

# Hills, others get help battling gypsy moths

By GREG KOWALSKI  
STAFF WRITER

For the first time, area communities can get help from the county, state and federal government to battle the growing gypsy moth infestation.

The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Oakland County are coordinating a program to reimburse communities for up to half the cost of spraying for the pests, which are infesting many area communities.

Officials from Bloomfield Township, West Bloomfield Township, Bloomfield Hills, Orchard Lake, Franklin, Beverly Hills, Bingham Farms, Rochester Hills, Farmington Hills and Royal Oak met with county and state representatives last week to hear details of the program.

Michael Zehnder has been named as the Oakland County coordinator for the reimbursement program. The county will coordinate the communities' plan of action against the moths.

All the communities have identified areas of gypsy moth infestation, which could potentially devastate the forests. Seven of the communities — Beverly Hills, Franklin, Bingham Farms, Bloomfield Township, Bloomfield Hills, West Bloomfield and Farmington Hills — are already part of a consortium formed to coordinate efforts to battle the moths.

"The county will take a leading role in this," said Zehnder. "We're not looking at this as some kind of science fiction problem. We are going to commit the time, resources and people we have," said Zehnder.

Under the project, the communities must submit maps of areas that are infested with the gypsy

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*Michael Zehnder  
Oakland County coordinator for reimbursement program*

moths to the county for spraying next spring.

The county will serve as the coordinating agency for the project at the local level and submit the maps and spraying proposals to the Michigan Department of Agriculture. It in turn will seek reimbursement for the program from the U. S. Department of Interior.

Affected areas will be divided into five categories with the amount of reimbursement based on the category.

In general, private lands of less than 500 acres per owner will receive a 50 percent reimbursement. Private recreational and special use lands of 500 or more acres will be reimbursed at a rate of 33 percent. Public land will be reimbursed at a rate of 25 percent.

"Bids will be taken for the spraying in February," said Kendra Anderson, department of agriculture pest management specialist.

One contractor will be hired to spray all the Oakland County communities in the program.

Whether the spraying will be done by helicopter or fixed-wing airplane is still to be determined.

David Payne, Bloomfield Township assistant administrator, said helicopters are preferable.

"We've had fixed-wing planes,

but there's no comparison to helicopters," Payne said. Helicopters are quieter and can more precisely direct the spraying, Payne said.

In either case, residents in areas to be sprayed will have to be notified by mail that spraying will be done.

The county and state want to get the program in motion now in time for spraying in the spring before the egg masses hatch. The gypsy moth caterpillars are extremely destructive and have defoliated some areas of western Oakland County.

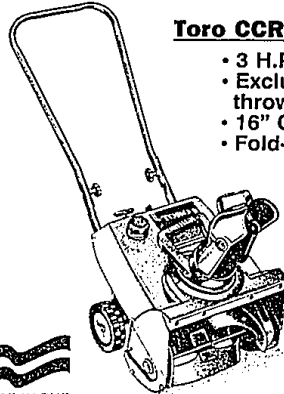
The caterpillars prefer oak tree leaves but will eat whatever leaves are available.

Egg masses are clusters of between 250 and 1,000 eggs, usually found clinging to sides of trees, although they can be found on wood piles and porches.

Many area communities have shared previous egg mass counts and some have contracted with the National Gypsy Moth Management Group of Landisburg, Pa., which specializes in tracking gypsy moths. But the company does not do spraying.

"The infestation is rising at incredible rates," said Bingham Farms clerk Kathy Hagaman. "The problem is getting out of hand, even in little Bingham Farms."

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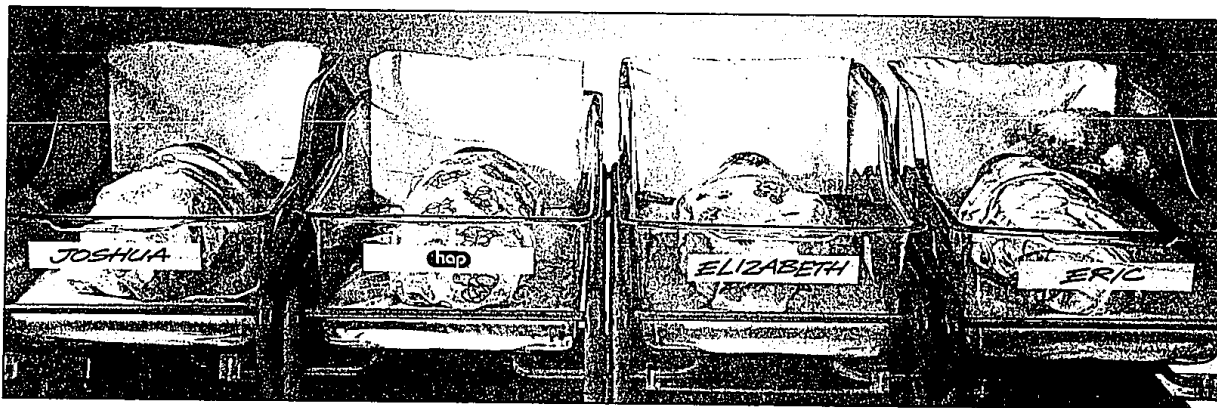
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