

**REAL CHRISTMAS TREE BOARD**  
**BOARD MEETING**  
April 16, 2026

Via Video Conference

**Welcome and Roll Call:** Chairman Chuck Berry called the meeting to order at 11:01 a.m. Eastern time.

**Board Members in Attendance:** Chuck Berry, Jane Neubauer, Chris Aldrich, Ryan Tyce, JoLynn Stroda, Gary Thomas, Scott Powell, Sam Cartner, Sophia Stajduhar, Renee Beutell, Jan Hupp

**Board Members not in Attendance:** Kari Puffer

**USDA Representative in Attendance:** George Webster

**Staff in Attendance:** Marsha Gray, Jenny Tomaszewski

**Agenda**

It was **MOVED** by Gary Thomas and **SECONDED** by Jan Hupp to approve the agenda as presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

**Meeting Minutes:**

Change: under nominations, only one board seat is open in the west, not two as listed.

It was **MOVED** by Sam Cartner and **SECONDED** by Chris Aldrich to approve the March 19, 2026, Board meeting minutes as corrected. **MOTION APPROVED.**

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

- a. **Upcoming Management Evaluation** – Berry shared that a management evaluation of the Gray Management team is conducted annually. Berry will email the evaluation packet to all Board members for completion and request that it be returned to Chuck Berry by Friday, April 24, 2026.

**Committee Reports**

**Finance** – JoLynn Stroda reported.

- a. **March 2026 Financials:** Stroda provided a detailed overview of the March 2026 financials.

It was **MOVED** by Gary Thomas and **SECONDED** by Sophia Stajduhar to accept the March 2026 financials as they were presented. **MOTION APPROVED.**

- b. **2026-27 Budget Planning Update** – Stroda shared that the final 2026-27 FY budget is due to USDA by June 1<sup>st</sup>. Marsha Gray and Stroda will meet with the Finance Committee and present a proposed budget to the Board at the May meeting. Stroda will contact each committee chairperson to determine what each committee is requesting for their budget.

**Research Committee** – Renee Beutell reported.

- a. **Research Request for Proposals** – Beutell shared that everything is on schedule.
- b. **International Christmas Tree Research Meeting** – The meeting will be held in Blowing Rock, North Carolina, on June 8-11, 2026. Beutell shared that the registration fee for Cyndi Knudson to attend the Research Conference was reduced from the initially presented \$1,600 to \$1,400 plus Knudson's mileage.

**Industry Relations Committee** – Chris Aldrich and Marsha Gray Reported.

- Aldrich shared that the referendum notice has not been published in the Federal Registry as of yet.
- Aldrich announced that the Washington State Department of Agriculture Christmas Tree Licensure

Advisory Committee voted to make a \$40,000 donation to Gary Chastanger's endowment fund.

- Gray shared that she has received many invitations to attend Summer State Association meetings. Gray requested the Board's guidance on how many meetings they would like her to attend. Board members discussed. The board asked Gray to attempt to get the greatest reach in the time and budget available. Based on the timing of the meeting being post-referendum, Gray has suggested a presentation on the future of the RCTB.

**Governance Committee** – Jane Neubauer Reported.

- a. **Board Nominations** – Neubauer restated that there are four open seats: two Eastern, one Western, and one Central. Chuck Berry, Jane Neubauer, and Renee Beutell will term out. JoLynn Stroda has an additional term to serve, if she chooses to run again. All nominations must be submitted by June 1<sup>st</sup>. The office has received two nominations for the Eastern seats.

**Compliance Committee** – Jan Hupp and Marsha Gray reported.

- Gray shared that Jamie Hanselman has completed contacting those who have yet to pay for the 2025 harvest season. As of yet, the large producer who didn't report in 2024 hasn't reported for 2025. Gray contacted George Webster about arranging a high-level conversation with USDA leadership to address this issue.
- Five farms were selected for auditing. Two audits are currently scheduled for May. Auditor Jim Lantz is working to schedule the additional three audits.
- Board members discussed the audit process.

