

GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT



2025-26

SIERRA COUNTY

CALIFORNIA



SIERRA COUNTY GRAND JURY 2025-2026

"Jason" LaChance, Assistant Presiding Judge

Sierra County Superior Court

100 Courthouse Square

Downieville, CA 95936

Your honor,

This year's Grand Jury made great efforts to "revive" the fully functioning Grand Jury culture for Sierra County. Penal code requires at least one investigation a year and each complete report must have "Findings" and "Recommendations". The last Sierra County Grand Jury Report that included the required Findings and Recommendations was in 2018-19. This year's grand jury has posted 4 completed reports with Findings and Recommendations in the best interests of our client...the Public.

You will be pleased to know that our first Report has already received a response and as a direct result the public throughout the county will be able to view the June Elections counting process online from Downieville.

I can report that most of the benefits of a functioning Grand Jury are not seen in the public reports. Not unlike the "white door" of the Sheriff's department, the mere presence of a functioning Grand Jury asking questions, and investigating solves many problems. Traffic immediately slows down when a law enforcement vehicle is parked by the road. No sirens, no tickets, just a safe and trouble-free place to be.



Very special thanks go to the very special 2025-26 Grand Jurors that attended trainings, meetings, interviews and work sessions, in a year-long effort to do a great job for Sierra County. A wonderful group of great people that was a joy to work with. Job well done!

Thanks also go to all government officials, departments, employees and citizens that were so cooperative and genuinely helpful in all of our activities, inquiries, interviews and requests. Sierra County is blessed with such excellent public servants.

Many thanks to your honor, for providing me the honor and privilege of returning as Foreperson for the Sierra County Grand Jury after a 35-year sabbatical leave. I hope that returning to this role helped provide something useful in crafting the following 2025-26 Sierra County Final Report with this outstanding Grand Jury panel.

SIERRA COUNTY GRAND JURY 2025-2026

SIERRA COUNTY GRAND JURY 2025-2026

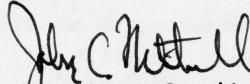
FORMAL PRESENTATION OF THE FINAL REPORT

The 2025-2026 Sierra County Grand Jury is honored to prepare and present our Final Report to you and to the citizens of Sierra County in conformance with Penal Code §933(a) that states:

“Each Grand Jury shall 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.”

I am pleased to certify that the following report has been developed by and approved by the required super majority of jurors of the Sierra County Grand Jury 2025-26. (8 or more votes of the 11 jurors)

John Mitchell

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John C. Mitchell", written in a cursive style.

Sierra County Grand Jury 2025-26 Foreperson

GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT

**TO THE PEOPLE OF SIERRA COUNTY,
CALIFORNIA**



**FROM THE 2025-2026
Sierra County Grand Jury
May 20, 2026**

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2025-26 Grand Jury Panel

Aufdemaur, Stephanie #	Downieville
Corcoran, Candy	Loyalton
Erickson, Charisse	Sierraville
Geiszler, Joshua	Loyalton
Hollis, Jennifer	Loyalton
Manning, Patrick	Downieville
Mitchell, John	Calpine
Pearmund, Kristie #	Downieville
Rust, Jessica #	Calpine
Sexton, Laura Lee	Loyalton
Stringer, Kortney *	Sierra City
Taylor, Michael *	Downieville
Walker, Caleb	Calpine
Whittier, Scott *	Loyalton
* = did not complete term	
# = filled vacancy during term	

Foreperson.....John Mitchell

Foreperson Pro Temp/Secretary/Committee Chair.....Joshua Geiszler

Foreperson Pro Temp Alternate.....Candy Corcoran

Sergeant-at-Arms/Committee Chair.....Patrick Manning

Committee ChairpersonJennifer Hollis

Sub Committee Chairperson.....Caleb Walker

Legal Basis of Grand Jury and Grand Jury Function

The 5th Amendment of the United States of America, ratified on December 15, 1791, states that “No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a grand jury...” In California, under Article 1, Section 23 of the state constitution a mandate is made stating “One or more grand juries shall be drawn and summoned at least once a year in each county.” The activities of California Grand Juries are covered under the California Penal Code Part 2 Title 4. “Grand Jury Proceedings.”

