spraying of Checkmate LBAM-E, the trade name of the synthetic pheromone. Their action was seconded by the County Board of Supervisors in the last week of October.

This newest legal development—which came days after Judge Robert O'Farrell refused to renew an earlier temporary injunction on spraying brought forth by the Carmel environmental group Helping Our Peninsula's Environment (HOPE)—will try to use the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) rather than rely upon a temporary injunction.

"Our role is to create a better process so that people get the information that they need," says Vice Mayor Ryan Coonerty. "The state hasn't done a great job of that. We're not saying that [the spraying] is the worst thing that has ever happened, but the state has to make the case that there is an impact, that this warrants being treated as an emergency."