

**2024-2025
PLUMAS COUNTY CIVIL GRAND JURY
FINAL REPORT
June 30th 2025**



Introduction to the Plumas County Civil Grand Jury

Overview:

The Plumas County Civil Grand Jury (PCCGJ) is one of 58 County Grand Juries operating in the State of California. It is part of the Superior Court of Plumas County, CA. The Grand Jury consists of 19 county residents who serve Plumas County on a part-time basis for a 12-month period. Its primary function is to act as a citizen “watchdog” over county, city and special district departments and officials. It helps ensure local government agencies and officers are accountable and working in the best interests of the public and communities that they serve. Primary Officers are the Foreperson, Pro Tem, and Secretary.

Powers and Jurisdiction:

The Civil Grand Jury (CGJ) has broad investigative powers which permit it to select the topics and offices to investigate and report on each year. Its jurisdiction is limited to matters involving local government and local government officials. It is not authorized to investigate state or federal functions or offices. Its customary focus is one of conducting civil investigations; it does not ordinarily sit as a criminal grand jury.

Grand Jurors are sworn to secrecy and CGJ meetings are conducted in closed session. All testimony given to the Grand Jury, and its deliberations, must remain forever confidential.

Grand Jury Reports:

Each year, the CGJ issues one or more written reports, setting forth the results of its completed investigations with Findings and Recommendations. The Final Report reflects the collective effort of all Jury Members. These reports are published in the local newspaper and on the County’s website. Under California statute, relevant elected officials, and governing bodies (such as the Board of Supervisors) must formally respond to each such report.

Under Penal Code § 933, governing boards and elected county officials and mayors are required to submit responses to relevant findings and recommendations following the format required by Penal Code § 933.05. Responses are required within 90 days for governing boards and within 60 days for elected county officials.

Appointment and Service:

Members of the CGJ are appointed by the Superior Court Judge to serve a one-year term, starting in or about July 1 of each year. Grand Jurors from a prior year may opt to be considered to serve a second term.

Jurors can expect to serve 2-10+ hours per week on average, depending upon the number of committees on which they serve. Serving on the Grand Jury is an excellent way both to learn more about your County, and local government, and to be of service to your County. To qualify, potential jurors must have been resident of Plumas County for at least one year prior to service and be a minimum of 18 years of age.

Jail Visit:

Penal Code section 919(b) requires the CGJ to inquire into public prisons within the County. The CA Attorney General has defined "public prisons" as including local detention facilities that confine persons for more than 24 hours. A County or City Jail is a typical example of a local detention facility.

Citizen Complaints

If you wish to file a complaint with the Grand Jury, please submit a completed citizen form

http://plumascounty.us/documentcenter/view/1696/citizen_complaint_form?didid=

to the Grand Jury at:

Plumas County Grand Jury
PO Box 784
Quincy, CA 95971

Call the Plumas County Superior Court at (530) 283-6016 to enroll as a Civil Grand Juror.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." - Margaret Mead.

(4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation, therefore.

- c. However, if a Finding or Recommendation of the Grand Jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the board of supervisors shall respond if requested by the Grand Jury, but the response of the board of supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the Findings or Recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.
- f. A Grand Jury shall provide to the affected agency a copy of the portion of the Grand Jury report relating to that person or entity two working days prior to its public release and after the approval of the Presiding Judge. No officer, agency, department, or governing body of a public agency shall disclose any contents of the report prior to the public release of the final report. (*Emphasis added.*)

DISCLAIMERS

§ 933. Findings and Recommendations (Excerpt)

No later than 90 days after the Grand Jury submits a Final Report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the governing body of the public agency shall comment to the presiding judge of the Superior Court on the Findings and Recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body, and every elected county officer or agency head for which the Grand Jury has responsibility pursuant to Section 914.1 shall comment within 60 days to the presiding judge of the Superior Court, with an information copy sent to the Board of Supervisors, on the Findings and Recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the Findings and Recommendations. All of these comments and reports shall forthwith be submitted to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court who impaneled the Grand Jury. A copy of all responses to Grand Jury reports shall be placed on file with the clerk of the public agency and the office of the County Clerk, or the Mayor when applicable, and shall remain on file in those offices...

As used in this section, “agency” includes a department.

§ 933.05. Responses to Findings (Excerpt)

- a. For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each Grand Jury Finding, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
 - (1) The respondent agrees with the Finding.
 - (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding, in which case the response shall specify the portion of the Finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.
- b. For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to each Grand Jury Recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:
 - (1) The Recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
 - (2) The Recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.
 - (3) The Recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.

Thank You Letter

To the Court: Thanks to Judge Douglas M. Prouty for graciously extending your time, legal expertise, and guidance. You and your staff went above and beyond to help the Grand Jury meet its goals and responsibilities.

To County Counsel: Thanks for all your help, your legal opinions, your precise directions, and suggestions. It was all done with care and consideration for the independence of the Grand Jury.

To County Administrative Office Staff: Thanks for helping with our budget, supplies, and our meeting room. Your assistance and support were instrumental in our success.

To the Citizens of Plumas County: Thanks for giving the Grand Jury the opportunity of serving your County. We have met our burden to the best of our abilities. We have done our part. We have worked diligently to provide some insight into the operation of the County Government; that is all we can do. Now you must do your part. Read our reports and take appropriate action. Get involved with your government. For we, the Plumas County Grand Jury, are just the watch dog. It is up to you to make a positive change. Our freedom depends on you. “Government of the People, for the people, and by the people.” Get involved: If not us, then who? If not now, then when?

The Plumas County Grand Jury: I want to express my profound thanks to all the Jurors for their diligence, tenacity, and cohesiveness in completing this report. You faced opposition and criticism throughout our term but continued to be professional in your job. You are a great group of individuals, from different backgrounds, who came together to meet our goals. Thanks for challenging me, yourself, and our system.

Donald Bliss

Foreperson

2024-2025 Jurors

Don Bliss, Foreperson

Christine Meyers, Foreperson Pro-Tem (July 2024-April 2025) & Secretary

Teryl Schwartz, Foreperson Pro-Tem (April 2025 – June 2025)

Mary Alvarado – Quincy

Jerald Blinn – Quincy

Don Bliss - Portola

Carolyn Blom – Clio

Mark Cook – Meadow Valley

Claudia Doohan - Quincy

Anita Hadenfeldt – Portola

Anne Hewitt – Quincy

Koralee Jones-Dollar – Chester

Clint Koble – Hamilton Branch

Laura Lazenby - Quincy

Bernice McProud – Chester

Christine Meyers, Greenville

Nancy Ryan – Chester

Teryl Schwartz – Indian Falls

Karen Segarini – Cromberg

Jim Worthington – Graeagle

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Board of Supervisors

- Agendas and Minutes: <https://www.plumascounty.us/Archive.aspx>

Grand Jury Reports, Plumas County

- Past Grand Jury Reports: <https://plumascounty.us/Archive.aspx?AMID=37>
- Responses to Grand Jury Reports: <https://plumascounty.us/Archive.aspx?AMID=38>

Plumas News

- Plumas News: Excellent source for news related to everything of interest in Plumas County Government: <https://www.plumasnews.com/category/news>
- The Plumas Sun: <https://plumassun.org>

Response: The Board of Supervisors agrees. Please see the Acting Director’s Response to the Grand Jury. Additionally, the Board has directed the Acting Director of Social Service to review and abide by the MOUs.

