

Butte County remains free of West Nile virus

Officials say "combined effort" remains strong

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OROVILLE — It's so far, so good this year in terms of the West Nile virus in Butte County.

According to Butte County Public Health spokeswoman Lisa Almaguer, no cases of West Nile virus have been reported as of July 3. Last year, the first case was reported July 2.

The Butte County Vector Control District, along with Butte County Public Health officials, have combined their efforts to ensure the virus stays out of the area. Although this does not guarantee Butte County won't see cases rise as summer begins, the effort so far has been collaborative between local agencies.

"The district always strives to conduct early detection, surveillance and control of mosquitoes that are capable of transmitting West Nile virus," said Matt Ball, Butte County Vector Control District manager, on Wednesday.

"The district had to repeat some early and late spring work due to the excess late season rain. Due to the Camp Fire and above average precipitation, the district hired more seasonal staff than has in years past, conducted aerial surveillance of potential mosquito-breeding sources at a different time, and boosted the efforts for public education and awareness."

Ball then spoke to whether areas like the Camp Fire burn scar have created new problems in the face of fighting this disease. His answer was a resounding "Yes".

"The Camp Fire's devastation destroyed over 12,000 Butte County resident homes and if that wasn't sad enough, in its wake, it created hundreds of thousands of new homes for mosquitoes capable of transmitting West Nile. Burnt rubble and miscellaneous containers capable of holding water, exposed septic tanks, ponds, fountains and unmaintained swimming pools are just an example of newly created homes for mosquitoes," Ball said.

According to Ball, the most unfortunate issue with the new mosquito breeding grounds the Camp Fire created are the species of mosquitoes that now call it home. The new habitats are preferred by two troublesome species of mosquitoes that are very "efficient and effective" transmitters of West Nile virus. Among the 26 species of mosquitoes found throughout Butte County, these two species — *Culex tarsalis* (encephalitis mosquito) and *Culex pipiens* (northern house mosquito), according to Ball — are not ones officials want moving in for good.

The Butte County Vector Control District had reached out for help following the Camp Fire, according to Ball.

“Thanks to the financial assistance provided by the North Valley Community Foundation, Butte Strong Fund, the district has had resources available to hire more staff, hire a contractor to provide aerial surveillance and had the ability to purchase more biological public health products,” Ball said. “We are extremely fortunate to have the support of the North Valley Community Foundation.”

The district has increased its temporary and permanent staff assigned to the Camp Fire burn scar from two to eight in the past several months. Those staff are conducting aerial and ground surveillance over the burn scar, according to Ball. They continue to visit and treat sites identified by the aerial surveillance conducted. Crews also work to suppress adult mosquito populations by fogging where trap numbers are high and where local residents have requested assistance.

“To date the district has not identified West Nile virus within its mosquito populations or bird population,” Ball said. “Last year, West Nile virus positive mosquito pools were not detected until July 2, the first positive dead bird was not identified until July 24, and the first positive sentinel chicken was on July 31.”

As of now, both Butte County Public Health officials and Vector Control officials remain vigilant and will continue to monitor the threat.