## 100 TEMPORARY JOBS

# State Outlines $9 Million Spraying Program To Fight Gypsy Moths

BY ERIC CARLSON

In the most extensive eradication effort ever mounted in the U.S. against a recently introduced leaf-eating caterpillar, airplanes will spray insecticide over more than 130,000 acres of Brunswick and New Hanover counties next spring.

"We'll need to spray everywhere," said W.A. Dickerson, plant pest administrator for the N.C. Department of Agriculture, when asked if residential areas also will need to be treated.

Dickerson is chairman of a management team coordinating the massive effort to prevent a local infestation of Asian gypsy moths from rapidly spreading throughout the Southeast. The group held a public forum in Bolivia Thursday night to explain the eradication program.

Last July, a German cargo ship at the Military Ocean Terminal Sunny Point was found to be infested with Asian gypsy moths. Although the ship was immediately sent back to sea and fumigated, insect traps set shortly after the discovery indicated that the moths made their way to shore on both sides of the Cape Fear River.

The Asian and European strains of gypsy moths are similar in that they can devastate huge tracts of forest by stripping the trees of their leaves. The European gypsy moth already affects more than 4.2 million acres each year, mostly in the northeastern United States.

But the two strains differ in one important characteristic, said Lloyd Garcia, an agriculture department staff entomologist. While female European gypsy moths are flightless and lay their eggs within a few feet of where they emerge from their cocoons, the Asian females can fly up to 20 miles before laying their eggs.

> *"We expect to knock them down before they get to a reproducing level, which will work because there are no so few out there."*
> —W.A. Dickerson, NCDA Plant Pest Administrator

Consequently, the gypsy moth management team is mounting an effort to eradicate the infestation when it first hatches in May or June. Aircraft will spray two types of insecticide along the coast from Masonboro Inlet to Tubbs Inlet and inland to Bolivia.

Most areas will be sprayed with Bacillus thuringiensis (Bt), a naturally-occurring bacterium that is toxic only to caterpillars of certain damaging agricultural pests including the spruce budworm, tent caterpillar, spring and fall cankerworm, cabbage looper and the gypsy moth. Experts say Bt has a proven safety record and has been used to control gypsy moths since the 1950s.

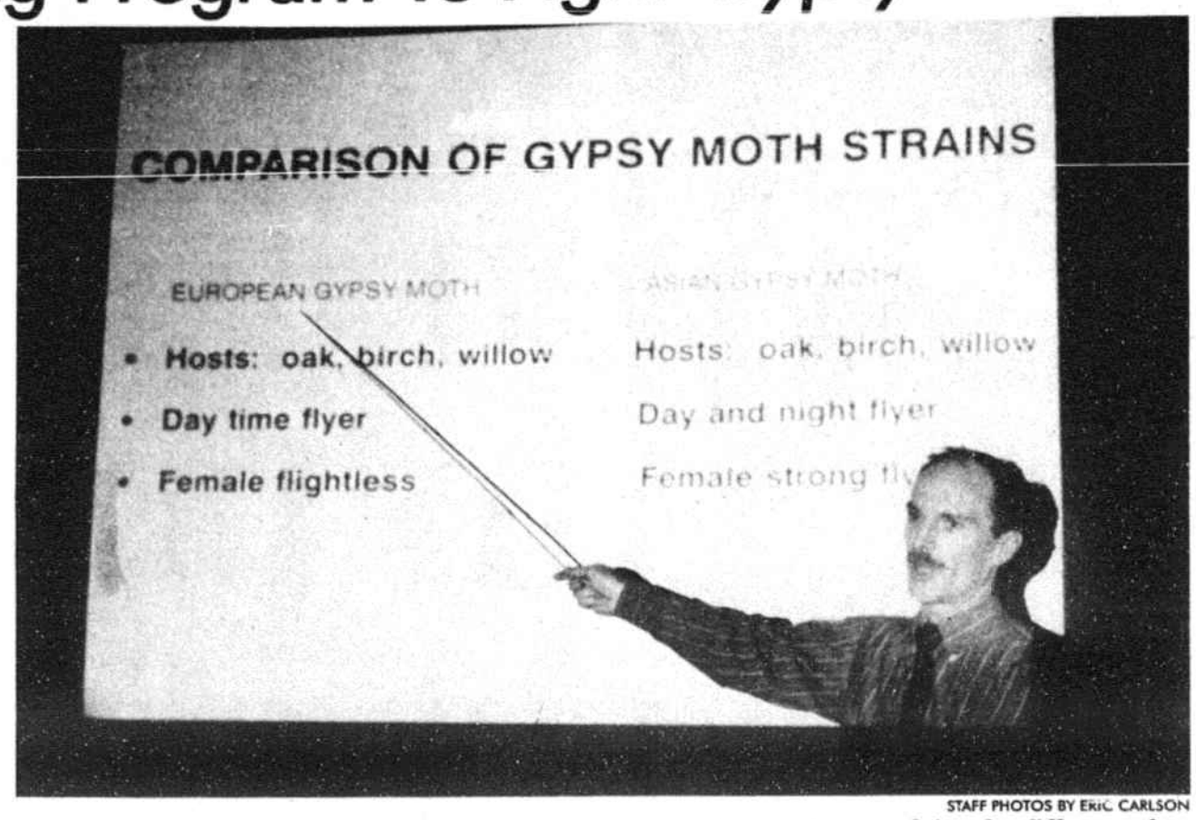
On 4,000 acres where scientists have determined that Bt spraying could harm rare or fragile insect species, an insect virus called Gypcheck will be used against the moths, Dickerson said. Gypcheck is only produced in government laboratories and is "in short supply," he said. The local spraying program will exhaust the nation's supply of the virus.