Grand Jury Function

In California, the presiding judge in each county is responsible for impaneling a grand jury. The grand jury is responsible for investigating and reporting on the operations of local government, issuing criminal indictments when required and investigating allegations of public official’s corruption or willful misconduct in office. The grand jury acts as a civil and independent watchdog for local government. Under Penal code 933a, the grand jury shall submit a final report of its findings and recommendations made during their term to the presiding judge. No later than 90 days after the report is submitted, the governing body of the public agency shall provide written comments on those findings and recommendations. For recommendations made to county elected officers, responses shall be made in 60 days. In some instances, findings may be directed to an individual or a group within the government (for example, a department head or local board). The jury may only invite them to respond and can do so within 60 to 90 days.

Training and Government Orientation and Survey

Jurors in Sierra County underwent two days of training that was organized by the California Grand Jury Association. This online training reviewed meeting procedures, jury conduct guidelines, investigations, and reporting.

Jurors in Sierra County were also oriented on the previous Grand Jury Reports, the Sierra County departments, special districts (including several intercounty districts), Sierra County and City of Loyalton Budgets and their functions in the county as well as the locations of county offices in Downieville and Loyalton.

The Secretary and Foreperson of the jury underwent 1 day of training in Jury report writing. In addition, the Foreperson attended 2 days of training that underlined the responsibilities of a jury foreperson.

Grand Jury Education

After our first gathering, many of the jurors did not fully understand what our purpose and goals were for the year. The online training jurors received offered an eye-opening understanding of the purpose of the Civil Grand Jury. Because of this, a broad outreach to educate the public on the function of Civil Grand Juries was taken up by the foreperson of the jury, John Mitchell. A presentation was prepared and was authorized by the jury to be presented to the Board of Supervisors, the School Board, Downieville Lions, Loyalton Rotary and Loyalton High School. (See Chapter 6)

In order to increase retention, motivation and compensate for time lost, the Foreperson was authorized by the Grand Jury to make a request to the Board of Supervisors to increase the regular meeting stipend from \$25 to \$50. In addition, the Board of Supervisors was also asked to proclaim January as Grand Jury Awareness Month and to formally designate Grand Jury secure meeting locations. These requests were granted at their January 20, 2026 meeting.

Grand Jury Procedures

The Grand Jury adopted, updated and followed a formal “Rules of Procedure”, elected officers and then created and amended committees throughout the term to effectively complete the Grand Jury’s service for the public. Only one juror was recused from participation in one and only one topic as required by “Rules of Procedure” and State Law during the 2025-26 term. A quorum affirmative vote of 8 or more of the 11 jurors was followed faithfully throughout the term.

Grand Jury Charge/Purpose

The Grand Jury faithfully pursued it’s charge as defined by the California Grand Jury’s Association training manual to: 1) investigate and report on the operations of local governments, 2) to improve efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability, 3) to facilitate positive change in your county, and 4) promote accountability and transparency. The purpose is to help those entities improve their operations to better serve the public.

Grand Jury Questionnaire

The Grand Jury is a time-honored institution which enables citizens to review the internal functioning of their local government. Prospective Jurors may apply online at:

<https://www.sierra.courts.ca.gov/general-information/grand-jury/webform-sierra-county-grand-jury-application>

A REPORT

**TO THE PEOPLE OF SIERRA COUNTY,
CALIFORNIA**



**FROM THE 2025-2026
SIERRA COUNTY GRAND JURY**

Sierra County Elections and Ballot Counting Process

January 15th, 2026

Summary

It is customary that grand jurors are invited to witness the election process that is handled by the County Elections Department. The County Elections Department is overseen by the California Registrar of Voters. Two members of the 2025-2026 Grand Jury were invited by the County Clerk-Recorder to observe the election process. The designated members were invited to observe any stage of the voting process, including Logic and Accuracy testing, and the opening and processing of mail in ballots. Processing of ballots takes place as early as October 7th and extends until Election Day on November 4th or until all ballots are tabulated and the election is certified.

Background

The statewide special election was approved by the State Senate, Assembly and signed by the governor on August 21, 2025. The special election was held on November 4, 2025. In Sierra County, the election was conducted completely through mail in ballots. No polling places were designated. Ballots were mailed to registered voters on October 6th. Ballots could be returned in 1 of 3 ways. Either directly at the Sierra County Clerk's Office, a drop box at the Loyalton City Hall Auditorium on Election Day Only, or by mail with the ballot being postmarked no later than November 4th, 2025.

Methodology

Information about the special election was found on the Voter Information Pamphlet and Vote by Mail Instructions. The election and ballot counting process was observed by two members of the Grand Jury on two separate dates, October 30th, 2025 and November 4th, 2025. The process of running the election was explained step-by-step by the County Clerk-Recorder. The clerk and their staff were willing and able to answer

all questions asked. Election and ballot counting procedures were verified through information found on the State of California's Secretary of State Website.

