

# Flooding to create active mosquito season in Flathead Valley



David Glode takes photographs at the flooded Old Steel Bridge Fishing Access on the Flathead River in E.ergreen on Wednesday, June 22. (Casey Kreider/Daily Inter Lake)

By  
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For Flathead Valley residents hearing a buzz around town this summer, it's probably not the influx of tourists swarming the area — it's the mosquitoes.

A report from county pest control officials warns that Northwest Montana is in for a sharp increase in mosquito activity this summer due to unprecedented flooding in June.

Jake Rubow with the Flathead County Mosquito Control program, notes that because mosquitoes need mud and standing water to lay eggs and raise larvae, the flooding that has beset much of the Flathead Valley for the past month has created ideal conditions for an abnormally active mosquito population.

On top of that, Rubow said that because flooding remains an issue in many areas of the Flathead Valley, he and his team are cut off from treating many important mosquito breeding sites. According to Rubow, these sites need to be watched closely and mapped accurately if the the county is to grapple with the influx of mosquitoes head on.

“Our priorities right now lie in the areas that we have access to,” Rubow told the Inter Lake, “but one of the main ways in which we prevent mosquito populations from getting out of control is by physically being where they are breeding and treating the larvae.”

Rubow said that one of the ways he and his team treat a mosquito breeding habitat is by taking water samples to see how many mosquito larvae are in the area. They then apply granules of *Bacillus Thuringiensis Israelensis*, an organic non-toxic insecticide that dissolves in the water where the hatchings take place. The larvae then absorb the insecticide and are killed.

According to Rubow, when areas affected by flooding are not treated by insect control agencies with urgency, the situation can become worse and the consequences will compound.

“Often times, mosquito eggs can lay dormant in mud for months, even years at a time, and when they are left to hatch you will sometimes see multiple generations of larvae hatching at the same time as the newest wave of larvae, which obviously just multiplies the headaches for our team,” Rubow said.

Another problem Rubow said Montanan's should remain vigilant about is the potential for the spread of the West Nile virus, an infection that can be carried by a species of mosquitoes known as the *Culex*.

Although the chances of contracting the West Nile Virus from mosquito contact is still low, Rubow said that any potential spike in mosquito population should be treated with caution. He recommends that residents stay prepared to protect themselves whenever going out in the elements.

“The best defense against mosquito bites remains the same: bug spray and long sleeves,” he advised.

Rubow also reminded residents that mosquitoes are most attracted to places with standing water and that some of the most ideal habitats for them to breed are in a backyard.

“That means bird baths, boat tarps, drainage ditches,” Rubow said. “Anywhere that collects water and creates puddles.”

Some of the ways the Flathead County Mosquito Control program hopes to limit the scope of the mosquito infestation is by doing what Rubow refers to as “fogging,” an older practice of insect prevention that involves driving up and down different mosquito habitats with a truck that sprays insecticide into all of the breeding areas. Rubow noted that this process isn’t done without first getting the expressed consent of landowners and by calling all affected residents.

He also cited the usage of “adulticide,” in which the program aims to target adult mosquito colonies instead of their larvae.

Rubow lamented an increase of new homes being built in mosquito habitats, as well as dwindling resources and limited workers at his disposal.

“Right now, we’re doing everything we can with the numbers we have to keep the problem manageable,” Rublow said. “However, what we need more than anything is cooperation from the public. Otherwise, tackling this issue all the way may prove extremely difficult, if not impossible.”

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