

Kern/Tulare

GWSS Update



A project of the Glassy-winged Sharpshooter Task Force of Kern and Tulare Counties. Participants: Agricultural Commissioner's Offices of Kern and Tulare Counties, California Department of Food and Agriculture, University of California-Cooperative Extension, U.S. Department of Agriculture (APHIS and ARS Divisions).

Ventura County succeeds in 2003's GWSS efforts

The devastating fires that swept over Southern California last October produced the worst wildfire season in its history and caused \$12 million in crop losses in Ventura County alone. But the disaster is not the only noteworthy story to emerge from the area's 2003 agricultural files.

While Ventura County suffered major fire-related losses among its cattle, avocado and citrus industries, it also saw a far quieter — and more successful — story arise from its glassy-winged sharpshooter (GWSS) control program. Considered a GWSS-infested zone, Ventura County counted only six rejections for GWSS from among the 1.3 million flats and containers of plant nursery stock it shipped north to non-infested areas in 2003.

"We are extremely happy about that," says Alan Laird, Ventura County deputy agricultural commissioner. "That's the smallest rejection amount in three years."

Every flat and container from the county's 28 plant nurseries must be inspected for GWSS before shipment. The six flats were rejected for the presence of GWSS egg masses.

Zero bulk-citrus rejections. Laird also is pleased that Ventura County had no GWSS rejections among its 1,200 bulk-citrus shipments to non-infested areas.

"That's the first time we've gone through a season without a GWSS rejection on bulk citrus since we started the program in 2002," he says.

Ventura County is California's largest lemon producer, accounting for 55 percent of the state's crop and bringing in \$175 million a year. Its plant nursery industry, valued at \$171 million per year, is the third largest in the state. Unlike neighboring Kern County, Ventura County produces no grapes. The large citrus and plant nursery industries in Ventura County, however, have been prime GWSS habitat, and their commodities are shipped across the state.

Ventura County receives \$650,000 in annual funding from the California Depart-

ment of Food and Agriculture to operate its bulk citrus and plant nursery inspection programs.

Laird acknowledges that fewer GWSS overall were detected in Ventura County during 2003. Monthly counts averaged .5 GWSS per trap during 2003, compared to highs of eight per tree in June and July 2002.

"The lower counts could be attributed to a combination of weather, treatments and biological releases," Laird says.

Pilot project success. Lower GWSS levels may have resulted from the pilot project the county implemented last year with funding help from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

From March to November 2003, Ventura County treated 7,460 acres of citrus for GWSS — 5,300 acres with Assail® and the remainder with Admire®. Treatment reimbursements totaled \$816,000.

Laird also believes it's possible that last autumn's fires may have eliminated some GWSS. "A lot of land in the Santa Clara River Valley, where GWSS had been present, was scorched by the fires," he says. "They may have been killed off or they may have moved elsewhere."

While Laird is pleased with the lower GWSS levels in citrus groves and plant nurseries, he is well aware the pest remains in residential backyards and river bottom areas where it can still pose problems.

"That's why we cannot call this an eradication program," he says. "It's a control program. Our goal is to do what we can for our plant nursery industry and keep as low a pest pressure as we can."

Laird and his office staff will meet next week with other program officials to plan the county's GWSS activities for 2004. He expects Ventura County's GWSS program to continue as before, with some "tweaking" as it strives toward keeping the pest's populations levels in check.

— Catherine Merlo

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- www.co.kern.ca.us/kernag/
- http://cekern.ucdavis.edu/Custom_Program444/

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—Alan Laird,
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