The Grand Jury was unable to find the response of the Acting Social Services Director referenced above.

The Grand Jury report requested responses from the Board of Supervisors, there was no request for a response from the Social Services Department.

The Many Faces of Plumas County Recycling

In the last few years there has been a reduction of CRV recycling centers in Plumas County for several reasons. Some private recycling centers closed their doors, in one case the owner-operator passed away and the business was shut down. Reduced prices for CRV plastics have caused a glut of the material reducing the demand, so many private recyclers have called it quits. Some stores refuse to take large quantities of bottles or cans, putting the burden on the consumer to find a location that will take their CRV material. The Grand Jury made two recommendations but did not request a response from a specific agency.

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RECOMMENDATION 4 *The Grand Jury recommends that the mission statements, and policies and procedures be updated in the Assessor’s office, the Auditor Controller’s office, and the Treasurer/Tax Collector’s office by December 1, 2024.*

No response was received from the Assessor’s office.

RECOMMENDATION 5 *The Grand Jury recommends that all job descriptions in Treasurer/Tax Collector, Auditor and Assessor offices include experience and competencies in using digital platforms by June 30, 2025.*

No response was received from the Assessor’s office.

Keeping All Our Children Safe—It Takes a Village

The Plumas County Child Protective Services (CPS) Department has not worked consistently together with other agencies to ensure the safety and protection of their clients (children). Many agencies need information when reports of abuse are filed, yet sharing this information does not always occur. The Sheriff’s office is not always contacted when abuse is suspected. Working with other agencies is mandated through a California Assembly Bill passed in 2019, yet the department has made little effort to update their policies and procedures to follow the new law. Also, it is unclear to the Grand Jury (GJ) how CPS defines child abuse in a consistent regular manner. The Grand Jury made recommendations and requested a response from the Board of Supervisors.

RECOMMENDATION 1 *recommends that the CPS policy manual be completely reviewed and rewritten including an Index, Table of Contents and be electronically available by June 2025.*

Response: The Board of Supervisors agrees. The Acting Social Services Director has begun organizing these items as outlined in the Acting Social Services Director’s Response to the Grand Jury and the Board is optimistic that the review and rewrite will be completed by June 2025.

The Grand Jury was unable to find the response of the Acting Social Services Director referenced above.

RECOMMENDATION 3 *The Grand Jury recommends that the website include a complete report to the BOS and the public on the status of CPS by October 2024.*

Response: The Board of Supervisors agrees. Please see the Acting Director’s Response to the Grand Jury.

The Grand Jury was unable to find the response of the Acting Social Services Director referenced above. A review of the Plumas County Social Services website found that the most recent report was dated June, 2023.

RECOMMENDATION 4 *The Grand Jury recommends that the MOU currently in place with other agencies be followed as written.*

METHODOLOGY

The Grand Jury reviewed responses to the 2023-24 Grand Jury Report. These responses are posted on the Plumas County Grand Jury website. The report requested responses from the Board of Supervisors, the Auditor/Controller, Treasurer/Tax Collector, and Assessor. Each of them posted responses as required, except the Assessor. That response isn't posted on the website. This report will only focus on missing or unclear responses to the recommendations.

DISCUSSION

A Call for Accountability—Putting the Public's Interest First

The 2023-24 Grand Jury Report looked at the troubling state of the Plumas County financial system and found that there are many issues facing the County. The accounting systems being used are outdated, there are delays in getting interest payments on investments to Feather River College, Feather River Tourism, and special districts, and missed deadlines that have impacted Public Works transportation projects. The report encourages the public to be informed and take action to remedy the situation. The report makes seven recommendations and requested responses from the Board of Supervisors, the Auditor/Controller, Treasurer/Tax Collector, and Assessor. The Auditor/Controller and the Treasurer/Tax Collector responded in full, but the responses from the Board of Supervisors resulted in additional questions from the Grand Jury.

RECOMMENDATION 2 *The Grand Jury recommends that the BOS direct the Treasurer/Tax Collector to use the option within the Investment Policy to reinstate the Treasurer Oversight Committee by November 1, 2024.*

Response: The Board of Supervisors agrees to place this matter on the agenda for October 8, 2024, for a vote on the reinstatement of the Treasurer Oversight Committee.

This was discussed at the March 4, 2025 Board of Supervisors meeting and it was agreed to reinstate the Treasurer Oversight Committee. Due to the timing of this Compliance Report, the Grand Jury is unable to verify that this committee has been reinstated. We suggest that the 2025-26 Civil Grand Jury follow up on this matter.

RECOMMENDATION 3 *The Grand Jury recommends that the BOS follow the recommendations from CLA including the hiring of a fiscal officer or administrative assistant to assist the CAO's office by October 1, 2024.*

Response: The Board of Supervisors agrees. The request for a Fiscal Officer is already in the recommended budget for fiscal year of 2024 and 2025.

The Grand Jury was unable to verify that this was included in the recommended budget for the fiscal year 2024 and 2025.

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Jail Summary

Penal Code section 919(b) requires the jury to inquire into public prisons within the county.

Grand juries with state-run correctional facilities (prisons or conservation camps) in the county routinely inquire into them. The California Attorney General has defined “public prisons” as including local detention facilities that confine persons for more than 24 hours.

A county or city jail is a typical example of a local detention facility. On Wednesday, December 4th, several members of the Plumas County Civil Grand Jury visited the county’s public prison located in Quincy. The facility has been under construction for some time and was completed in late 2024 and recently occupied. The new facility has a capacity of 61 inmates, with about 20 currently housed. People in custody of Plumas County Sheriff’s Office are provided with a safe and secure process from initial entry through booking and into residency. Good natural lighting, recreational areas and secure monitoring procedures are apparent. It was noted that additional personnel are needed to efficiently man the facility to full inmate capacity. Rehabilitation and Alternative Sentencing programs, including GED, culinary training, and access to Feather River College classes have proven to be successful and continue to be a crucial component of the rehabilitation process.

The Plumas County Civil Grand Jury was impressed with the new jail facility, including upgrades to structure and programs, and the professionalism of jail personnel.