Dickerson said that by targeting the gypsy moths in a massive one-shot program over a period of about two weeks, it should be possible to eradicate the pests without harming birds or other species of insects.

"We expect to knock them down before they get to a reproducing level, which will work because there are no so few out there." Dickerson said. "Other insects are present in such numbers that a single spraying won't have much impact on them. They'll recover quickly."

The area of concern for controlling the gypsy moth infestation has been divided by priority into five zones, with different treatment and testing plans for each:

■Zone 1 includes all land areas within eight kilometers of the route traversed by the German cargo ship. This encompasses a 40,109-acre area roughly from the N.C. Baptist Assembly Grounds and Bald Head Island to just north of Carolina Beach and inland about a mile from the Cape Fear River. The greatest exposure to gypsy moths occurred here with more than 300 trapped at the wharf where the ship docked. A minimum of two applications of Bt are planned with subsequent test traps to be set at a level of 25 per square mile.




STAFF PHOTOS BY ERIC CARLSON

*ENTOMOLOGIST Lloyd Garcia of the N.C. Department of Agriculture explains the difference between two strains of Gypsy Moth at a public forum called to outline the state's plan to combat a recently discovered infestation of the pests in Brunswick and New Hanover counties.*

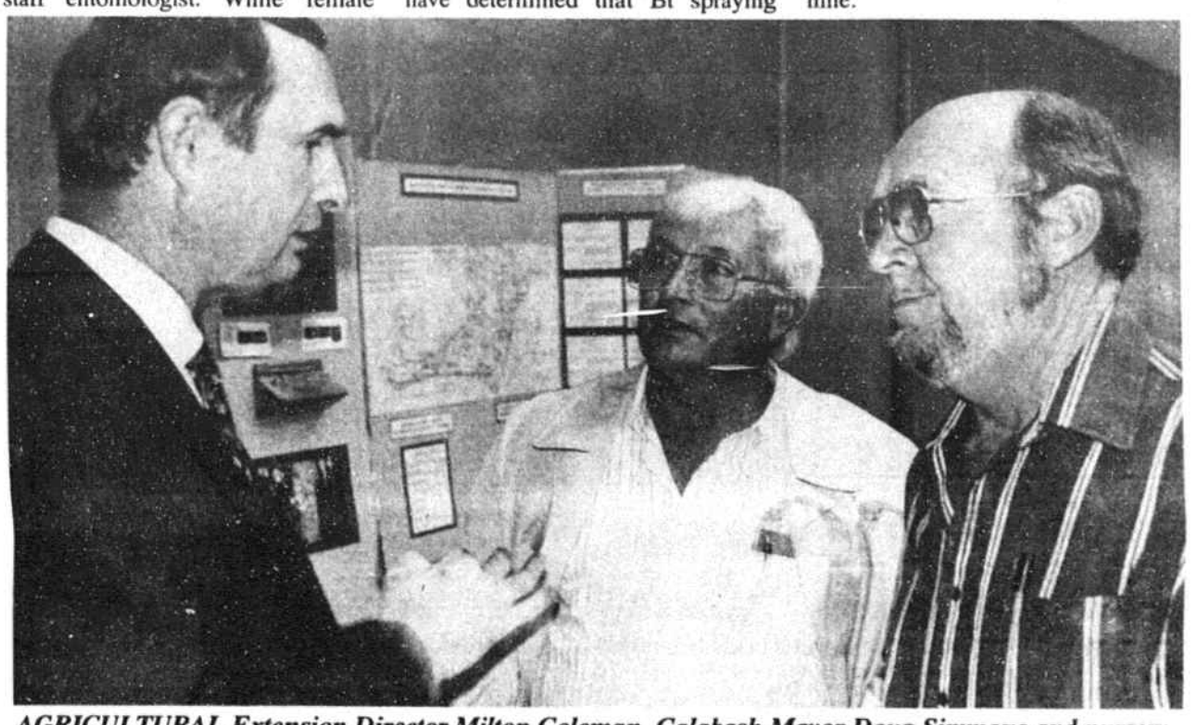
■Zone 2 extends north and west of Zone 1 to two miles beyond the furthest initial catches, where 12 moths were trapped. The area encompasses about 68,162 acres from Masonboro Inlet almost to Bolivia and east to the border of Zone 1. At least two applications of Bt are planned followed by trapping at 25 traps per square mile.

■Zone 3 is a 12-mile strip running along the South Brunswick Island beaches and two miles inland from Caswell Beach to Tubbs Inlet. Moths were trapped here along the shoreline, suggesting that they flew to the coast from the ship as it was anchored offshore. In this area of 22,198 acres, a minimum of two applications of Bt are planned, with follow-up trapping at 25 traps per square mile.

■Zone 4 encompasses 58,074 acres between Zones 1, 2 and 3, roughly from N.C. 133 to Supply and south toward Holden Beach. Only two gypsy moths were captured in 17 traps set in this area. Spraying is not planned initially, but traps will be set at a rate of 25 per square mile and checked every three days. Trapping will be increased to nine per mile if any moths are captured after the spraying program.

■Zone 5 extends 30 miles out from Zone 1 and includes the probable maximum distance the females could reach during the first season. Traps will be set at 25 per square mile and increased following any positive moth captures.

In all, more than 20,000 traps will be set to track the success of the spraying program and to identify areas where additional spraying is needed. The program is expected to cost about $9 million and will include the hiring of about 100 part-time workers to monitor the traps between May and August, Dickerson said.



*AGRICULTURAL Extension Director Milton Coleman, Calabash Mayor Doug Simmons and nursery owner David Nelson of Longwood (left to right) discuss the state's plan to eradicated gypsy moths at a public forum in Bolivia Thursday night.*

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