

**REAL CHRISTMAS TREE BOARD  
IN-PERSON BOARD MEETING**

July 24, 2025

Evergreen Resort – Cadillac, Michigan

**Welcome, and Roll Call:** Chairman Chuck Berry called the meeting to order at 11:07 a.m. Eastern time.

**Board Members in Attendance:** Chuck Berry, Renee Beutell, Jan Hupp, Ryan Tyce, Jane Neubauer, Kari Puffer, Chris Aldrich, Mike Jones, Charles Fowler, Derek Ahl, JoLynn Stroda, and Gary Thomas

**USDA Representative in Attendance:** George Webster

**Staff in Attendance:** Marsha Gray, Cyndi Knudson, and Jenny Tomaszewski

**Guests in Attendance:** Barry Campbell and Sam Cartner

**Agenda**

It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler and **SECONDED** by JoLynn Stroda to approve the agenda as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Meeting Minutes**

It was **MOVED** by Chris Aldrich and **SECONDED** by Renee Beutell to approve the June 19, 2025, Board meeting minutes as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Chairman's Report** – Chuck Berry reported.

- a. **Board Nominations Update** – Berry presented the results from the most recent nominations voting. The top two vote-getters of each region will be submitted to the Secretary of Agriculture.
  - Question was raised as to why USDA requires the name of the individual voting on the ballot, and why it is not anonymous. George Webster shared that it is required by the USDA to verify that the individual voting is a qualified voter. Board members discussed different avenues that could be used instead of the individual's name.
- b. **Referendum** – The next referendum will be conducted sometime in 2026. The goal for the RCTB at the current Michigan Association Meeting is to present the accomplishments of the RCTB and share the available resources. George Webster shared that, leading up to the referendum, the USDA will consider the best month for the voting to take place.
  - Question was raised about who will receive a ballot. Marsha Gray shared that ballots will be mailed to those who harvested and paid assessments for 500 or more trees in the 2025 harvest year.

**Committee Reports**

**Finance Committee** – Mike Jones presented.

- a. **May 2025 Financials** – Jones provided a detailed overview of the June 2025 financials. Jones noted that the Executive Committee and the Finance Committee decided to reinvest the CDARS investment - \$400,000 was reinvested for three months, and \$700,000 was invested for six months.
  - Marsha Gray shared that there is currently a large assessment receivable. Gray has been working with the producer and has made numerous attempts to collect the debt through phone calls and written communication. At this point, Gray has submitted the case to the USDA for further action. George Webster shared that the USDA will send a letter explaining the program and why it is mandated that they pay. If no response is received, it will be forwarded to the Office of General Counsel.

It was **MOVED** by Derek Ahl and **SECONDED** by Chris Aldrich to accept the June 2025 financials as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Research Committee** – Renee Beutell and Cyndi Knudson reported.

- a. **Research Recommendations** – Beutell and Knudson shared that the Committee met on July 18<sup>th</sup> and compiled the received proposals. Fourteen projects in total were received. Seven projects, totaling \$168,234.00, were presented to the Board for recommendation; three of these projects are in their second year. The recommended projects exceeded the budget by \$18,234. The overage would be taken from Research Reserves, leaving \$64,000 in the research reserve fund.

It was **MOVED** by Kari Puffer and **SECONDED** by Gary Thomas to approve the seven research proposals for \$168,234.00, as recommended by the Research Committee, with \$18,234.00 to be pulled from the research reserve fund. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Industry Relations Committee** – Chris Aldrich reported.

- a. **Schedule and Plans for Michigan Meeting** – Marsha Gray provided the Board with a detailed itinerary for the Michigan Meeting on Friday, July 24<sup>th</sup>.
- b. **Communications Contractor** – Aldrich shared that the work from Michelle Rothmeyer has been very effective. The Committee would like to recommend a contract with Rothmeyer that includes the following: producing two e-newsletters per month, writing four industry articles per year, creating twelve social media posts, as well as providing content for the annual report, for \$14,000. Marsha Gray volunteered to reduce the Gray Management contract by \$4,000, to be applied to the Industry Relations Committee line item in order to offset the cost of the communications contract.

It was **MOVED** by Derek Ahl and **SECONDED** by Renee Beutell to approve a contract with Michelle Rothmeyer as outlined for \$14,000, decrease the Gray Management line item by \$4,000, and increase the Industry Relations Committee by \$4,000. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Governance Committee** – Charles Fowler presented.

- a. **Publishing of Proposed Rule** - Fowler shared that the comment period for the Order changes closed on July 14. Twenty-five comments were posted. George Webster shared that the AMS will review the comments. Webster will keep the Board posted when additional details are available.

