

PAGE ONE

For Mortgages Underwater, Help Swims In

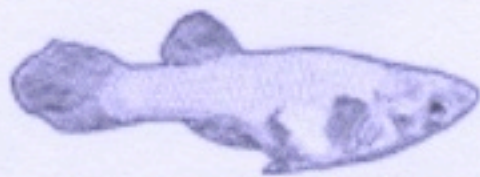
Tiny Fish Clean Pools Of Foreclosed Homes; Eating Up Mosquitoes

By **MICHAEL CORKERY**

April 24, 2008; Page A1

ANTIOCH, Calif. -- While lawmakers in Washington struggle to solve the nation's foreclosure crisis, officials here are using a small fish to clean up some of the mess.

The *Gambusia affinis* is commonly known as the "mosquito fish" because of its healthy appetite for the larvae of the irritating and disease-spreading insects. Lately, the fish is being pressed into service in California, Arizona, Florida and other areas struggling with a soaring number of foreclosures.



Mosquito Fish

The problem: swimming pools of abandoned homes have turned into mosquito breeding grounds.

"They are real heroes," says Josefa Cabada, a technician at the Contra Costa Mosquito & Vector Control District, a government agency. "I've never seen a mosquito in a pool with mosquito fish."

The mosquito fish is well suited for a prolonged housing slump. Hardy creatures with big appetites, they can survive in oxygen-depleted swimming pools for many months, eating up to 500 larvae a day and giving birth to 60 fry a month. That can save environmental crews from having to repeatedly spray pesticides in the pools while the houses grind through the foreclosure process.

Some local agencies, increasingly worried about mosquito-borne diseases like the West Nile Virus, are taking to the air to find problem swimming pools. The Turlock Abatement District, near Modesto, Calif., last month hired a plane to fly over 55 square miles, snapping pictures of pools from about 5,000 feet. On the ground, mosquito-control crews cross-referenced properties that had greenish-brown pools with a street map and a database of local foreclosed homes.

In the Turlock district alone, about 475