Election Summary

This topic was not an investigation into the Plumas County Election Department, but an opportunity for Grand Jury members to observe November 2024 General Election operations and learn how the department operates on a regular basis.

Election events taking place at the Plumas County Courthouse are open to the public for observation, and in mid-September the Grand Jury was invited by letter to observe as part of the department’s outreach practices along with several other local entities. A schedule of times available for public viewing of Plumas County General Election events was listed in the invitation and several Grand Jury members attended individually at various times to view and learn about the activities that go into conducting an election.

Election activities follow Plumas County policies and procedures which are based on California Secretary of State guidelines and the National Voter Registration Act. Plumas County is all Vote-By-Mail and there are no polls for in-person voting. Voters mail in their ballots or may drop them off in person at the County Courthouse. At the courthouse, election office staff and the workers complete a variety of duties including performing logic and accuracy testing of equipment, tallying, and canvassing the vote. Election staff and workers are trained to maintain the voter roll as well as to collect, verify, tabulate, and secure ballots during the election process. The County uses both electronic and physical security measures including machines for ballot tabulation and sorting that do not connect to the internet.

COMPLIANCE AND CONTINUITY REPORT: 2023 – 2024

GRAND JURY REPORT

SUMMARY

The 2024-2025 Plumas County Civil Grand Jury reviewed the responses to the three investigative reports issued by the 2023-2024 Plumas County Civil Grand Jury, to assess compliance with the California Penal Code. The complete text of these reports can be accessed at the following website:

<http://www.countyofplumas.com/GrandJury>

The website also provides links to the responses given by the County agencies to the Findings and Recommendations contained in the reports.

BACKGROUND

California Penal Code §933(a) requires the Grand Jury to “submit to the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court a final report of its Findings and Recommendations that pertain to county government matters during the fiscal or calendar year.” Governing boards or department officials are required to respond to the Findings and Recommendations directed to them within 90 days of the release of a Grand Jury’s report. Elected County officials are required to respond within 60 days. (PC §933(c)).

This Compliance and Continuity Report focuses only on the Penal Code requirements for responding to the Recommendations.

Penal Code Section §933.05 states that the board or official is required to select one of four possible responses to the Recommendations (PC §933.05(b)):

- 1) The Recommendation has been implemented, with a summary of the action taken.
- 2) It will be implemented, with a timeframe for implementation being provided.
- 3) It requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope of the analysis and a timeframe for response being provided of not more than six months from the release of the report.
- 4) It will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation being provided.

The 2023-2024 Civil Grand Jury issued the following reports in its consolidated report released on June 11, 2024:

- A Call for Accountability—Putting the Public’s Interest First
- Keeping All Our Children Safe: It Takes a Village
- Many Faces of Plumas County Recycling

- R6. The PCCGJ recommends that PCCDC provide an alternative contact for filing discrimination complaints and post this information onsite. This is to take place no later than October 31, 2025. (F6)
- R7. The PCCGJ recommends that the PCCDC develop an action plan to repair the structural issues previously identified. This is to take place no later than October 31, 2025. (F7)

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

REQUIRED FOR RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05, the following responses are required from Plumas County Officials:

- PCCDC Board of Commissioners F3, F5 through F7 and R3, R5 through 7

INVITED RESPONSES

- PCCDC Executive Director

BIBLIOGRAPHY

<http://www.officialhousingauthority.com/california/quincy-county-housing-authority/>

<https://www.plumascdc.org/>

<https://nlihc.org/resource/public-housing-history>

<https://www.hcd.ca.gov/grants-and-funding/income-limits>

<https://www.hud.gov/helping-americans/public-housing>

<https://www.hcd.ca.gov/sites/default/files/docs/grants-and-funding/income-limits-2023.pdf>

<https://www.icarol.info/ResourceView2.aspx?org=2273&agencynum=14291414>

<http://www.officialhousingauthority.com/what-is-a-housing-authority/>

Plumas County Community Development Commission website:

<https://www.plumascdc.org/pdf/PROHousingapp.pdf>

The Grand Jury members who individually visited the elections office on several of the scheduled days (including election day November 5) were signed in, given a badge, and then taken to the observation window area where the workers were situated with the equipment. The Grand Jury members were also provided with general rules for observers and given a signed letter to retain during their visit. Most of the members stayed at the window approximately two hours where they were given periodic updates by election staff. Some members were given a demonstration of the signature verification process by looking at their own signature on record in the main election office. No chairs are typically provided but Election staff indicated they could be if requested. No other observers from the public were present during Grand Jury visits.

The Grand Jury members who participated prior to election day were able to observe four election workers inspecting and organizing received vote by mail ballots through the wide glass window of the election room. The door lock system for the work area was explained and demonstrated by the staff. Workers were observed to separate envelopes from ballots and inspect them for any damage or excess marks and the need to duplicate, according to guidelines. Ballots were then split into batches and placed into bins ready for processing. Election day observation included operations of various machines for ballot tabulation.

Grand Jury participants were also invited to go out to the mailbox outside at scheduled times to observe the collection of the ballots that had been dropped off. The outside ballot drop box is bolted to the ground, and at least two trained county employees are present when emptying. Before opening the box, a camera probe was inserted and the inside looked at with a tablet for safety reasons. This also applied to a drop box inside the office. The security personnel at the courthouse door entrance stay close to watch this process. They do not wear uniforms on election day according to protocol.

The Plumas County Elections Office employees are noted to be dedicated to offering citizens an opportunity to observe elections. The Grand Jury members who participated were welcomed and provided with useful information by election office staff about what procedures were taking place at many points in the process. Grand Jury visitors found a well-organized Elections Office, efficient facilities, organized supplies, and enthusiastic staff who often engaged with us in person. The Plumas County Elections Office deserves accolades for its efforts at welcoming observers and providing information at many points in the process. The Grand Jury expresses its gratitude to department staff for taking the time to meet and help orient election observers to the normal functioning of the Election Department in Plumas County.

Jobs Jobs Jobs !



SUMMARY

Several departments in Plumas County are understaffed, which results in issues of overworked employees, those who fill positions without the necessary qualifications, and those in key positions who lack leadership skills.

The Plumas County Civil Grand Jury (PCCGJ) decided to investigate key job positions that are unfilled and determine areas for improvement that could lead to the hiring of qualified individuals. Two major areas became the focus of the investigation, those being the Human Resources (HR) hiring process and the applicability of the current job descriptions.

