

Genetically Modified Mosquitoes to be Released in the US? Trump Ally Pushes for Permit

By [GMWatch](#)

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Documents obtained through the US Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) show a lobbyist and leading Trump fundraiser, his billionaire friend who owns the GM mosquito firm Oxitec, and the US EPA's then boss met to discuss how to forward Oxitec's efforts to obtain a permit allowing it to release GM mosquitoes in Florida and Texas – the first such releases in the US.

Recently researchers found Oxitec GM mosquitoes [spreading](#) out of control in Brazil after an experimental release went ahead there. The researchers also found that the GM mosquitoes had completely failed in their mission of crashing the existing dengue-spreading population of mosquitoes in the area where they were released, and may even have made it more robust through cross-breeding. There is also the possibility that they may have spread insecticide resistance – something Oxitec failed to check for on the grounds that the mosquitoes weren't supposed to be able to reproduce.

If you are in the US you can send your [comments](#) to the EPA on the insanity of this application. The deadline for comments is October 11.

Trump ally pushes permit for genetically altered mosquito

Ariana Figueroa, E&E News reporter

Greenwire, September 16, 2019

<https://www.eenews.net/stories/1061126099>

EPA is evaluating an experimental permit — backed by a company with ties to a top Trump fundraiser — involving the release of genetically engineered mosquitoes.

The review, which EPA opened on Sept. 11 for public comment, draws into question the political influence leveraged to facilitate a high-level meeting with EPA's administrator in an effort to push the application forward.

The application was put forth by Oxitec, a British biotech company that is bankrolled by multiple investors including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and is a holding company of Intrexon Corp.

Freedom of Information Act documents obtained by E&E News show lobbyist and Trump fundraiser Roy Bailey and billionaire and CEO of Intrexon Randal Kirk were scheduled to meet with former EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt on May 18, 2017, to discuss the application.

Kirk is a former attorney who made his money as an investor in pharmaceuticals and

biotechnology. Bailey is a Texas financial executive who raises funds for America First Action, a super political action committee comprised of former aides to President Trump.

The nonprofit arm of the organization, America First Policies, is dedicated to supporting Trump's agenda. America First raised \$39 million from 2017 through 2018, according to Federal Election Commission files.

Meredith Fensom, Intrexon's head of global policy and governmental affairs, said Bailey set up the meeting for Kirk, who needed help transferring review of his biotech application between federal agencies. Fensom also noted that Bailey and Kirk are good friends.

Initially, the company's plan for genetically altered mosquitoes was being reviewed by the Food and Drug Administration, but in January of 2017, the agency decided it should be reviewed by EPA, Fensom said.

"So for us it was important, that transfer," she said, noting that it was during a Zika virus outbreak in the U.S. Nearly five months went by, but the transfer was not complete, she added.

In May 2017, Bailey facilitated the meeting with Pruitt and Kirk, Fensom said. After that meeting, it took nearly another five months for the transfer to EPA to be complete.

"We didn't get special treatment because it took 10 months to get that transfer," she said. "Think back to the timing; this was during a real Zika outbreak."

As to Bailey's relationship with Pruitt and how he facilitated the meeting, Fensom said she did not know.

Bailey did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Lobbying records show that Bailey first registered as a lobbyist for Intrexon in October 2017, five months after the May meeting.

Bailey was a board member on the super PAC at the time of the meeting.

For the next two years, representatives from Oxitec had meetings scheduled with EPA about genetically altered mosquitoes to reduce populations, according to FOIAs obtained through a Sierra Club lawsuit.

"Intrexon is a leading life science company and they have the genetically engineered mosquito technology which can eradicate Zika virus and other viruses associated with mosquito bites, [OxiTec], their technology will fall under the purview of the EPA," the subject line of the May 18 meeting reads.

EPA spokesman Michael Abboud said, "EPA met with Oxitec to discuss ways to combat the spread of Zika virus during 2017."

The permit would allow Oxitec to release male genetically altered mosquitoes into Harris County in Texas and Monroe County in Florida to mate with female mosquitoes, which bite people and animals.

The modified male mosquitoes would cause the female offspring to die, meaning only the

male offspring would survive to adulthood. That next generation of male mosquitoes would have the same genetic modification as those initially released by Oxitec.

Oxitec intends to target one mosquito species in the Florida Keys called *Aedes aegypti*.

University of Florida professor Nathan Burkett-Cadena said the *Aedes aegypti* mosquito is not native to the U.S. and is often referred to as the “yellow fever” mosquito.

Burkett-Cadena, who studies how diseases spread from mosquitoes and other blood-feeding arthropods to people and animals, said *Aedes aegypti* can spread include Zika, chikungunya and dengue viruses.

EPA said if the experiment is approved, it will take more than two years to complete.

Public comments on the proposal are due Oct. 11, according to EPA.

Reporters Kevin Bogardus and Corbin Hiar contributed.

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