Discussion

The Elections Office of Sierra County is operated by the County Clerk's Office. The Clerk's office also serves as the clerk to the Board of Supervisors, Clerk and Recorder to the county. Any member of the public is welcome to observe the election and ballot counting process in the Sierra County Board of Supervisors Meeting room as long as posted rules are obeyed. This is the same room that the Board of Supervisors holds its public meetings with live internet access for all citizens of Sierra County to "attend" without cross county travel over the mountain pass. Because of the small size of the office, two volunteers are secured and sworn in as election officials on election night.

Sierra County Election Procedures are created by the state and which each county is directed to follow. The Election office creates and prints the ballots with guidelines and layout provided by the state. The ballots are then mailed to all registered voters in the county. When ballots arrive at the office, the signature is verified and the ballot is marked as received in special ballot tracking software. Election employees use the software keeps track of all known signatures of the registered voter. If a ballot is received without a signature, a ballot notice is sent to that registered voter. They must verify that their ballot was mailed by them and provide a signature with the notice. Checked in ballots are then stored in the appropriate box, separated by precinct and locked in a secure safe.

Ballot counting computers are comprised of three separate servers. One used for creating and printing ballots, one for scanning ballots, and the last for tabulating votes. These computers are not connected to any network or internet source and can only be accessed by physically using the computer in the office. Jurors were shown each computer station and were allowed to view their operation. All of the computers were connected to a battery backup, ensuring their operation even if a power outage occurred.

The jurors were introduced to the Logic and Accuracy testing phase of the evening before ballots were scanned. In this testing phase, 10 ballots were marked. Four ballots were marked “Yes,” 4 ballots were marked “No,” one ballot had neither a yes or no (undervote), and one ballot had been marked with both yes and no (overvote). Jurors counted the votes and made notes of their results. The ballots were then run through the scanner, and a report was generated with the results. Jurors reviewed the report and compared the computer’s results with their own and found the results to be the same, proving that the scanner was functioning as designed. The jurors acted as members of the Logic and Accuracy board and signed off on the results.

During the night, each voting precinct’s box is opened. The number of ballots is counted and compared to the number of ballots, ensuring none are missing. The names of the registered voters from the envelopes are read, and compared to the list of checked in ballots. Ballots are then taken to the scanner, and the votes are tallied and recorded in the computer. Results are stored on a thumb drive and given directly to a state official. As a double check, a state election official contacts a county staff member to hear a verbal total of votes.

If during the counting of ballots, a ballot is found to be unreadable by the machine, a duplicate of that ballot will be created by 2 certified election officials. Ballots of this nature can contain unnecessary folds, stains or marks or any other flaw. Ballots sent in from overseas and military are duplicated due to the format of the ballot upon receipt. These ballots are duplicated onto appropriate ballots that can be read by the scanner.

Findings

F1. Great care and professionalism is taken by the Election Office staff in the handling and opening of ballot envelopes.

F2. Election Office staff proved to be highly knowledgeable of the ballot counting and election process.

F3. The Election Office performs the task of ballot counting accurately, with many redundancies to ensure that each ballot is counted exactly once.

F4. The ballots are stored in a locked safe in the County offices when they are not being processed by Election Office Staff.

F5. The Elections Office invites and provides opportunity for any member of the public to view the actual processing of the sorting and processing ballots in the Sierra County offices in Downieville.

F6. A commendation is warranted for the staff of the Sierra County Elections Office for their tireless and diligent work in ensuring the efficient, friendly and public implementation of the State of California mandated election process in this election.

Recommendations

The Sierra County Grand Jury Recommends that:

R1. The Head of the Elections Office pursue and strive to implement, within the appropriate State Election practices and budget constraints, the opportunity for any member of the public to view the actual process of sorting and processing ballots via existing teleconferencing services in the Downieville Board of Supervisors room without unwelcome travel expense and mountain pass safety issues.

Required Responses

The following responses are required, pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05:

-Regarding Recommendation R1, the County-Clerk Recorder shall respond in writing to the presiding judge of the superior court within (60) days of the release of this report.

