

Volusia looks at forming westside mosquito control district

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Creating a Mosquito Control District on Volusia's west side could reduce disease-carrying insects between Lake George in Pierson and the St. Johns River floodplain. But it would also cause West Volusia homeowners in a 726 square-mile region to get bit by a new tax.

Volusia officials will seek direction from the County Council on Tuesday as to whether to move forward with establishing a Westside Mosquito Control District. If council gives the nod of approval, this operation — currently funded through a special tax by property owners on the east side of the county — would be one step closer to a countywide service.

Council members representing Volusia's west side, Pat Patterson and Fred Lowry, did not return phone calls seeking comment. County spokeswoman Joanne Magley said the county "isn't commenting on this agenda item before it goes in front of County Council."

Joyce Cusack, a DeLand resident and the County Council's at-large representative, said she's heard of mosquitoes being a nuisance in West Volusia during the rainy summer months and closer to hurricane season. She wants to ensure the county is doing all it can to address the needs in that area.

"I've heard folks tell me they can't get any help when they have mosquitos," she said. "I just think we need to do what we can do address the problem if there is a problem."

County Chair Ed Kelley isn't convinced it's needed but is willing to listen to a presentation about how it would work and how much it would cost.

“I don’t know if (homeowners there) are willing to pay what it would cost to do it countywide,” Kelley said, adding that West Volusia cities can pay to extend services there as needed, such as when a West Nile or Zika virus outbreak occurs or when a large group of mosquitoes are found breeding over a body of water. “For me, I think it would be wise to go with it as needed. I don’t know if it’s something we should force upon everyone.”

Currently, the county has an East Volusia Mosquito Control District that serves 537 square miles and 50,000 acres of salt marsh between Ormond-by-the-Sea and Oak Hill. For the services — which includes pest management and West Nile virus treatment, response and education — residents there pay about 18 cents for every \$1,000 in taxable value, or approximately \$18 a year for a home valued at \$150,000 with a \$50,000 homestead exemption.

The county provides limited services on the west side, according to agenda materials posted on the county’s website. Several mosquito traps are in place, along with sentinel chickens, which are kept in cages in areas where mosquito bites are likely. Through regular blood testing of the birds, disease hunters can predict when and where people are at risk of catching West Nile.

According to a presentation included in agenda materials, the county spends about \$150,000 of its Municipal Service District fund a year on mosquito services in West Volusia. The presentation also mentions contracts with cities totaling \$21,000 a year.

The council on March 6 told county staff that it wanted to explore expanding the mosquito service to all areas of the county. County Manager Jim Dinneen told the council that he’d come back with a presentation on how much that would cost and how it would look.

“Maybe we can do a straw poll or something to find whether or not anyone else was interested,” Dinneen said. “In the old days, we only had one side of the county that was interested. ... What we will do is put forward what this could look and what the implications are to having a countywide district.”

A Westside Mosquito Control District would require funding for a new site, nine full-time positions and three seasonal special workers, according to the agenda materials. It would also call for the acquisition of six trucks, six

insecticide units, a helicopter and other resources.

The county estimates a special tax, like the one paid by East Volusia residents, would generate roughly \$8.6 million a year.

The 10 a.m. County Council meeting will be held at the Thomas C. Kelly Administration Complex, 123 W. Indiana Avenue in DeLand. Also on the agenda: the council will hear a presentation on the reopening of the Daytona Beach Regional Library at City Island, which has been closed since Hurricane Irma.