

# **California Department of Food & Agriculture**

## **Minutes**

of the Meeting of the Pierce's Disease and Glassy-winged Sharpshooter Board  
and Pierce's Disease Advisory Task Force  
Held on Thursday, January 29<sup>th</sup>, 2026.

Physical Location:

California Department of Food and Agriculture Auditorium  
1220 N Street, Sacramento, CA 95814 and via  
Web-conference and Teleconference.

### **PD/GWSS BOARD**

Members Present: Jeff Bitter, Greg Coleman\*, Rich Hammond\*, Randy Heinzen,  
Kendall Hoxsey-Onysko\*, Trey Irwin, Aaron Lange, Jim  
Ledbetter, John McCarthy, Domonic Rossini, Seth Schwesb\*

Members Absent: William Drayton, John "JD" Harkey, Steve McIntyre, Dave Teuschler

### **PD ADVISORY TASK FORCE**

Members Present: Tracy Cleveland, Ha Dang\*, Glenn Fankhauser, Kris Lowe, Martin  
Mochizuki, Beth Stone-Smith\*, Judy Zaninovich\*

Members Absent: Chris Bowland, Casey Creamer, Todd Sanders

### **OTHER ATTENDEES**

Buddhi Achhami\*, Chasika Bandna, Carrie Baughman\*, Noelle Cremers, Joe  
Damiano, Ariana De La Torre\*, Anna Ferrera, Leah Gayagas\*, Joseph Gerald\*,  
Mark Harrington, Matthew Kaiser, Giancarlo LaGiusa, Corrie Larsen, Melissa  
Lovett\*, Michael Miiller, Joe Monson, Ericka Mora\*, Warren Nichols\*, Stacie Oswald,  
Jason Perez, Michelle Pham, James Rhodes\*, Helena Roberts\*, Karen Ross, Tom  
Solury\*, Nicole Shorter, Clayton Smith\*, Miranda Townsend\*, Sean Veling, Myrna  
Villegas\*, Priscilla Yeane\*

\*Denotes attendance via web conference or teleconference.

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### **CALL TO ORDER**

PD/GWSS Board Chairperson Randy Heinzen and PD Advisory Task Force Chairperson  
Kris Lowe called the joint meeting to order at 10:00 AM.

### **ROLL CALL AND INTRODUCTIONS**

PDCP Statewide Coordinator Joseph Damiano conducted the roll call for the PD/GWSS  
Board (Board) and the PD Advisory Task Force (Task Force). Quorums were present for  
both the Board and the Task Force.

### **WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS**

Randy Heinzen and Kris Lowe acknowledged the passing of Bob Steinhauer and all of  
his contributions to viticulture and the PDCP. Joseph Damiano of the PDCP stated that  
Casey Creamer of the Task Force has expressed interest in stepping down from his  
current position. Damiano asked if there were any recommendations for a replacement  
and if so, please contact him when feasible. Later in the meeting, CDFA Secretary  
Karen Ross stopped by to greet participants and thank members for their service.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Randy Heinzen asked the Board for a motion to approve the minutes from the joint Board and Task Force meeting held on November 19, 2025.

- It was moved, seconded, and unanimously passed by the Board to approve the minutes from the joint Board and Task Force meeting held on November 19, 2025.

### **Details of Board Vote**

Motion: Jim Ledbetter      Second: Jeff Bitter  
In Favor: Bitter, Coleman, Heinzen, Hoxsey-Onysko, Irwin, Ledbetter,  
                  McCarthy, Rossini, Schwebs  
Against: None  
Abstain: None  
Absent: Drayton, Hammond\*\*, Harkey, Lange\*\*, McIntyre, Teuschler

\*\*Not present for this action item

Kris Lowe asked the Task Force for a motion to approve the minutes from the joint Board and Task Force meeting held on November 19, 2025.

- It was moved, seconded, and unanimously passed by the Task Force to approve the minutes from the joint Board and Task Force meeting held on November 19, 2025.

### **Details of Task Force Vote**

Motion: Martin Mochizuki      Second: Beth Stone-Smith  
In Favor: Cleveland, Dang, Lowe, Mochizuki, Stone-Smith, Zaninovich  
Against: None  
Abstain: None  
Absent: Bowland, Creamer, Fankhauser\*\*, Sanders

\*\*Not present for this action item

## **NEXT MEETINGS**

The next Board and Task Force meetings were set for Wednesday, April 29, 2026, Wednesday, July 1, 2026, and Tuesday, November 10, 2026, at Foundation Plant Services in Davis and will begin at 10:00 AM.

