

Taking on the gypsy moth

County eyes coordinator to help local communities

By LeAnne Rogers
staff writer

Oakland is apparently the only county in Michigan with a gypsy moth problem that has no county coordinator to direct efforts to fight the infestation.

But Oakland County communities are looking into the possibility of following suit.

A group of transplanted Easterners, gypsy moths, have growing numbers in Oakland County and are likely to be here for a long time, according to Carl Dollhopf, Michigan Department of Agriculture regional supervisor.

And oak trees are their favorite target.

"We want the communities to be in control rather than individuals having sprayings done. It's not effective if only one guy sprays," Dollhopf said. "The same is true for communities. No one can be 100 percent sure in the county that they aren't going to get this."

When communities eventually do begin spraying, Dollhopf said the hope is that the gypsy moth population will be reduced by as much as 90 percent.

Eight communities in the county have been designated as having general problems with gypsy moth infestations, he said, but all communities in the county have some number of the insects.

BASED ON findings in traps and egg mass counts, the eight heaviest areas of gypsy moth concentrations are:

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— Carl Dollhopf
Michigan Department of Agriculture

• Beverly Hills and Bingham Farms — the area west of Lahser Road between 13 Mile and 14 Mile;

• Bloomfield Hills and Bloomfield Township — along the border of the two communities at Lahser and Quanton roads;

• Troy — in the area of Big Beaver and Adams roads;

• West Bloomfield — north of Maple Road and east of Orchard Lake Road;

• Rochester Hills — east of Meadow Brook Hall;

• Holly — in Seven Lakes State Park;

• Highland Township — in the area of Hickory Ridge Road, north of M-59;

• Lake Orion — the southern end of the village.

"THIS is based on density of the gypsy moths. All of these are very small areas," Dollhopf said. "All the surrounding counties also have them. They are here to stay."

During their caterpillar stage, in this area usually mid-May through mid-June, the gypsy moths eat leaves from trees, Dollhopf said. If

50 percent or more of the leaves are lost, he said the tree is weakened.

The larger moths will go after white pine and hemlock, according to a representative from the extension service. The smaller larvae have broader tastes. They will attack alder, birch, apple and basswood trees.

They will go to other kinds of trees only after supplies of these leaves are exhausted.

"(THEN) THE tree is open to infestation from bark beetles or other bugs and to winter injuries," Dollhopf said. "If there is minimal damage, you can care for the tree by trimming dead branches, feeding it and watering it if needed. You can't do anything really if there is a heavy infestation."

Currently the infested area of Beverly Hills has 65-70 egg masses per acre. Dollhopf said total defoliation by the gypsy moths does not occur until the egg masses exceed 300 per acre.

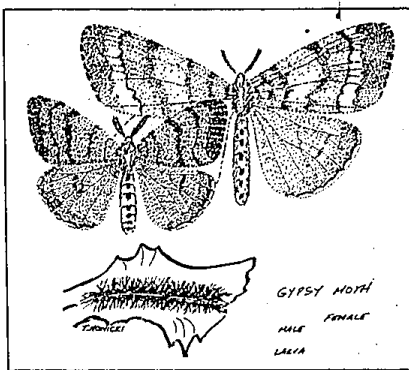
"We could reach those levels by 1990 depending on environmental factors like how severe this winter will be," Dollhopf said. "If the winter is severe and there is a high mortality rate, we might not reach those levels."

THE DENSITY of infestation will determine whether gypsy moth spraying is warranted, Dollhopf said. Currently, Beverly Hills, Bingham Farms, Bloomfield Hills, Bloomfield Township and West Bloomfield are looking at a possible spring 1990 spraying program, he said.

"It is really up to the community if they are going to spray," Dollhopf said. "You are dealing with a lot of issues like a drop in property values if the trees are defoliated and you can't get federal or state money unless defoliation is imminent. Communities might want to go ahead with spraying."

Bacillus Thuringiensis (BT), also known by the product name Dipel, would most likely be the spray used for aerial spraying of infested trees. This spray is not supposed to be harmful to other insects, wildlife, humans or the environment.

"If infestation is at too low a level, the BT will not be effective," Dollhopf said. "Also it isn't cost effective financially or environmentally to put pesticides into the environment unnecessarily. The idea is to spray only when there is an imminent need."



Parks re-open for camping

Weekend camping resumes at two Oakland County parks. Opening day at Addison Oaks is Friday April 28 while Groveland Oaks opens Friday, May 5. The regular camping season begins May 19 and runs through Sept. 10. Fees for primitive sites are \$7 (\$9 for non-residents); semi-modern sites are \$9.

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Project failed; moths escaped

Gypsy moths are on this continent as the result of a failed experiment.

The moths were brought to New England from Europe in 1869 for cross breeding to make sturdier silk moths, according to Carl Dollhopf of the Michigan Department of Agriculture.

Since escaping captivity in New England, the gypsy moths have been transported to other areas of the country by egg masses laid in baskets, cars, trailers, lawn furniture and even a clothespin bag.

"The egg masses are deposited by early August and don't hatch until April, so there is a lot of time for them to be moved," Dollhopf said.

Michigan's first infestation was in Lansing in 1933 when the eggs were brought in on produce bushel baskets. That infestation was eradicated, he said, but that is no longer possible.

"We can cosmetically control

them but we can't eradicate them. They are very prolific and their natural enemies aren't here," Dollhopf said. "We introduced some of their natural enemies, but winter has taken a harder toll on them than on the gypsy moths. They are also kind of hairy, so birds don't like them much."

For the past 50 years the state has set two traps in designated spots in each township to monitor gypsy moth populations. Dollhopf said extra traps had also been set, but due to funding cuts that task is being taken over by local communities.

More information on the gypsy moth is available in booklet form at a small charge from the Oakland County Cooperative Extension Service, 1200 N. Telegraph, Pontiac. Hours are 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Telephone number is 858-0880.

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It is up to each community to decide whether to spray, according to state experts.