SIERRA COUNTY

Clerk-Recorder
P.O. Drawer D
Downieville, California 95936
Telephone (530) 289-3295
Fax (530) 289-2830



Heather Foster
Clerk-Recorder

April 13, 2026

Honorable Jason LaChance, Assistant Presiding Judge
Sierra County Superior Court
PO Box 476
Downieville, CA 95936

Subject: Response to 2025-2026 Grand Jury Report re: Sierra County Elections

Dear Judge LaChance,

Pursuant to Section 933.05 of the Penal Code, please find my response to the 2025-2026 Sierra County Grand Jury Final Report below:

With respect to Recommendation 1 (R1), the Sierra County Elections Department will implement a Microsoft Teams meeting option, beginning with the June 2, 2026 Primary Election, to allow the public to remotely access the Board of Supervisors Chambers and observe the vote-by-mail ballot processing. Access information for the Teams meeting will be posted on the Sierra County Elections webpage at <https://www.sierracounty.ca.gov/804/Upcoming-Elections> and included in the required public notice for the vote-by-mail ballot process.

As the County's Elections Official, I remain committed to ensuring transparency in the election process and maintaining public trust in the fairness, accuracy, and security of all elections conducted in Sierra County. I support providing both remote and in-person opportunities for the public to observe election activities.

I would like to thank the 2025–2026 Grand Jury for their engagement in the election process and for recognizing the efforts of the Sierra County Elections Department.

Respectfully submitted,

Heather Foster
County Clerk-Recorder

cc: Sierra County Board of Supervisors
Sierra County Grand Jury
Andrew Plett, County Counsel

GRAND JURY REPORT

**TO THE PEOPLE OF SIERRA COUNTY,
CALIFORNIA**



**FROM THE 2025-2026
Sierra County Grand Jury
May 20, 2026**

Sierra County Temporary Holding Facility
Board of State and Community Corrections #5440



Summary

After receiving an inspection report from the Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) highlighting maintenance deficiencies in the holding facility at the Downieville Courthouse, the grand jury decided to make an inquiry into that facility. There has been some confusion about the status of the Sierra County Jail and whether it required an inquiry from the Grand Jury. There were also questions about how and where individuals are detained after arrest. After reviewing a series of documents,

obtaining written confirmation on the status of the jail, and holding an interview with staff, the jury learned of the nature of the facility, that it is in compliance and does not require an inquiry from the jury.

Background

Penal Code section 919(b) requires grand juries to inquire into prisons within the county they serve, however, Sierra County has not operated a jail/prison since 2015. The California Attorney General has defined prisons as any local detention facility that holds persons for longer than 24 hours. Therefore, a Sierra County Grand Jury has not had the need to inquire into the facility for inclusion in their report since that time. Holding facilities however, are still subject to state inspection. The grand jury received a copy of a 2025 inspection report sent from the BSCC highlighting a list of deficiencies at the holding facility. After touring the facility and interviewing staff, the jury learned that the deficiencies from the BSCC had been corrected or are being addressed since the letter had been received. The jury was also affirmed that the jail facility is rated as a “Temporary Holding Facility” and learned what the current process was for holding detainees.

METHODOLOGY

Documents

The following, but not limited to the following documents were reviewed by the grand jury:

-Board of State and Community Corrections (BSCC) Jail Inspection Handbook for Grand Jurors

-County of Sierra-County of Nevada, Booking and Jail Services, Agreement , 2025

-County of Sierra-County of Plumas, Booking and Jail Services, Agreement, 2015

-Sierra County Sheriff's Office, County Court Bailiff Protocol, 2026

Interviews

This investigation required visiting the sheriff's office in Downieville for an interview with Sierra County Sheriff Office staff.

Discussion

After finding that an inspection of the facility was not required, the jury still decided to do their due diligence and tour the jail facility and inquire into the BSCC's findings.

Upon meeting with staff, the jury learned that the maintenance deficiencies in question had all been fixed, for the exception of one item, which was scheduled to be repaired in mid-April.

The jury learned that there are no local detention facilities that hold inmates 24 hours or more within Sierra County. The jail in Downieville acts only as a temporary holding facility for detained individuals awaiting their appearance in front of the court. In inquiring where detainees are housed, the jury learned that Sierra County has made an agreement with Nevada and Plumas counties to provide jail and prison services. The cost and staffing requirements of operating a detention facility that houses persons for more than 24 hours is beyond Sierra County Budget considerations.

Findings

F1. Because of the estimated cost of \$1 million dollars to bring the jail up to the current standards set forth in California, the jail will likely not be reopened in the future.

F2. The Sierra County's Sheriff's "Temporary Holding Facilities" management plan ensures proper training and the efficient and safe arrival and departure of criminal offenders for Court appearances.

F3. Sierra County achieves significant fiscal savings by opting not to operate its own jail facility, and contracting this need with other counties.

F4. The Sierra County Sheriff's Office operates a well-organized, staffed and well-equipped law enforcement facility that includes updated technology and communications equipment.