It was determined that the following impact/issues exist with the current hiring process:

- Job applications go through a pre-screening process and not all applications are shared with the Hiring Manager.
- Revisions to new or changed job descriptions are routed to various reviewers, causing lengthy delays in the process.
- Job postings on the Plumas County website need to be approved by the Board of Supervisors (BOS), with prior approval of new/revised job descriptions by the BOS.
- Due to the hiring process, the posting of a few key job openings has taken over a year from the beginning of the process. One department's request for 2 entry level positions is still 'in progress' and overall, it may be up to 2 years before applications are received, let alone anyone hired. Unfilled vacancies have burdened others with heavier workloads.
- The current process does not allow for an overlap of employees when a known employee has a planned retirement date. There is a loss of knowledge sharing between the incoming employee and the retired employee.

- F2. Sierra Meadows does not maintain a maintenance log, as required by the ACOP, resulting in deferred and incomplete maintenance affecting the quality of housing provided to the residents.
- F3. Failure to implement a Resident Advisory Board has resulted in the inability of residents to address issues of common concern as a community.
- F4. Disregard for public safety and lack of routine maintenance has resulted in a severe wasp and rodent infestation with no visible traps.
- F5. The Admission and Continued Occupancy Plan is not posted on the Plumas County Community Development Commission (PCCDC) website resulting in residents having limited access to pertinent information.
- F6. As residents have no alternative means to file Discrimination Complaints, except through the onsite manager, their concerns at times go unaddressed.
- F7. Disregard for public safety is apparent as several structural issues are visible to the casual visitor.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The PCCGJ recommends that the onsite manager purge the waitlist as recommended in the Admission and Continued Occupancy Plan (ACOP). This is to take place no later than October 31, 2025. (F1)
- R2. The PCCGJ recommends that the housing director develop a system for how maintenance requests are handled, logged, resolved, and documented. This is to take place no later than October 31, 2025. (F2)
- R3. The PCCGJ recommends that the Plumas County Community Development Commission (PCCDC) empanel a Resident Advisory Board. This is to take place no later than September 30, 2025. (F3)
- R4. The PCCGJ recommends that Maintenance place and maintain wasp/bee and rodent traps immediately for the protection of the occupants and visitors. This is to take place no later than September 30, 2025. (F4)
- R5. The PCCGJ recommends that the PCCDC link or post the ACOP on their website. This is to take place no later than September 30, 2025. (F5)

file a discrimination complaint about the management, it must be filed with the on-site manager as stated in the ACOP. Several residents feel that these conditions affected their mental well-being. One person believes these conditions may have contributed to the deaths that have occurred here.

The Investigating Committee identified several structural issues while conducting the survey, including sidewalks in disrepair, broken rain gutters, roof damage, and wasp infestation in the common areas. Inside the units it was noted there are outdated heaters and water heaters as well as a lack of bathroom fans.

A Resident Advisory Board is a requirement for Public Housing Authorities according to the ACOP. It is important for residents to have a voice and recourse if they feel they have legitimate issues. The Resident Advisory Board gives them the ability to address all issues as a community. PCCDC acknowledged that there is not a Resident Advisory Board for their public housing units. In the 5-Year Plan and the Annual Plan the director certified that the Resident Advisory Boards had no comments on these plans in the March 2025 meetings. The Resident Advisory Board was addressed at the Board of Commissioners meeting last March by a citizen. This citizen spoke to the fact that PCCDC was aware of the requirements but did not follow it. The citizen also stated that the policies and procedures are in place to protect the sovereignty and rights of individuals who these institutions serve. It is of the utmost importance to follow these rules so institutions can continue to provide adequate services.

ACOP provides a resource for interested parties to locate basic policies, rules, and requirements concerning the PHA operations, programs, and services. The Admission and Continued Occupancy Plan is what the PCCDC uses as a policy and procedures manual. Both the 5-year Plan and the Annual Public Housing Plan state the ACOP is on the PCCDC website, however PCCDC acknowledged that it is only available onsite.

HUD evaluates a PHA by measuring its physical condition, financial condition, management operations, capital fund obligations, and occupancy. A combination of vacancies and the aging facilities contributed to a reduced 2023 Public Housing Score. PCCDC has restructured the Maintenance Team to better utilize the staff. Management and maintenance staff continue to work diligently to complete turnarounds. It is PCCDC's goal to increase occupancy statistics to at least 96% for Public Housing in our county.

FINDINGS

F1. Sierra Meadows Management has not provided evidence that they purge the waitlist yearly as recommended in the Admission and Continued Occupancy Plan (ACOP), resulting in inconsistent occupancy and a lengthy waitlist.

To further worsen the current hiring problems, the Director of HR was placed on Administrative Leave on May 17, 2022, at which time the Chief Administrative Officer became acting Interim Director of HR. Following this, the Chief Administrative Officer was placed on Administrative Leave on January 21, 2025.

BACKGROUND

In Fall 2024, the PCCGJ became interested in investigating the Plumas County HR hiring process and considered reviewing open job postings and related job descriptions as a starting point. A few events led to this interest. In October 2024, the PCCGJ met with the Plumas County DA. It was noted that Plumas County employed several consultants. The (higher) consulting fees had an impact on the budget and meant that Plumas County money was going outside of Plumas County (e.g., MRG Consulting LLC was hired as HR consultants and Clifton, Larson & Allen was hired as accounting consultants). In other cases, contractors with higher pay rates were hired as temporary employees for positions that remained unfilled for lengthy periods. Also in October 2024, during a meeting with the Chief Administrative Officer, it was noted that Plumas County has an overall vacancy rate of 20-25% and that Plumas County salaries are up to 20% or more lower than equivalent positions in other counties. This led the PCCGJ to question the current job descriptions and whether they adequately represented the open positions. In November 2024, in a meeting with a SAS Systems Administrator from the Plumas County IT Department, it was noted that key positions are unfilled and that job descriptions are outdated.

In December 2024, there were 32 open positions across 13 departments. The PCCGJ decided to investigate key open positions in the following departments: Auditor's/Controllers Office, Planning Department, Public Works Department, and the Sheriff's Department.

The Building Department was added to the investigation after a preliminary discussion with the Director of the Building Department and concerns that were voiced regarding the hiring process.

The following discussion section represents the findings and recommendations based on interviews with the heads of those departments.

METHODOLOGY

- Interviews with Plumas County Departmental Heads for the following: Auditor/Controller, Planning and Building Departments, Public Works Department, Sheriff's Department
- Telephone interviews with HR employee and Chief Administrative Officer (Interim Director of Human Resources)
- Review of Chief Administrative Officer's report dated April 2, 2024, for recommendations made by Clifton, Larson & Allen on the problems and risks in Plumas County's financial reporting
- Review of Personnel Rules for Plumas County

- Plumas County HR website for information on hiring process and rules governing changes to job descriptions

A combination of sources of information was used to verify statements made during interviews and to corroborate facts and inform the findings and recommendations included in this report.

