

Community Comment  
Tuesday, May 23, 2017

This is Erin Dunn of the Fortuna Chamber of Commerce with a community comment.

I recently attended the County's Scoping Meeting for Cannabis Environmental Impact Report. This meeting provided participants the opportunity to comment on the proposed amendments regulating Cannabis activities in Humboldt County.

I experienced a couple of "firsts" at that meeting.

The first first was shocking -- I agreed 100 per cent with what Bonnie Blackberry had to say. She succinctly lined out all of the ways the massive Cannabis grows are damaging our quality of life--through air, noise, light, and water pollution. She was spot on.

The second first – a biologist-type suggested, among other things, that instead of poisons to control pests at the outdoor grows, they might want to consider predatory mice.

Predatory mice? I had never even heard of that before.

I asked a few people over the next couple of days if they had heard about Predatory Mice. Nope, no one. So I looked it up. Predatory mice is a thing.

The news reports I found all cited a January 12, 2017, article in Cell Press. That's C-E-L-L cell. They are a leading publisher of cutting-edge biomedical research and reviews.

Other media outlets did their own stories based on the Cell Press report, including NPR Morning Edition and Nature—International Weekly Journal of Science.

OK, so on to predatory mice. I'm quoting from all of the sources I just mentioned.

Researches at Yale University have isolated the brain circuitry that coordinates predatory hunting. One set of neurons in the brain's center of emotion and motivation—the amygdala--cues the animal to pursue prey. Another set signals the animal to use its jaw and neck muscles to bite and kill.

Before I go any further, they are talking about mice attacking insects, like crickets. Not necessarily other animals and definitely not humans.

First they infected the mice with a virus that made the neurons in their brains sensitive to blue light. Then, the researchers used a tiny optic fiber to shine a blue laser on the aforementioned amygdala.

They call this optogenetics. When the laser is off, the animals behave normally. When it's on, the mice take on qualities of "walkers"—like from *The Walking Dead*--pursuing and biting almost anything in their path, including bottle caps and wood sticks. Researchers said they would turn the laser on and the mice would jump on an object, hold it with their paws, and intensively bite it like a predator.

While I'll never be able to watch the "Walking Dead" again without thinking of those mice, it is an intriguing possibility. I think.

This has been Erin Dunn with a Community Comment.