Recommendations

The Sierra County Grand Jury Recommends:

R1. The Sierra County Sheriff's Office and the Sierra County Board of Supervisors deserve commendation for establishing the "Agreement for Booking and Jail Services between Nevada County and Sierra County" that serves the best interests of the county.

R2. The Sierra County Sheriff's Office deserves commendation for operating a successful law enforcement department that protects and benefits all of Sierra County.

Required Responses

The following responses are required, pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05:

-Regarding Recommendation R2, the Board of Supervisors shall respond in writing to the presiding judge of the superior court within (90) days of the release of this report.

GRAND JURY REPORT

**TO THE PEOPLE OF SIERRA COUNTY,
CALIFORNIA**



**FROM THE 2025-2026
Sierra County Grand Jury
May 20, 2026**

City of Loyalton Water Emergency



DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION ITEMS

1. After a brief discussion It was moved by B. Mertton, seconded by S. McIlravy to reaffirm our State of Emergency Water Distribution System. Motion carried. (This item will be added to the next agenda)

Summary

The Sierra County Grand Jury's decision to conduct an investigation into the operations of the City of Loyalton was prompted by local media coverage of water infrastructure issues and a prior Grand Jury's report. During our investigation, we found that the city operates on a very small budget and faces many challenges due to those budgetary constraints. While the council members are paid a small monthly stipend, operation of the city requires the council members to volunteer their time to take on various city functions.

We also found that the city's water supply issues have been ongoing for several years. After the formation of an Ad-Hoc committee, the city was able to receive professional assistance from one of the members to write and receive a grant to fund a major project. The city also successfully passed

Proposition 218, which added an infrastructure fee on the property taxes of users connected to the City Water system. Failures in the water system have negatively impacted residents with emergency water shortages, boil notices, and school and office closures. The potential for larger failures exist if repairs are not made in the immediate future.

Background

Part of a grand jury's responsibility is to follow up on the recommendations made in reports by previous grand juries. In the 2018/19 report, the jury recommended that the City of Loyalton take the necessary steps to disincorporate the city, or if disincorporation did not take place, that the citizens of the city initiate the disincorporation of the city by petition. We investigated the city's prior response and the topic of disincorporation.

In reviewing the operations of the city, the jury found that for several years the water infrastructure has plagued the city with ongoing issues. The issues with Loyalton's aging water infrastructure are well known within the county and city. While the grand jury did not receive any verbal or written complaints regarding the infrastructure, we found that the potential impacts of a failed water system would detrimentally affect the town, its residents and operations of the county, including schools and government departments, as well as the health care district.

METHODOLOGY

Documents

The following, but not limited to the following documents were reviewed by the grand jury:

-City of Loyalton Profit and Loss Statement, Fiscal Year 2024-2025

-City of Loyalton, Regular and Special Meeting Minutes, 2019-2026

-City of Loyalton, Personnel Policy

-City of Loyalton, Administrative Policy

-City of Loyalton, Proposition 218 Notice of Public Hearing

-City of Loyalton-Sierra County Fire Protection Agreement, 2019

-City of Loyalton-County of Sierra, Memorandum of Understanding, Law Enforcement Agreement 2009

-DOWL Engineering Loyalton Water System Improvements Proposal, September 5, 2023

Interviews

During this investigation, the grand jury interviewed a number of people, including members of the city council, City of Loyalton staff, and members of the public and contractors who have worked directly with the city.

Discussion

City Overview

The City of Loyalton is a small rural city located in eastern Sierra County with a population of 740 residents, per the 2020 Census. This population represents roughly a quarter of the Sierra County population. Settled in the 1850's, the town was eventually incorporated in 1901 and remains Sierra County's only incorporated city.

The city is governed by an elected city council with a mayor that is elected by the council. The city employs 2 part time employees, the City Clerk and Bookkeeper, 2 full time employees who serve the water and sewer systems, and general maintenance issues, and 1 seasonal employee, who services streets and general maintenance issues. While remaining an independent department of the city, the all-

volunteer fire department is partially funded by the city, with a majority of funding coming from tax revenue, special agreements with the Sierra Valley Fire Protection District and wildfire service contracts.

Though Loyalton runs with a Council–Manager style of government, no city manager is currently employed, nor any director of public works. The city’s operations are managed by the council, with each council member taking on responsibilities to oversee one or more of the city’s departments. With a monthly stipend of \$150 each, this makes running these departments largely a volunteer position.

The city’s budget floats just over \$1 million dollars a year, compared to the \$67 million that Sierra County uses to operate. There are few revenue sources that the city can tap into with such a small population.

