

Weed & Pest district outlines strategy

Weed & Pest district outlines grasshopper strategy

By TOM MORTON - Star-Tribune staff writer | Posted: Wednesday, June 23, 2010

Pharaoh in the time of Moses -- when locusts devastated Egypt -- could have used the Natrona County Weed & Pest Control District's strategy to fight the largest local grasshopper infestation in 22 years.

"We have densities that warrant spraying," the district's director, Brian Connely, told Natrona County commissioners at a work session Tuesday.

The district plans to treat 112,542 acres with chemicals that stop the grasshoppers from metamorphosing after they hatch, Connely said. These chemicals are not harmful to other insects, plants or animals, he added.

The district, which has its own property tax system independent of county government, has been working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Johnson County, he said.

The district has enlisted the service of a Texas company that owns airplanes designed for spraying, and they fly from the airport in Douglas to the targeted areas in Natrona County, Connely said.

While grasshoppers are part of the local ecosystem, there comes a point where they can do immense harm to the environment and the economy, he said.

"A major grasshopper infestation has the potential to take all the forage off the land," Connely said. "It's very beneficial to nip these things in the bud."

The extreme loss of vegetation affects livestock on the economic side, and the ecosystem effects include damage to antelope, deer, elk, sage grouse and other animals, he said.

While the prairies take the hardest hit, some of the infestations have reached inside Casper city limits, Connely said.

He cautioned homeowners about what to do and not do, he said. "Don't encourage them to go to Home Depot and buy Bug-B-Dead."

Instead, homeowners should use other products that target only grasshoppers because insecticides will kill other insects, including bees, Connely said.

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