

Mosquito horde threatens Watsonville

By GREG BEEBE

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WATSONVILLE — The latest buzz in Watsonville is that the city's mosquito problem could be "four or five times worse than last year."

Such is the written warning from Public Works director John Cooper, who is recommending the City Council spend \$7,500 to spray an estimated 350 acres of the city's slough breeding grounds.

"Mosquito experts tell us it's going to be worse this year," Public Works director John Cooper said Monday.

"... Get out the repellent."

Drought-busting rains have filled area waterways to levels not seen in seven or eight years, creating perfect breeding grounds for *Aedes increpitus*, the area's most common mosquito, said Peter Ghormley, manager-zoologist of the North Salinas Valley Mosquito

Abatement District, which is advising the city on its mosquito problem.

"Obviously we've had an increase in habitat, and so as soon as it turns warm we're going to be busy," said Ghormley. A combination of factors, he said, could make this year's collective mosquito bite one of the itchiest and bumpiest in years.

Rains are the first ingredient, he said. Plus, "you had a significant problem last year that went uncontrolled," said Ghormley, "and all of those mosquitoes fed and went back and laid their eggs."

Watsonville's most common breed of buzzing, biting pest does not lay its eggs on water, but rather on land, where the eggs can await the flow of water for several years, he said.

"Only the mosquitoes and God know how the water is going to get there eventually. And when the water comes those eggs are

all immersed," said Ghormley. Just add warm weather and humidity and you get "a bumper crop" of mosquitoes, he said.

Some south county residents are even now reporting mosquitoes lurking around their homes, and Cooper said he's already received complaints.

"I got a call today," he said.

Large bodies of water are not the only haven for mosquitoes, said Ghormley. "Local residents can minimize the production of mosquitoes in their yards by making sure they have no containers holding water, from a tire to a bottle to a dog dish.

"Anything that's holding water — dump it out, turn it upside down," he said.

According to Cooper's recommendation to the council, an "intensive" effort will be employed to inform city residents of the spraying. A final decision on spraying won't be made until the city has a better idea how

effective it might be.

The city would rent a helicopter to seek, spray and destroy mosquito larvae, but the exact eradication area remains to be decided, said Ghormley, who estimated the campaign should be 40 to 50 percent successful.

Both Watsonville and the county of Santa Cruz have expressed interest in joining the Mosquito Abatement District, but annexation must take place before the end of the year if the district is to take official control of mosquito abatement efforts here by 1994, said Ghormley.

City Manager Steve Salomon said Watsonville officials have met with the abatement district about annexing into its service area, "but there's a whole process to it and it's going to take a while. ...

"I don't know yet if we're going to pull it off," said Salomon.