DISCUSSION

Job Descriptions for Plumas County Auditor/Controller's Office

The 2023-24 PCCGJ noted in their report that the Auditor/Controller Office has insufficient staffing. This is due in part to COVID, the Dixie Fire and the departure of the previous Auditor. Since 2022, the Auditor's office has completed financial audits and single audits for Fiscal Years 2020-21 and 2021-22. The Auditor's Office is working diligently to complete the 2022-23 and 2023-24 audits. The late filing of audited financial statements and late Single Audits to the State Controller's Office has caused delays in federal funds that will not be released until the Single Audit is published. The late filing decreases the credit rating of the County and can also affect the County's ability to secure funding for future projects. The Assistant Auditor/Controller position has been open since December 2022, which makes it difficult to complete the required audits. The primary duty of this position is the year-end process and preparation of the financial statements, including the audits, as well as supervising the other employees in this office. Upon reviewing the job description and hiring practices in Plumas County, several issues became apparent.

1a The job description for Assistant Auditor/Controller requires five years of experience and the equivalent of a four-year degree.

2a All job applications are screened by the HR Department, but the Auditor/Controller doesn't see applications of applicants who might be capable of doing the job but don't meet the training/education requirements, such as former employees in that department.

3a Changes to the Job Description require a resolution passed by the BOS, and this process must start with HR in January of each year.

Job Descriptions for Plumas County Public Works Department

Transportation Planning and Road Department Engineering are important functions of the Public Works department and hiring is often needed at various levels due to employee turnover.

Open positions for Associate Engineer and Principal Transportation Planner have remained unfilled for 17 and 5 months respectively.

Initially, the position of Associate Engineer was to be advertised as Assistant/Associate Engineer and based on experience. However, only the higher level was advertised because the job description for Assistant Engineer needed to be revised. The Transportation position

3. Have you had any issues with management?
4. What was the outcome?

DISCUSSION

Sierra Meadows Apartments is a 39-unit facility located in Chester, California. It is owned and operated by PCCDC, the Housing Authority of Plumas County. The PCCDC consists of an Executive Director, Housing Director, Finance Director, Secretary to the Board, several maintenance employees, property managers, and the Board of Commissioners.

The initial interview included the Sierra Meadows manager, maintenance person, and Finance Director. The Investigating Committee reviewed the waitlist. It was stated there was a regular mandated purging of the waitlist but the documentation for that was not provided. The procedure described to the Investigative Committee does not correlate with the regulated procedure. The recommended procedure for purging the wait list is outlined in the Admission and Continued Occupancy Plan (ACOP).

During that interview, they stated that a maintenance log was in place with a workorder file, as well as a file for residents' complaints. Documentation of complaints, maintenance requests and solutions were requested. They were unable to provide these documents and stated that there were only two complaints received regarding maintenance or management.

A survey was conducted at Sierra Meadows for all available residents. The findings did not correlate with the impression that was received in the initial interview of management. Out of the 39 units, ten units were empty, three units did not answer, and one unit did not want to participate. Those surveyed showed:

- 6 units reported no problems
- 17 units had issues with maintenance
- 15 units had issues with management
- 16 units reported mold
- 11 units expressed fear of retaliation and eviction
- 7 units said some things get fixed; some don't

Specific complaints included mold, suspicious propane bills, leaking windows and doors, and inefficient heaters and water heaters. In addition, they complained about leaking roofs, walls, and sinks. They reported swallow nests in the parking area were being destroyed while actively occupied. Lights in the parking lot were on during the day as well as lights on in empty units. Other complaints were that the laundry room was in a deplorable state, and units had rodent and wasp infestations. Some complained that maintenance started repairs, but they were not completed.

Many residents have consulted a lawyer regarding these complaints. A previous tenant came forward to share her medical case against Sierra Meadows with the surveyors. There were reports of difficulties communicating with management, and concern that in order to

BACKGROUND

The federal public housing program started as part of the Housing Act of 1937; it was passed during the New Deal. Housing was the result of powerful grassroots organizations. Public Housing was established to provide decent and safe rental housing for eligible low-income families, including the elderly and people with disabilities. The local Public Housing Authority (PHA) is tasked with administering housing programs that are sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The PHA provides subsidies in the form of rental housing or rental assistance.

In his book, *Housing Policy and the United States*, Alex F. Schwartz notes, “public housing is unpopular with everybody except those who live in it and those who are waiting to get in.” So many people want to live in Public Housing that the wait can be long, often years. For those waiting to get into Public Housing, there is even a waitlist to initiate the process. While on the waitlist, the housing authority allows for some applicants to be given priority points thereby shifting their names up on the waitlist.

Both the PHA and the Housing Choice Vouchers allow preferences for certain individuals or families. They include veterans, the unhoused, victims of domestic abuse, senior citizens, disabled persons, and victims of natural disasters among others. Like the eligibility criteria, the preference criteria may also vary across various locations.

PCCDC oversees both public housing and voucher programs. Their mission statement is “The Plumas County Community Development Commission assists low-income residents meet their housing needs, provides energy assistance and weatherization services, builds and improves infrastructure, supports the creation and retention of jobs, supports human service organizations, thereby making communities better places to live.”

METHODOLOGY

The PCCGJ interviewed the complainant as well as the property manager, the primary maintenance person, and the Financial Director of the PCCDC. In addition, many residents were interviewed.

The following documents were reviewed: The Annual Public Housing Authority Plan, the 5-year PHA Plan, Admission and Continued Occupancy Plan, The Sierra Meadow’s Waitlist, and The Personnel Policy.

Meeting minutes were reviewed for: The PCCDC Board of Commissioners, Plumas Community Development Corporation (PCDC), and Lassen Plumas Sierra Community Action Agency (LPSCAA).

A survey was conducted at Sierra Meadows of all available residents. The survey consisted of four questions:

1. How long have you lived here?
2. Have you had any issues with maintenance?

was to be advertised as an entry-level Transportation Planner position to hire someone to overlap with the Principal Transportation Planner who will be retiring. Similarly, the job description for Transportation Planner needed to be revised and, due to delays, the only option was to advertise the position as Principal Transportation Planner.

During the revisions of the above-mentioned entry-level job descriptions, there were delays in the process that subsequently delayed the approvals. The process began in January 2024; however, delays were incurred during the process by both MRG (HR consulting firm) and the Chief Administrative Officer (interim HR Director). Both were, at times, not immediately responsive to emails, which delayed the MRG report and the processing of the job descriptions.

The job descriptions were finally approved by the union in October 2024 and are still pending approval by the BOS. It is possible that approval may take place in February 2025; however, this means that the job description approval process will have taken over a year. This lengthy approval process places an increased workload on others in Public Works and creates a need for hiring consultants. Once the job descriptions are approved, they can be advertised on the Plumas County website for applicants to apply. It may take well over a year to fill positions that were recognized in January 2024.