## **NOMINATION COMMITTEE REPORT**

Nomination committee member Seth Schwebs reported that he and fellow member Will Drayton were nominating Seth Schwebs as the next Treasurer.

## **ELECTION OF PD/GWSS BOARD OFFICERS**

Randy Heinzen asked the board for a motion to nominate Trey Irwin as Chairperson, Jeff Bitter as Vice-Chairperson, and Seth Schwebs as Treasurer of the PD/GWSS Board.



## **NURSERY TREATMENT FUNDING**

Stacie Oswald of the PDCP provided an update regarding Nursery Treatment funding and a proposal for future funding. The Board started funding these treatments in 2003/04, which included 8-12 nurseries in Ventura County and expanded to Riverside County in 2008/09 to include an additional 1-2 nurseries. These nurseries must be under a GWSS compliance agreement, have an active pest management plan, regularly ship to non-infested areas in California, and be located near commercial citrus or other high GWSS pressure areas. The total budget for these treatments was \$300,000 for each of FY 26/27 and FY 27/28 which the Board would need to approve. After discussion about the history and details for the program, the Board asked for information about how these Board-funded treatment costs compare to the overall costs of treatments and regulatory compliance for nurseries shipping out of the GWSS infested area. Discussion continued on constraints on Rapid Response Funding for pest outbreaks, uncertainty around pest introduction sources for new infestations, and the Board's fiscal outlook. There was general agreement to not take action on a funding recommendation at the time and revisit the item at the next meeting.

## **BOARD CONTINUATION PROCESS, BOARD NAME, AND OTHER POSSIBLE CHANGES REQUIRING LEGISLATION**

Joseph Damiano of the PDCP started the discussion by reiterating several points from the November 2025 meeting on potential changes to the referendum process for Board continuation and asking the Board to consider a continuation hearing model (similar to the Citrus Pest Disease Prevention Committee approach). The overall strategy included a transition from a paper ballot yes-no referendum to a continuation hearing model emphasizing industry and public input in-person, via email, and virtually. Consideration also included the timing for decisions as well as legal/operational considerations, including the potential Board name change. The overall consensus leaned toward adopting a continuation hearing model as the preferred alternative to the current referendum process, subject to broader industry discussions and final Board decision. Various Board members emphasized ensuring robust and inclusive stakeholder participation to build comfort and legitimacy (multiple in-person hearings, email comments, and a virtual session) and acknowledging that traditional paper ballots have been operationally difficult and less effective for participation, and the hearing model appeared to be a more cost-effective and engagement-friendly alternative. If adopted, and if there was question of support during the hearing process, a ballot referendum would still be held, and there was agreement to remove the current 40% participation threshold if a referendum were held. The Board had indicated a need for more time to consult with industry colleagues.

Michael Miiller of California Association of Winegrape Growers reported that AB 230 was introduced as a placeholder bill to enable prompt changes if approved. Joe Monson and Miranda Townsend of the CDFA Marketing Division answered questions about various options used by other programs and stated that the current paper ballot process faced significant challenges: difficulties distributing and returning ballots, imperfect contact lists, and participant preference for non-paper options. Voters had requested alternatives like email or electronic voting, and the hearing model would provide multiple channels without relying on paper ballots and emphasized the value of in-person participation and the cost-effectiveness of regional meetings. Damiano cautioned against adding provisions that could create instability such as mid-cycle referendum petitions that could distract staff, increase costs, or destabilize the program. It was generally agreed to maintain a straightforward continuation hearing framework without adding a mid-cycle referendum petition provision.

Discussion continued about issues involved in changing the Board name to better reflect the ongoing and evolving mission. Damiano reported that the CDFA Legal Office indicated no immediate red flags on changing the board name. No decisions were finalized, but there was a broad acknowledgement that a name change to Winegrape Pest and Disease Prevention Board was feasible. This issue was agreed to be reviewed further during the April 2026 meeting.

### **RESEARCH PROGRAM UPDATE**

Matt Kaiser of the PDCP provided a brief update regarding Board research funding, including the annual Request for Proposals (RFP) which was closing at the end of January and interim progress reports which were also due and would be shared with reviewers. Kaiser also reported providing comments to a USDA Agriculture Research Service stakeholder listening session for grape disease research priorities, sharing research grant information with National Grape Research Alliance for their inventory of current research, and that the American Society for Enology and Viticulture was renaming their extension award for the late Dr. Anita Oberholster.