Because of this, the city relies on grants or low interest loans to obtain funding for improvements throughout the city. The city’s small budget does not allow for the addition of key staff, nor does it allow for competitive compensation and benefits that similar positions in the county and surrounding area afford. Full time employees are not offered health benefits, PERS retirement or paid time off.

Residents

The population has been in a slow decline since the last census. Interest in potential candidates for running for city council has waned with most seats going unchallenged in elections. In the past, the council has struggled to gain quorum and did not have the ability to legally conduct business. With 2 council seats up for re-election, the city once again faces the same issue.

Website

In working to obtain information and to simply conduct a review, the jury found that no designated phone or email is identified to log any complaints. There is no information about the building permits process or how to apply for one. There is also no information on which council member oversees which department.

Council meeting notes are mostly present and even date back years, but can often take a month to be

posted. Information about the Ad Hoc Water Committee appears to be out of date, with no information posted since 2023.

Agreements

The City has a current agreement with Sierra County Fire Protection District #1 to provide fire suppression, prevention and medical services to adjacent, unincorporated areas of Sierra County. The City's fire department receives 85% of the yearly tax revenue from the areas covered in this district. In addition to this agreement, the city has contracted with the Sierra County's Sheriff's Office to provide law enforcement for the city. As a city, Loyalton is eligible to receive state funding for use with law enforcement services. These services are paid for with this funding, which is approximately \$100,000 a year. To remain eligible for the state funding, Loyalton contributes 5% of its general funds to the agreement.

Many within the city state that their relationship with officials in the county has been strained. Though the county works with the city in many areas, Loyalton suffers from past costly management decisions that have negatively affected desirable interagency partnerships.

Water

In 2017, the City of Loyalton hired Far West Engineering to provide consultation on water and sewer issues. In 2022 Far West merged with DOWL engineering and continued its relationship with the city as its consultation for engineering. In 2023, a report containing a plan of action was made regarding the city's water infrastructure. The report detailed that the age of the pipes ranged from 30 to 85 years old, with much of the steel pipe failing, and having large leaks that were losing 100,000 gallons a day. With an estimated total replacement cost of \$44 million dollars, DOWL presented 2 options to slowly tackle some of the bigger repairs

In October 2023, the city received a \$2 million grant through a Federal Appropriations bill with the help of Congressperson Kevin Kiley.

The projects that Rep. Kiley secured in the FY24 Interior, Environment, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill include:

City of Loyalton Water Infrastructure Project: This request would allocate \$2,000,000 to the City of Loyalton to replace the deteriorating main water line and would ensure access to safe drinking water, as well as enable the fire department to better fight fires.

To unlock the funding, the city was required to work with the United States EPA. The process of dealing with the EPA is riddled with delays, confusion and a lack of communication on the federal government's part. By October of 2025, repairs were finally approved by the council, despite not having money awarded to the city from the grant. The council agreed to pay for work invoices using Prop. 218 or Cal Trust money, and would continue to pursue unlocking the grant money. Work was started on option #2 of DOWL's report. Approximately 800 feet of main line pipe was replaced, stopping the 100,000 gallon a day leak.

After the grant money is unlocked and awarded, the city still has approximately \$1.5 million left for further repairs, but continues to seek additional funding to pay for some of the next phases. At the time of the report, the city has not yet been awarded the money and reimbursed for repair invoices. The city council reaffirms their "State of Emergency" for the water infrastructure to remain eligible for current and future external sources of funding.

Impacts to City Residents

The biggest impact that a failing water system has is to the 406 water users that the city serves. Besides the residents and businesses that make up these users, the Sierra-Plumas Joint school District has 369 students that attend school inside the City of Loyalton, along with the District Office. The number represents an astonishing 89% of students in the school district. Sierra County occupies many offices in Loyalton as well, including Health and Human Services, Probation Office, Behavioral Health Advisory Board, Office of Education, and Social Services. In addition to these offices, Eastern Plumas Health Care maintains the Loyalton Medical Clinic, the ALS Ambulance station, and the Skilled Nursing Care Facility that houses 35 patients.

These services that are provided in Loyalton are vital to the health, safety and well-being of the residents of Sierra and adjacent Plumas Counties. The threat of an unstable water supply threatens the daily and long-term operations of these facilities. Among these threats are the loss of water for drinking, sanitary waste disposal, fire suppression and sprinkler systems. Without water, businesses and schools are forced to close. The skilled nursing facility in town must consider the immediate relocation of all patients.