Employee turnover is particularly true for maintenance workers. If applicants do not have a required commercial license, Public Works has been willing to provide training for maintenance workers to obtain the required commercial license. Once licensed, however, applicants often seek opportunities with higher pay both in and outside of Plumas County.

There is a need to fill and support the above positions for long-term stability.

In doing this, issues and delays due to the Plumas County’s current hiring practices need to be addressed first.

Upon reviewing the Public Works job descriptions and hiring practices, the following became apparent:

1b The Public Works Department has job openings for Associate Engineer (posted 8/17/2023) and Principal Transportation Planner (posted 9/3/2024). There have been no applicants in over 1 year for the Associate Engineer position.

2b The planned positions of Assistant Engineer and Transportation Planner could not be advertised until the related job descriptions were revised and approved. The approval process for these positions was lengthy and there were many handoffs during the review process, which caused delays.

3b The Principal Transportation Planner is retiring at the end of March 2025, and a replacement is needed. The BOS approved the Public Works Director’s request for an overlap period to train the entry-level Transportation Planner. Delays with approval and advertising the position made the overlap impossible before the current employee retires. Therefore, no training or knowledge sharing will take place.

4b Consultants were hired due to delays in approving job descriptions and posting new positions. Consultants came from outside of Plumas County.

Job Descriptions for Plumas County Building Department

The Building Department has had several personnel changes resulting in job openings. Two key positions are open, a building inspector and a building plan inspector. Three permit tech positions also need to be filled.

Job descriptions are current; however, there are positions that could be filled with current employees with cross training.

Upon reviewing the Building Department's job descriptions and hiring practices, the following became apparent:

- 1c** The Department Head is also working as an inspector, as well as performing his administrative duties, thus potentially causing delays in services.
- 2c** The paperwork for accepting resignations and retirements to pass to the HR department is cumbersome and time-consuming.
- 3c** The duties of a building inspector are regulated; however, it is noted that not every applicant needs to have experience to become an inspector.
- 4c** At the present time, applicants rarely come before the manager if they do not have the necessary skills/education as listed in the job description.

Job Descriptions for Plumas County Sheriff's Department

The meeting with the Under Sheriff and members of the PCCGJ covered several key points.

The Sheriff's Office has been chronically understaffed. The Under Sheriff stated that in 31 years of service, he can only remember a period of six months during his tenure that the department was fully staffed. Currently, eight of the current ten positions are filled. These funded allocated positions require BOS approval each time they are vacated, creating delays in application and filling of said positions. Hiring and retention continue to be a problem due to low wages and limited amenities in the area.

Transitioning to the new jail facility, many job descriptions and policy changes were required to accommodate the duties of multiple personnel and procedures. This was accomplished with the help of Prentice Long LLC. Going forward, the department is also implementing a Digital Management System (DMS). This system will allow all authorized personnel to access current policies that are updated anytime there are legislative and/or regulatory changes by notification to supervisory personnel who will then update, inform/educate, and sign off as reviewed by all pertinent personnel.

It must be noted that this process/system (DMS) may be an appropriate model for other county departments.

Is There Room for One More?



SUMMARY

Affordable housing is often cited as one of Plumas County's most pressing issues. The Plumas County Community Development Commission (PCCDC) is the Housing Authority in Plumas County, overseeing both public housing and voucher programs in Plumas County. Sierra Meadows in Chester is one of those housing facilities and is owned and operated by PCCDC. Plumas County Civil Grand Jury (PCCGJ) investigated information that the facility has a several year long waitlist despite having empty units, and residents expressing fear of retaliation.

DEFINITIONS

HUD: U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development

PHA: Public Housing Authority

PCCDC: Plumas County Community Development Commission

ACOP: Admission and Continued Occupancy Plan

CAA: Community Action Agency

LPSCAA: Lassen Plumas Sierra Community Action Agency – under a joint power's agreement; PCCDC governs a tri-county Community Action Agency

PCDC: Plumas County Development Corporation (Non -profit)

APPENDIX C: Plumas County Solid Waste Contracts

Waste Management Contract

Section 5.03

C. California Redemption Value (CRV) Recycling. Contractor shall, within ninety (90) Calendar days of notification by County of the need for such services, provide redemption services for customers who self-haul their CRV recyclable materials to a redemption facility operated by Contractor within their Service Area in the following population centers of Plumas County, where such redemption services are not offered by other recycling contractors:

1. Chester - Lake Almanor Basin
2. Greenville - Indian Valley
3. Quincy – American Valley

Intermountain Disposal Contractor

Section 5.03

C. California Redemption Value (CRV) Recycling. Contractor shall, within ninety (90) Calendar days of notification by County of the need for such services, provide redemption services for customers who self-haul their CRV recyclable materials to a redemption facility operated by Contractor within their Service Area in the following population centers of Plumas County, where such redemption services are not offered by other recycling contractors:

1. Delleker
2. Graeagle

The office has additional issues because their IT person retired, leaving a big gap due to the complexities of communications and the emergency notification system.

1d The Sheriff's Department is chronically short staffed, especially in the classifications of Deputies and Dispatchers. Deputies often cover dispatches in addition to their regular hours on patrol duty.

2d Retirement of a Sergeant of 29 service years as well as a Dispatcher of 28 service years and the only IT Officer with 20+ service years has left a large deficit because of experience and Plumas County specific expertise.

3d The process of replacing allocated positions does not allow for a replacement in specialized positions to overlap to provide experienced specific training by the outgoing employee.

4d The hiring process is improving. However, the screening process required by HR and MRG is completed before the Sheriff sees all applications. This process may exclude otherwise successful candidates for other positions. It may prevent candidates that do not qualify for the job they applied for from being recognized as qualified for a similar but different position. Currently these candidates are rejected and would have to start the hiring process over if they were not persistent or discouraged.

5d The policy for replacing an allocated position requiring BOS approval slows the hiring process even further.

6d Policy and procedures throughout the department have historically been on a server, which is labor intensive to maintain and requires additional documentation. The help of Prentice and Long and the implementation of the DMS have been extremely helpful in maintaining compliance with current laws and regulations.

FINDINGS

- F1. Required experience and education requirements for some positions are too high, resulting in candidates with potential to be eliminated early in the process (e.g., Auditor/Controller office position requires both experience and a four-year degree in accounting).
- F2. New or changes to Job Descriptions require approval by the BOS. The approval process is lengthy and entails several reviews and handoffs. The process must start in HR and can only be requested once a year (in January). This results in a delay of up to 12 months or more before otherwise qualified candidates can be considered for open positions (e.g., in Auditor/Controller's Office, Public Works Department, Sheriff's Department).