### **RESEARCH COORDINATOR UPDATE**

Dr. Kris Lowe, Chairperson of the Task Force and Research Coordinator for the PD/GWSS Board, provided an update regarding the research proposal review process. Lowe contacted 65 scientists asking for volunteers for the scientific review panels, resulting in 17 volunteers including 3 from the National Academy of Sciences virus study committee. These scientific reviewers would meet in March, and their comments and recommendations from their discussions would be shared at the Research Screening Committee meeting scheduled for April 16 in Davis. Lowe also reported on her involvement in a growers' tailgate event with Vineyard Team in the central coast region.

Lowe highlighted that everyone who participated in the Grapevine Virus Committee (GVC) would be invited to the Research Screening Committee to see how proposals are reviewed and recommendations are made, and how GVC recommendations were implemented in the review process. These efforts included RFP process refinements such as the implementation of a Tier 1/Tier 2 categorization of the designated pests and diseases and more specific requests for proposal components. A plan was outlined to schedule additional meetings of members of these committees once all participants had seen the RFP process, where the research review and funding process could be further discussed.

### **OUTREACH AND EDUCATION UPDATE**

Nicole Short of Brown-Miller Communications provided an update regarding continuing outreach on behalf of the PDCP program. A draft postcard and latest newsletter pertaining to various issues, including mealybugs, leafroll, and Dr. David Morgan's recent retirement, was shared. The monthly online e-newsletter was sent out to various members of industry with an open rate of 43%, an increase over the prior year. All outreach materials were sent out via email and social media channels, including Facebook, which had a 20% increase in readership over last year. The Board's Facebook page had been viewed over 3.1 million times which also includes information on spotted lanternfly (SLF). The PDCP YouTube channel subscribers had also increased 9% over last year's figures, and the LinkedIn page was growing as well. Media coverage included 64 news articles about the Board, including the referendum, economic impact study, and research funding. A new webpage was recently created that contains various information regarding recent GWSS control projects by county, which was now also being linked in e-newsletters. In regard to SLF, stickers with reporting information were shared with participants, and new winter advertisements reached 410,000 people for a grand total of 1.7 million readers for the entire year. These figures also include 3,385 clicks and 3,525 post engagements. Print advertisements were currently being published in the Wine Business Monthly Winter issues and also in AgAlert periodicals. Randy Heinzen summarized recent information he learned about SLF in Virginia and how it is impacting grape growers as well as wine makers there.

## **COUNTY ERADICATION PROJECT UPDATES**

Michelle Pham of the PDCP coordinated five county presentations regarding ongoing GWSS eradication measures.

Joseph Geraldes, Deputy Agricultural Commissioner, Solano County, provided an update regarding the status of recent GWSS eradication efforts. Geraldes stated that the initial GWSS find was Browns Valley neighborhood 2021 and treatment efforts have been ongoing since then. Adult detections peaked in 2022 with 78 finds but declined to just 1 detection in 2025. However, 10 GWSS egg masses were found in 2025. Overall treatments in 2025 included 845 properties (824 soil injections; 19 foliar) and 7,630 biocontrol wasps released. Overall cumulated statistics included 148 adults; 663 egg masses/scars; 3,583 properties treated and 23,450 biocontrol wasps released, for a total \$2.9 million cost of the project. Court-ordered abatement was executed April 2025 on a non-compliant property, with no detections at that property or adjacent properties in 2025. Geraldes shared templates/documents with other counties, highlighted their use of GIS tools for managing the project and importance of good communication with residents, and stated the next step was to scale back treatment and resume targeted soil injections in February 2026 at 300–350 properties. Geraldes thanked the PD/GWSS Board for funding they contributed to the project and PDCP staff for guidance.

Melissa Lovett, Deputy Agricultural Commissioner for Stanislaus County, provided an update on the GWSS eradication project in Turlock. The first detections were in August 2024. County trapping efforts included 168 adults and 4 nymphs in the 2025 season. Multiple gated communities contained heavy infestation including eggs through adults. Treatment operations included 4,038 foliar treatments and 3,094 soil treatments complete with a sharp increase in positive properties requiring follow-up compared to 2024. High treatment compliance with only just over 100 refusals assisted in these efforts. Lovett noted unusual GWSS adult size variation was observed in traps. Treatment coordination was challenging due to overlaps with fairgrounds, community parks, and schools within treatment buffers. Multiple potential pathways for GWSS introduction and spread were discussed, including fairgrounds plant material, cemetery visitors bringing plants, unregulated cut plant material processors, pop-up plant markets, plant swaps, and the proximity to Highway 99. Infestation boundaries had been expanded, and ongoing spread containment remains a priority. In 2026, visual survey strategies are scheduled to occur earlier along with plans to increase trap density. The Board asked again about source identification (aka “patient zero”) and Lovett responded that no definitive pathway had been identified but outlined the various unregulated pathways above, and clarified that the nearest shipping nursery was 10 miles away.