**Compliance Committee** – Derek Ahl presented.

- **Compliance Contractors** – Ahl provided a breakdown of the three compliance officers' work and the Committee's recommendations in renewing their contracts:
  - o James Lantz – the committee recommends \$165 per hour, plus travel expenses for a maximum of \$20,000 per fiscal year.
  - o Jamie Hanselman – the committee recommends \$50 per hour with a maximum of \$20,000.
  - o Jason Hanselman – the committee recommends \$50 per hour with a maximum of \$5,000.

It was **MOVED** by Mike Jones and **SECONDED** by Charles Fowler to renew contracts for Jim Lantz for a maximum of \$20,000 per year, Jamie Hanselman for a maximum of \$20,000 per year, and Jason Hanselman for a maximum of \$5,000 per year, totaling \$45,000. **MOTION APPROVED.**

The Board recessed for lunch at 12:35 p.m. and reconvened at 1:23 p.m.

**Promotion Committee** – Jane Neubauer reported.

- a. **Update of Campaign** – Neubauer shared an update on all the current moving pieces for the Promotion Committee, touching on the upcoming grower survey, which will be released in August,

and the Pre-season Consumer Survey. Neubauer and Marsha Gray provided a detailed overview of an upcoming sweepstakes to collect a variety of images and videos of real people and their real Christmas tree experiences.

- b. **Christmas Spirit Foundation** – Neubauer shared that, as in the past, the Committee would like to sponsor \$10,000 for Trees for Troops.

It was **MOVED** by JoLynn Stroda and **SECONDED** by Mike Jones to approve \$10,000 partnership for Trees for Troops for the 2025 fiscal year. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- c. **Webinar** – As a part of the contract with FleishmanHillard, they are presenting the Intentional Communications webinar. It was recommended that members of the RCTB, NCTA, and industry participate in the webinar as they often serve as industry spokespersons.

**Management Staff Update** – Marsha Gray reported.

- a. **Assessment Collection Report** - As of July 19, 2025, the RCTB has received 1,061 payers through the lockbox and online portal for \$1,206,395.25, and Importer Assessments received via US Customs for \$221,415.91, totaling \$1,427,815.16.
- b. **AP Photo Usage Rights Issue** – Gray shared that at the beginning of July, the Board was contacted by a company that tracks photo usage on websites on behalf of clients. This service found one photo that the RCTB posted in the “From Your Press” section of our Newsroom, where the RCTB features news stories in which the RCTB has been quoted. Gray consulted with FleishmanHillard and RCTB attorney Chris Salisbury of Watkinson Miller. The attorney provided a recommended response, and Gray was able to settle with the PicRights Company for \$300.00 instead of the initial, \$575.00 requested. The photos have been removed from the website.
- c. **Independent Economic Evaluation** – Gray shared that Timothy Richards has completed the evaluation. The draft has been submitted to the USDA for approval, and once approved, it will be shared with the Board.

**New Business:**

- a. **Approve Attorney’s Agreement** – Marsha Gray presented the retainer letter from Watkinson Miller, PLLC, which has served as the RCTB’s Legal Counsel since 2015.

It was **MOVED** by Charles Fowler and **SECONDED** by Derrek Ahl to approve Watkinson Miller, PLLC., as RCTB’s legal counsel. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**USDA** – George Webster reported.

- a. **Status – Non-reporting Importer** - USDA has been working with the Office of General Counsel, and a formal complaint has been drafted and submitted to the hierarchy at the OGC office. Once an official submission has been received, Webster will notify the Board.

**For the Good of the Order/ Announcement:**

- Charles Fowler and Derek Ahl thanked the Board for allowing them to serve on the Board.

**Meeting Schedule:**

- a. **Future In-person Board Meeting** – Sarah Glitto, the director of the Wisconsin Christmas Tree Producers Association, submitted to the Board an invitation to attend the Wisconsin Summer meeting in August 2026.

It was **MOVED** by Mike Jones and **SECONDED** by Chris Aldrich to attend the Wisconsin Christmas Tree Producer Association meeting on August 6-8, 2026. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- b. **Future Meeting Schedule** - RCTB's next meeting will be held on Thursday, August 21, 2025, and September 18, 2025, at 11:00 a.m. Eastern.

**Adjourn:**

It was **MOVED** by Renee Beutell and **SECONDED** by Derek Ahl to adjourn the meeting. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman Chuck Berry adjourned the meeting at 3:30 p.m. Eastern.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jolynn Stroda  
Secretary