- F3. Reclassification of Job Descriptions follow the same path as above (Finding 2) and require labor intensive documentation and review.
- F4. The process of filling vacated positions (e.g., Sheriff's Department) are hindered by the requirement of the department to go to the BOS to fill positions already allocated that are vacated regardless of the reason the position was vacated.
- F5. Department heads do not see applications that may meet the requirements of an open position but have been disqualified during the screening process in HR (e.g., Auditor/Controller Office, Public Works Department, Building Department, Sheriff's Department).
- F6. The Hiring Process does not include a succession plan, which would allow an overlap of incoming employees with those leaving (e.g., due to retirement) and would facilitate training and knowledge sharing (e.g., Public Works - Transportation Manager, Building Department - Building Inspector, Sheriff's Department - IT Officer, Deputy Sargent, Dispatcher).
- F7. Several positions in Plumas County have remained unfilled for months/years, resulting in increased workloads for fellow employees and/or the need to hire consultants (e.g., Auditor/Controller Office, Public Works Department, Sheriff's Department).
- F8. Low salaries and limited amenities in the rural community of Plumas County continue to be the main reasons why positions remain unfilled.
- F9. This investigation has been hindered by lack of HR leadership and by lack of collaboration between Departmental Heads. In particular, HR accountability and responsiveness were impeded when the Director of HR was placed on Administrative Leave on May 17, 2022, and the Chief Administrative Officer (as acting interim Director of HR) was placed on Administrative Leave on January 21, 2025.

APPENDIX B: California CalRecycle Buy Back Centers in Plumas County

| Program Name | Facility County | Facility Address | Facility City | Facility State | Facility Postal Code | Operation Begin Date | Rural |
|------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------|
| Feather River Disposal | Plumas | 300 Greenville Dump Rd. | Greenville | CA | 95947 | 5/1/2017 | Y |
| Quincy Recycler | Plumas | 435 N. Mill Creek Rd | Quincy | CA | 95971 | 10/4/2023 | Y |
| Grizzly Creek Services | Plumas | 225 Taylor Ave | Portola | CA | 96122 | 3/24/2025 | Y |

<https://www2.calrecycle.ca.gov/BevContainer/CertifiedPrograms/RecyclersProcessors/>

RECOMMENDATIONS

- R1. The PCCGJ recommends that the Auditor/Controller request a change to the Job Description for the Assistant Auditor/Controller position to allow experience to supersede the degree requirement. This is to take place no later than September 30, 2025. (F1)
- R2. The PCCGJ recommends that all applications are shared with the respective Hiring Manager and that the Hiring Manager is allowed to determine where experience can

APPENDIX A: Plumas County Public Works Solid Waste Page

From the Solid Waste website:

Current available "Buy-Back" Centers in Plumas County (06/12/2023):

Greenville Transfer Station

300 Greenville Dump Road
Greenville, CA

Public Works website: <https://www.plumascounty.us/2113/Buy-Back-Centers>

supersede a degree requirement. It is also recommended that the Hiring Manager update current job descriptions with 'experience supersedes the degree requirement' where applicable. This is to take place no later than October 31, 2025. (F2) In addition, it is recommended that 'Rule 9 Application Procedure' in the Personnel Rules document be updated as follows:

9.04 Disqualification of Applicants

(2) Suggested wording change: The applicant fails to meet the minimum qualifications, except in cases where an applicant's experience supersedes a degree requirement.

- R3. The PCCGJ recommends that the BOS amend the Personnel Rules to allow more frequent changes to Job Descriptions. Changes in Job Descriptions should not require the extensive review and approval process as changes in Job Classification. It is recommended that approval for changes in Job Descriptions is limited to approval by HR and not the BOS. It is noted that this recommendation does not apply to job descriptions that include reclassification or when licensing/certification requirements change. The BOS will still review/approve those. This is to take place no later than October 31, 2025. (F3, F4)
- R4. The PCCGJ recommends that the BOS create a policy based on resolution of #SC 24-891, which will allow for succession planning, training and overlap in each department based on the discretion of the department head without additional BOS approval when upcoming vacancies are known. This is to take place no later than October 31, 2025. (F5)
- R5. The PCCGJ recommends that HR and the BOS place greater effort on recruitment for open Plumas County positions. This is to take place no later than October 31, 2025. (F6, F7) The following are suggested:
- Increase multimedia exposure for unfilled positions (e.g., county websites, job fairs, social media).
 - Share all applications with the Hiring Manager (Recommendation 2) to increase the likelihood of filling positions with qualified internal candidates.
 - Offer training for internal candidates to assist with meeting position requirements.
 - Create more entry level positions, which enables building expertise within the department.

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code section 933.05, the following responses are required from Plumas County Officials:

- Plumas County Board of Supervisors F2 through F9 and R1 through R5
- Plumas County Auditor/Controller F1 through F3 and F5 through F7 and F9 and R1

INVITED RESPONSES:

- HR Interim Director
- Plumas County Sheriff
- Plumas County Public Works Manager

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Plumas County, Employment Opportunities: <https://www.plumascounty.us/jobs.aspx>

Personnel Rules of Plumas County:

<https://www.plumascounty.us/DocumentCenter/View/26935/Personnel-Rules-of-Plumas-County---Updated-8-4-2020?bidId=>

- R3. The PCCGJ recommends that the Plumas County Public Works Solid Waste Division apply for available grants that would benefit Plumas County recycling efforts. This is to take place no later than October 31, 2025. (F3)
- R4. The PCCGJ recommends that the Plumas County Public Works Solid Waste Division review enforce existing with WMD and IMD and to ensure compliance with CRV. This is to take place no later than October 31, 2025. (F4)

REQUEST FOR RESPONSES

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Pursuant to Penal Code 933 and 933.05, the Civil Grand Jury requests responses as follows:

- Plumas County Board of Supervisors F1 through F4 and R1 through R4

INVITED RESPONSES:

- Plumas County Public Works

BIBLIOGRAPHY

State of California Recycling website: <https://calrecycle.ca.gov/>

Plumas County Solids Waste website: <https://www.plumascounty.us/177/Solid-Waste-Recycling>

The Press Democrat website: <https://www.pressdemocrat.com/article/news/california-bottle-bill-at-a-glance/>

The KQED website: <https://www.kqed.org/news/11961915/cashing-in-on-californias-broken-bottle-deposit-system>

The KPBS website: <https://www.kpbs.org/news/environment/2024/06/20/californias-unclaimed-bottle-deposits-820m-recycling-centers-close>

The Bottle Bill Resource Guide website: <https://www.bottlebill.org/index.php/current-and-proposed-laws/usa/california>

The NBC Bay Area website: <https://www.nbcbayarea.com/news/local/cash-in-the-can-californias-recycling-run-around/20550571/>

IMD acknowledges the contract requirement and is working on rectifying the deficiency. IMD indicated they had not been contacted by the Plumas County Public Works Solid Waste division concerning their obligations under the current contract.