Corrie Larsen, Assistant Agricultural Commissioner for El Dorado County, provided an update regarding recent GWSS treatment efforts in the El Dorado Hills area infestation, which was initially detected in October 2024. The infestation had since expanded beyond the original Serrano neighborhood, with new detections south of Highway 50. Significant efforts were made throughout 2025, including systemic and foliar treatments on residential properties and common areas, alongside biocontrol releases of wasps. 2025 statistics included 706 adult and nymphs and 142 egg masses detected (27 parasitized), 821 systemic treatments at residences, nearly 500 foliar treatments, and additional treatments in parks, golf courses, and HOA common spaces as the release of nearly 6,500 biocontrol wasps. A major challenge was the amount of prime host material and lush landscaping in the area, as well as securing treatment consent from residents. The focus for 2026 remains on aggressive treatment and extensive public outreach to increase resident cooperation. The origin of the infestation remained unknown despite interviews with homeowners and other investigations, but it was considered unlikely to have come from a regulated nursery participating in the PDCP. Larsen emphasized the county would continue to leverage the Board of Supervisors, HOAs, landscapers, and community service districts to get the word

out.

Jason Perez, Deputy Agricultural Commissioner for Kings County, provided an update regarding GWSS eradication efforts in Hanford. The presentation covered detection results, treatment scope, biocontrol releases, operational challenges, and coordination to prevent pest spread via unlicensed plant sales. Key data points include 34 adult GWSS detected in 2025, primarily via Asian citrus psyllid traps in citrus trees concentrated near Hanford town center. Approximately 414 properties were treated and 2,390 biocontrol wasps released, with refusal rate under 4% among the 430 properties visited. Challenges include homeowner access (daytime absence) and optimizing treatment timing in the first year of program operations. There were efforts to strengthen enforcement against unlicensed plant sellers such as flea markets, roadside vendors and to coordinate with neighboring counties. Next steps include completing marked field locations, improving public cooperation, and aligning treatment schedules with label constraints and regional conditions. Tracy Cleveland summarized additional efforts that county agricultural commissioners and their staff take to prevent the spread of pests, and the challenges that unregulated person to person plant sales and movement pose.

Ericka Mora, Deputy Agricultural Commissioner for Santa Clara County, provided an update regarding GWSS eradication efforts. She summarized a new GWSS infestation discovered in Morgan Hill in September 2025. The initial detection occurred in a production nursery, but subsequent trapping revealed a more significant infestation in a nearby, established residential neighborhood. A total of 53 detections had been confirmed. In response, the county began treatments and 148 properties had been treated so far out of 550 planned for the season. Biocontrol measures, involving the release of 1,440 wasps, were also implemented in September and October 2025. The primary theory is that the pest was introduced via infested plant material, possibly by a homeowner or through landscaping materials for nearby construction, but no definitive source had been found.

Michelle Pham concluded the county presentations with a breakdown of expenditures for the five eradicating counties that presented, totaling \$10 million since FY 21/22, of which nearly \$6 million was in FY 25/26 alone. A lively and focused discussion ensued on the critical funding for pest eradication and prevention programs, especially concerning GWSS and its impact on agriculture. These unexpected infestations were being funded by dwindling CDFA emergency funds and some Board funds, and stressing an already depleted program federal budget that had usage restrictions. The discussion highlighted a trend of increasing pest pressure and infestations, and rising costs, which outpace the available budget, forcing the program to make difficult choices that increase risk. Key takeaways included the consensus that prevention is more cost-effective than eradication, concerns about flat or decreasing program funding sources, and agreement that this was an "all-hands-on-deck" situation requiring a unified push for new funding solutions.

### **PDCP PROGRAM OPERATIONS UPDATES**

This information was discussed during the prior item and participants were directed to a handout for additional details of regular program updates for 2025.

### **CLOSING COMMENTS AND ADJOURNMENT**

Board Chairperson Randy Heinzen and Task Force Chairperson Kris Lowe thanked everyone in attendance and adjourned the meeting at 1:10 PM.

Respectfully submitted on April 10<sup>th</sup>, 2026 by  
Giancarlo LaGiusa, Associate Governmental Program Analyst  
Pierce's Disease Control Program  
California Department of Food and Agriculture