**Promotion Committee** – Marsha Gray reported.

- a. **Planning for 2026 Campaign** – Gray shared that she had a meeting with FleishmanHillard to assemble a plan for the 2026 campaign. \$35,000 is budgeted for the 2026 campaign planning with FleishmanHillard, but only \$28,000 will be needed. Committee chair, Kari Puffer, has stated her interest in developing more meaningful tools for retailers with this year's campaign. FleishmanHillard's attorneys are currently reviewing the planning contract and should be wrapped up in the next few days. The Promotion Committee should have a 2026 campaign plan to present to the Board in late June or early July. Kari Puffer has added two committee members and is looking to create a retailer advisory committee. Gray will connect Puffer with two retailer recommendations provided by Sam Cartner.
- b. **Virtual Farm Trip** – Gray shared that the next Virtual Farm Tour will occur at Northern Pines Nursery/ Dutchman Tree Farms on Friday, April 24<sup>th</sup>, for Arbor Day.

**Management Staff Updated** - Marsha Gray reported.

- a. **Assessment Collection Report** – Gray provided a detailed overview of the report. As of April 15, 2026, we have received 1,165 reports through the lockbox, online portal, and Importer Assessments received via US Customs, totaling \$1,284,179.70.
- b. **Impacts of Order Changes:**
  - **Name Change** – Gray shared that the name has officially changed from the Christmas to Promotion Board to the Real Christmas Tree Board, effective April 8. The bank account and USDA forms are being updated to align with the Real Christmas Tree Board name change. Existing contracts do not need to be updated.
  - **Revised Deadlines** – New budget deadline is June 1<sup>st</sup> as opposed to April 15<sup>th</sup>. The new notice period for meetings is 7 days versus the previous 14 days.
  - **Administrative Cap** – The new administrative cap is 15%. The cap includes the compliance budget, bank fees, attorney fees, and a portion of the Gray Management fee.
  - Board members discussed the administrative cap and how producers perceive the cap. Gray suggested providing a simple outline of what is included within the administrative budget to share with the industry.

- Gray encouraged the Board to have an “RCTB Story,” a quick three sentences that you can share about the Board when speaking with producers.

**New Business:**

- a. **Referendum Schedule** – George Webster shared that the Act, which the Order references, requires a 30-day notice prior to a referendum to be published in the Federal Registry. Webster shared that the notice is with the Legislative Review Office, which is the last step before publication. The mailing list has been prepared; additional names will be included until the ballots are mailed.
- b. **Industry Data Review Update** – Jane Neubauer shared that they are continuing to work with Rick Dungey at the National Christmas Tree Association. No updates currently.

**USDA** – George Webster reported.

- a. **Status – Non-Responding Importer** – nothing new to report.
  - b. **Status – Non-Responding Domestic Producer** – Webster shared that Marsha Gray would like to raise the urgency of the non-responding producer. USDA is working with the Treasury Office to create a short-hand accounting code, which is how the Treasury Office charges its work.
- A question was raised whether the non-responding producer would cover the fees from the USDA. Webster shared that his understanding is that the fees are charged to the RCTB and included within USDA user fees. RCTB could request that the non-responding producer cover these with USDA leadership. Gray reminded the board that the non-payer is accumulating significant interest charges that are intended to cover the cost of collection. Jan Hupp commented that the addition of facing collections costs or attorney’s fees may be an incentive for the producer to pay.

**Executive Session:**

Chairman, Chuck Berry, called the Board into an Executive Session at 12:08 a.m. Eastern Time. Berry requested that George Webster remain in attendance.

Chairman, Chuck Berry, adjourned the Executive Session at 12:47 p.m. Eastern Time.

**For the Good of the Order/ Announcement:** No items were reported.

**Meeting Schedule:**

- a. **Next Meeting** - RCTB’s next meeting will be held on Thursday, May 21, 2026, at 11:00 a.m. Eastern.
- b. **Summer In-Person Meeting** – Will be held near Madison, Wisconsin, on August 6<sup>th</sup> in conjunction with the National Christmas Tree Association meeting. Board members should plan to arrive on Wednesday, August 5, in time for a group dinner.

**Adjourn:**

It was **MOVED** by Sam Cartner and **SECONDED** by Chris Aldrich to adjourn the meeting. **MOTION APPROVED.**

Chairman Chuck Berry adjourned the meeting at 12:49 p.m. Eastern.

Respectfully Submitted,  
Ryan Tyce  
Secretary