

✓ Insects

County, Watsonville at odds over mosquito-control plans

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SANTA CRUZ — Mosquitoes that live in one jurisdiction but do their biting elsewhere have sparked a turf battle which has so far confounded efforts to control the pesky insects.

Ever since last spring's unusually severe mosquito outbreak, local jurisdictions have been snarled in debate over which one should be in charge of the fight.

Most of the mosquito breeding grounds are in the county, but most of the complaints have been in the city of Watsonville.

But so far, that city and the county have not seen eye to eye on who should make the decisions in the mosquito war.

Watsonville has said it wants to join a Salinas Valley-based mosquito abatement district.

County officials, however, fear the loss of control and are proposing the formation of a countywide mosquito abatement service area. That proposal has already been approved by the county's Local Agency Formation Commission.

Watsonville, though, has said it wants no part of the proposed service area.

The Board of Supervisors will hold a public hearing on the pro-

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posals at 10:45 a.m. today at the Board of Supervisors' Fifth Floor Chambers in the County Government Center, 701 Ocean St., Santa Cruz.

Watsonville-area Supervisor Ray Belgard has submitted his own proposal to the board, recommending that the southern part of the county join with the already existing North Salinas Valley Mosquito Abatement District.

"(The Salinas Valley district) is in place with equipment, personnel and memorandums of understanding with the appropriate regulatory agencies such as Fish and Game," Belgard said in his proposal. "Why are we creating another bureaucratic organization?"

But Supervisor Gary Patton said he doesn't want the county to lose control over what happens within its boundaries, and become only one voice on a Salinas Valley-based

district.

Specifically, what Patton is worried about is the spraying of pesticides. Patton says he's heard complaints from the Elkhorn Slough Natural Resource Preserve, which is in the existing mosquito abatement district, that spraying of the sloughs takes place despite the objections of the preserve.

"Exactly the thing I'm worried about has been a problem with the Elkhorn Slough already," Patton said. He fears that annexation into the district would lead to the same thing happening in this county.

Under the county's proposed plan, the governing board would be the county Board of Supervisors. Under the annexation plan, the county of Santa Cruz and the city of Watsonville would likely have one representative each on what is now a nine-member board.

County analysts estimate a first-year budget for the proposed service area at about \$80,000, or about \$7.50 per parcel, if the Watsonville is included. The cost would be higher if Watsonville does not participate, staff says.

The cost to the Pajaro Valley-area residents if the area is annexed into the Salinas district would also be about \$7.50 per parcel, according to county staff.