Minor leaks can result in muddy spots that can weaken roads and sidewalks. Major leaks can result in increased water production costs, loss of water pressure and inadequate supply for fire suppression. Water main failures can result in dangerous water flows that can flood homes and create large sinkholes in roads and other areas. Of course, these issues could cause significant financial and governmental impacts to Loyalton's and Sierra County government operations and services.

Disincorporation

After the 2018/2019 Grand Jury released its report and recommended disincorporation, the City Council responded stating that the council would hold town hall meetings to discuss that possibility. The reviewing of notes showed that this topic was openly discussed during regular and special meetings. The council also noted that disincorporation is a complicated process, pointing out the need to meet with the county, hold a special election, meet with LAFCO, form a water and sewer district, and consider the pensions of previous employees. It is noted that after consulting our own legal counsel, that the price of disincorporation could reach 1 million dollars and can take a year or more to complete.

Disincorporation would also mean that the City of Loyalton would lose its ability to obtain and remain eligible for grants, including the current grant that the city is utilizing for water infrastructure projects. It would also lose eligibility for law enforcement funding, meaning the county would lose out on roughly \$100,000 of revenue a year.

Findings

F1. Disincorporation of the City of Loyalton is not currently financially viable or wanted by the council and would also interrupt the work that the council is currently doing to work on issues.

F2. Failure of water systems would require many Sierra County offices, two Eastern-Plumas Health Care facilities, the Sierra-Plumas Joint Unified School District Office, four public schools and the Sierra County Office of Education to severely alter or cease their operations in the city.

F3. Loyalton's council deserves commendation for the extensive, unpaid service to the community.

F4. A lack of professional public works leadership, spanning for years, did not regularly budget for and implement ongoing maintenance to water supply infrastructure sufficiently, leading to the issues that face the system today.

F5. Mis-steps and a lack of positive interactions by some past government boards have damaged the logical cooperative government relationships between the City of Loyalton and Sierra County Governments.

F6. Loyalton's small budget and operations carry a heavy burden of providing essential water and sewer services for 90% of school district students, the Plumas-Sierra Joint Unified School District, 10 County Government Offices, 2 medical facilities.

F7. The city's website has had incorrect information and has lacked important information that would be helpful for residents to easily look up.

Recommendations

The Sierra County Grand Jury Recommends that:

R1. The City of Loyalton develops a regular schedule of website maintenance that includes reviewing all of the pages for outdated, missing and pertinent information by the end of December 2026.

R2. The City of Loyalton includes on the website the information for which council members oversee which specified committees, and city departments by the end of October 2026.

R3. The City of Loyalton includes on the website, information on the process and application of a building permit by the end of October 2026.

R4. The City of Loyalton researches and looks into the feasibility of developing a mutual-aid agreement with other water districts, and/or the county in obtaining resources, such as tools, repair materials, or knowledge needed at times of great emergency to water infrastructure by the end of October 2026.

Required Responses

The following responses are required, pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05:

-Regarding Recommendation R1 thru R4, the Loyalton City Council shall respond in writing to the presiding judge of the superior court within (90) days of the release of this report.

GRAND JURY REPORT

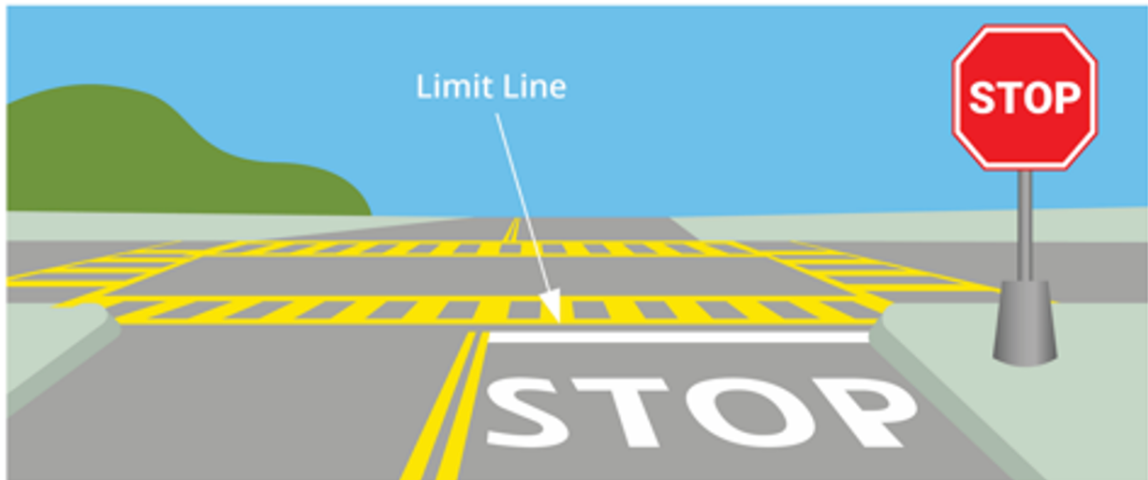
**TO THE PEOPLE OF SIERRA COUNTY,
CALIFORNIA**