A review of CalRecycle's website provides information on grants and loans that are available such as: Recycling Market Development Zone (RMDZ) loan program and Beverage Container Recycling Loan Program. Currently, Plumas County is not taking advantage of these programs.

Observation visits were made to various Plumas County business locations that sell CRV products. The CRV committee discovered that the signs required by the Bottle Bill were not always plainly posted and if posted were not accurate. Some signs had not been updated consistent with the current Bottle Bill and redemption facility status.

FINDINGS

- F1. The CRV portion of the Plumas County Public Works Solid Waste Division web page has not been updated since June 2023, resulting in incorrect information on site locations.
- F2. Site visits to markets disclosed that signs at the markets were either nonexistent or had not been updated to reflect current information on site locations.
- F3. The CalRecycle website lists many recycling grants that are available, however Plumas County has not applied for the grants.
- F4. Public Works Solid Waste Division has not enforced sections of the solid waste contracts pertaining to CRV, consequently the communities are being underserved.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on interviews and reviews of contracts, improvements in the administration of the Solid Waste CRV program should be made.

- R1. The PCCGJ recommends that the Plumas County Public Works Solid Waste Division website be reviewed and updated. This is to take place no later than October 31, 2025. (F1)
- R2. The PCCGJ recommends that the Plumas County Solid Waste Division explore options with the appropriate State agency for bringing retail stores into compliance with current Bottle Bill signage requirements. This is to take place no later than October 31, 2025. (F2)

CRV – It's Your Money



SUMMARY

The Plumas County Civil Grand Jury (PCCGJ) elected to review the Plumas County California Redemption Value (CRV) program. For Plumas County, the CRV program is administered by the Plumas County Public Works Solid Waste Division. There were previous investigations and reports on the problems with the CRV program in Plumas County, but the PCCGJ decided an investigation of the present status of the CRV program was needed. Investigations for this report included reviewing available facilities as well as facilities that should be available. Preliminary investigation indicates buyback facilities are available that are not listed on the Public Works Solid Waste website. A review of the service provider contracts reveals that there are other facilities that should be available but are not available. The Public Works Solid Waste Division has not acted to enforce the contracts for the additional facilities listed in the contracts.

BACKGROUND

California Beverage Container Recycling and Litter Reduction Act (AB 2020) also known as the "Bottle Bill", was enacted in 1986 and implemented in 1987. California is currently one of 10 states in the United States with a Bottle Bill. This was updated by SB 1013 in 2018, with certain provisions becoming operative in 2014.

The original Bottle Bill created the recycling deposit system used today. The Bottle Bill requires California consumers to pay a CRV fee when they purchase designated beverages. Consumers could receive CRV refunds when they redeem containers at a recycling center or certain retailers.

Eligible beverage containers in the original CRV act were packaged in:

- Aluminum
- Glass
- Plastic
- Bi metal

Any packaged drink container or container purchased at a store with the letters CRV printed anywhere on the container requires paying a CRV deposit at the checkout line. According to the Bottle Bill, California sought to achieve an 80% recycling rate for all CRV containers sold in the state. The state anticipated that not all CRV containers would be returned for refund, thus generating revenue to be deposited into the Beverage Container Fund (BCF). The unclaimed CRV deposits in the BCF are managed by Cal Recycle. These funds were supposed to be used to subsidize the state's recycling infrastructure.

The Bottle Bill required stores that sell CRV-labeled beverages to buy back the CRV empties. Stores could also pay a fine in lieu of the buy-back requirement. However, they were exempt if there is a California State certified redemption center within a one-mile radius (five miles for rural locations). A study in 2020 revealed that even after many buy-back centers had closed, the remaining buy-back centers still accounted for more than twice the number of returned containers as retail stores.

Consumer advocates argued that with the lack of local redemption centers, the Bottle Bill's exemption fine for stores is hurting consumers. The argument was that without readily available redemption centers, the CRV deposit becomes akin to a tax. According to advocates, working class communities that depend on the money from recycling to pay bills are hurt the most.

The California Bottle Bill has since been updated in 2018, pursuant SB 1013, and broadened the scope to additional container types such as the following:

- All non-alcoholic beverages
 - Carbonated and non-carbonated fruit drinks, soft drinks, or water
 - Coffee and tea beverages
 - 100% fruit juice (less than 46 ounces)
 - 100% vegetable juice (16 ounces or less)
- Beer and malt beverages
- Wine coolers and distilled spirits coolers
- Distilled spirits in all containers, including bladders, boxes, and pouches (all sizes)
- Wine in all containers, including bladders, boxes, and pouches (all sizes)
- 100% fruit juice (46 ounces or greater)

- 100% vegetable juice (greater than 16 ounces)

As of January 1, 2025, SB 1013 will require grocery stores with no nearby recycling centers to be responsible for taking back empty beverage containers in lieu of paying a fine. When a CRV buy-back facility is available, businesses are required to post the location of the CRV redemption centers at its entrances.

METHODOLOGY

Interviews

The CRV committee of the Plumas County Civil Grand Jury interviewed the Director of Plumas County Public Works and the Plumas County Public Works Solid Waste Coordinator, the designated employee responsible for the Plumas County Solid Waste program.

Members of CRV committee communicated via phone, emails, and text with solid waste service providers- Waste Management (WMD) and Intermountain Disposal (IMD) and their legal representatives with regards to their contracts pertaining to CRV.

Site Visits

Site visits by members of the CRV committee were made to various businesses involved in selling CRV products throughout Plumas County. Businesses included Safeway, Sav-Mor, Holiday Market, and Grocery Outlet, to name a few.

DISCUSSION

Plumas County Solid Waste Division website provides information on solid waste and redemption center locations. However, a review of the information indicates some of the pertinent information on the website has not been updated since June 12, 2023, as shown in Appendix A. The California Cal Recycle Buy Back Centers website shows the new facilities in Plumas County (see APPENDIX B).

Currently, residents in areas without a recycling center are supposed to have the option of returning their bottles and cans to retailers. The stores are supposed to be recyclers of last resort. However, they are unable to process large quantities of CRV creating an inconvenience for the consumer.

The Solid Waste Coordinator (SWC) is the designated coordinator whose job it is to oversee solid waste operations. The SWC's responsibilities include interfacing with WMD and IMD. According to contracts with WMD and IMD (see APPENDIX C), these solid waste service providers are responsible for CRV facilities in specified locations if no private operations are available.

WMD has not been contacted by the Plumas County Solid Waste division concerning their contract obligations. Waste Management conducted an extensive investigation and determined that there has not been a request from Plumas County regarding this issue.