

Hunterdon County Funds Share Of Last Black Fly Spraying



Photo Credit: Curtis Leeds, Tapinto

Hunterdon County Freeholder Board Deputy Director John E. Lanza has announced the County has provided the Pennsylvania DEP with funding to cover part of the cost for the August 1st final black fly suppression spraying along the Hunterdon side of the Delaware River, after the state notified the County that it will not fund its share of the program.

Lanza, the Board's liaison for Public Safety, stated, "The Freeholders consider this program too important to our residents to sit idly by. Black flies are not just annoying and intrusive, they have a negative impact on the quality of life for residents in communities along the river, as well as on tourism and other outdoor economic activities.

This program is a state responsibility because it normally covers Mercer, Hunterdon and Warren Counties. The state has dropped the ball and as County officials we felt we needed to act to at least have the Hunterdon portion of the river sprayed, in order for our residents to gain some relief."

The County received email confirmation on July 31st from the PADEP, Southeast Regional Office, in Norristown, PA, that stated, *'the PA DEP will be conducting an aerial black fly (biting gnat) control operation along the Delaware River on Thursday, August 1, beginning at approximately 8:00 am. The Black Fly Suppression Program will be treating the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's portion of the Delaware River.*

Without financial support from New Jersey, Pennsylvania can no longer manage and spray the New Jersey portion of the Delaware River; however, the entire river will be treated in Hunterdon County.

The black fly suppression application on the Hunterdon County side of the Delaware River by Helicopter Applicators, Inc. (HAI) of Gettysburg, PA, took place on August 1st.

Lanza said, “We are greatly appreciative of Pennsylvania including Hunterdon County’s portion of the river in their final spray operation of the season. They were very cooperative at adding us at the last minute. Our County Vector Control Division Head Tadhg Rainey is due significant credit for gaining the Pennsylvania DEP’s cooperation.”

In early July, the Pennsylvania DEP announced that black fly spraying would take place only along the Pennsylvania side of the Delaware River and not the New Jersey side due to lack of New Jersey financial support.

The Hunterdon Freeholders reached out to officials representing river towns requesting support for the funding. State Senators Mike Doherty and Kip Bateman contacted the NJDEP to support the black fly suppression funding.

The County received an email notification from the NJDEP on July 27 stating, ‘we are unable to participate this year.’

“We were very disappointed to learn the State was not holding up its end for this important public health initiative, as it had done the previous two years,” Lanza said.

The Hunterdon County cost share was \$10,500 for Pennsylvania’s DEP to spray identified points along the Hunterdon County side of the river.

According to the Pennsylvania DEP, the material used for spraying is a naturally occurring bacteria (*Bacillus thuringiensis israelensis*) that kills the immature (larval) form of the black fly when they feed on it in the waterways. The material does not affect other aquatic life negatively.

The PADEP indicates this application of B.t.i. is not toxic to fish or other aquatic macroinvertebrates found in the treated waterways.