

50K bees to be removed from Chase Street tree

Joseph Baucum,
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In an effort to preserve the local bee population, work is underway to transport about 50,000 bees from a hive near offices in downtown Pensacola to outlying apiaries in the region.

Clarence Prater Jr., the beekeeper tasked with the job, said it is critical to relocate bee colonies instead of killing them. Bees play a critical role in pollination. With their populations declining across the country, Prater stressed that they must be preserved whenever possible.

“Yes, it’s cheaper just to spray them, but we can’t afford to lose any more bees,” said Prater, owner of C’s Bees near Jay.

Prater started the process May 12 of coaxing the insects out of their hive inside an oak tree. The tree sits on the edge of a parking lot at 401 E. Chase St. The lot is used by several businesses.

He first placed a cone made of screen wire over the bees’ entrance to the tree. The cone allows the bees to exit the tree, but they are unable to later re-enter. He then set up a new hive beside the cone.



A new hive that will temporarily house a colony of bees before it is relocated to rural areas of Northwest Florida is pictured on Thursday, May 18, 2017, in a tree at 401 E. Chase St. in Pensacola. (Photo: Tony Giberson/tgiberson@pnj.com)

Because it contains larva, Prater said the bees that have left the tree will transition to the new hive to establish a new queen and colony.

He estimated the process to remove all of the bees will require about six weeks. Throughout the process, he will rotate those that have already exited the tree to apiaries he owns in more rural areas of the region. Prater said he has apiaries in Santa Rosa, Okaloosa and Walton counties.

Henry Land, a property manager with local firm SVN Southland Commercial, manages the site and made the decision to relocate the bees instead of killing them. He explained that having grown up on a farm, he prefers to err on the side of preservation whenever possible.

“If you don’t have to harm animals or whatever the case is, then I believe that you should do whatever you can to be a good steward,” he said. “This being the case that they’re outside, it made the option a lot easier.”

On Wednesday, the city relied on beekeeping professionals from Golden Harvest Bee Farm to relocate another hive, this one at Bayview Park’s large dog park in East Hill. The large dog park is expected to reopen Tuesday.

In February, the Center for Biological Diversity in Tucson, Arizona, released a report that detailed more than 700 North American bee species that have declined as a result of habitat loss and pesticide use. Because the insects play a vital role in pollination, their dwindling numbers have detrimentally impacted agriculture.

Prater, who first entered beekeeping after returning from military service in the Vietnam War, said that since he re-entered the profession seven years ago, he has witnessed the positive effects of shifting bees toward his garden. He urged all to relocate unwanted hives.

“That’s one of the reasons I got back into beekeeping is because I didn’t have any bees pollinating my garden,” he said. “You’ve got to have bees to pollinate.”