**FROM THE 2025-2026
Sierra County Grand Jury
May 20, 2026**

Sierra County Roads

Stop Lines (Limit Lines)



Stop lines, or limit lines, indicate the point where drivers must stop before a crosswalk or intersection.

Summary

In the recent year, Sierra County has lost a number of long-term veteran road department staff to retirement, reduction of work force and various other reasons. As a result, some in the communities have noticed and felt that there has been a decline in the status of roads in Sierra County. Among that sentiment, there has also been confusion on which government entities are responsible for which roads and where the funding sources are coming from. Given these concerns, the Grand Jury conducted an investigation into the road services provided to Sierra County, including the City of Loyalton. During this investigation, the jury learned about the sources of funding, and what they could be used for, and deficiencies in staffing in both the county and the City of Loyalton.

Background

The building and maintenance of roads is a vital focus of counties and local municipalities. The maintenance of these roads is essential for promoting public safety, preventing erosion and supporting local transportation infrastructure. Roads in a rural setting are more difficult to maintain since there are fewer taxpayers to support the infrastructure and generally face a higher cost per mile than their urban counterparts. Roads, especially in the mountain climate, face months of enduring freeze-thaw cycles and the wearing and damage from snow plow blades. In addition to the regular maintenance of roads, snow plowing services are essential for providing safe travel for residents and emergency services during and after winter storms.

METHODOLOGY

Documents

The following, but not limited to the following documents were reviewed by the grand jury *2024 Regional Transportation Improvement Plan - Sierra County Transportation Commission*

City of Loyalton, Regular and Special Meeting Minutes, 2019-2026

Sierra County, Regular Meeting Minutes, 2024-2025

Sierra County Transportation Commission, Regular Meeting Minutes, 2024-2025

Sierra County, Regional Transportation Plan, 2020

Interviews

During this investigation, the grand jury interviewed a number of people, including Sierra County elected officials, County Staff, Loyalton City council, City of Loyalton staff, and members of the public.

Discussion

Sierra County



The Sierra County Road Department is responsible for the maintenance of approximately 393 miles of roads, of which only 100 miles of the roads are paved. This maintenance includes everything from repairs, paving, grading, painting and snow removal.

Sierra County has a total Budget of \$67 million with county road funding including three sources, HR2389 - The Secure Rural Schools and Community Self Determination Act of 2000, Highway Users Taxes, including the new California Gas Tax; and Federal/State Exchange Funding. In order to receive the gas tax funding, the county must contribute a small amount to the roads fund, which in 2025, the amount was \$9,163. Most transportation funds come with stipulations: funds cannot be shifted in between categories, can only be used for approved purposes, and some unused funds might be subject to return.

Any complaints about Sierra County roads are directed to the Department Head. The county operates an extensive maintenance program for its fleet of equipment which now includes painting and striping equipment.

Most, if not all residential streets within Sierra County are due for resurfacing, with some requiring a reconstruction. In addition, “STOP” and limit lines have not been painted for some time.



Calpine/Hwy 89

Over the past few years, many employees in the road department left the county. Many of these positions remained unfilled with most reasons pointed towards the lack of available housing. In addition, some of these positions have been reduced from their historic levels. The Sierra County Road Department has two road crew groups: one stationed in western Sierra County and one eastern Sierra County. Sierra County Road employees receive health and retirement benefits in their compensation package.

Loyalton



The City of Loyalton is responsible for the maintenance of all of its city streets inside the city limits, with the exception of Highway 49 that runs through the center of town. The total budget for the town is \$1.2 million, with roads receiving a budget nearing \$33,000. There is only 1 part time seasonal employee employed in Loyalton, who works on the maintenance of streets. Loyalton employees do not receive health or retirement (PERS) benefits as part of their compensation package.

Most, if not all streets within Loyalton require a resurfacing. Some require a complete reconstruction because of the size of potholes or a deteriorating chip seal done in years past. In addition, "STOP" and limit lines have not been painted for some time.



Loyalton Taylor/Hwy 49



Loyalton – Church/Fourth

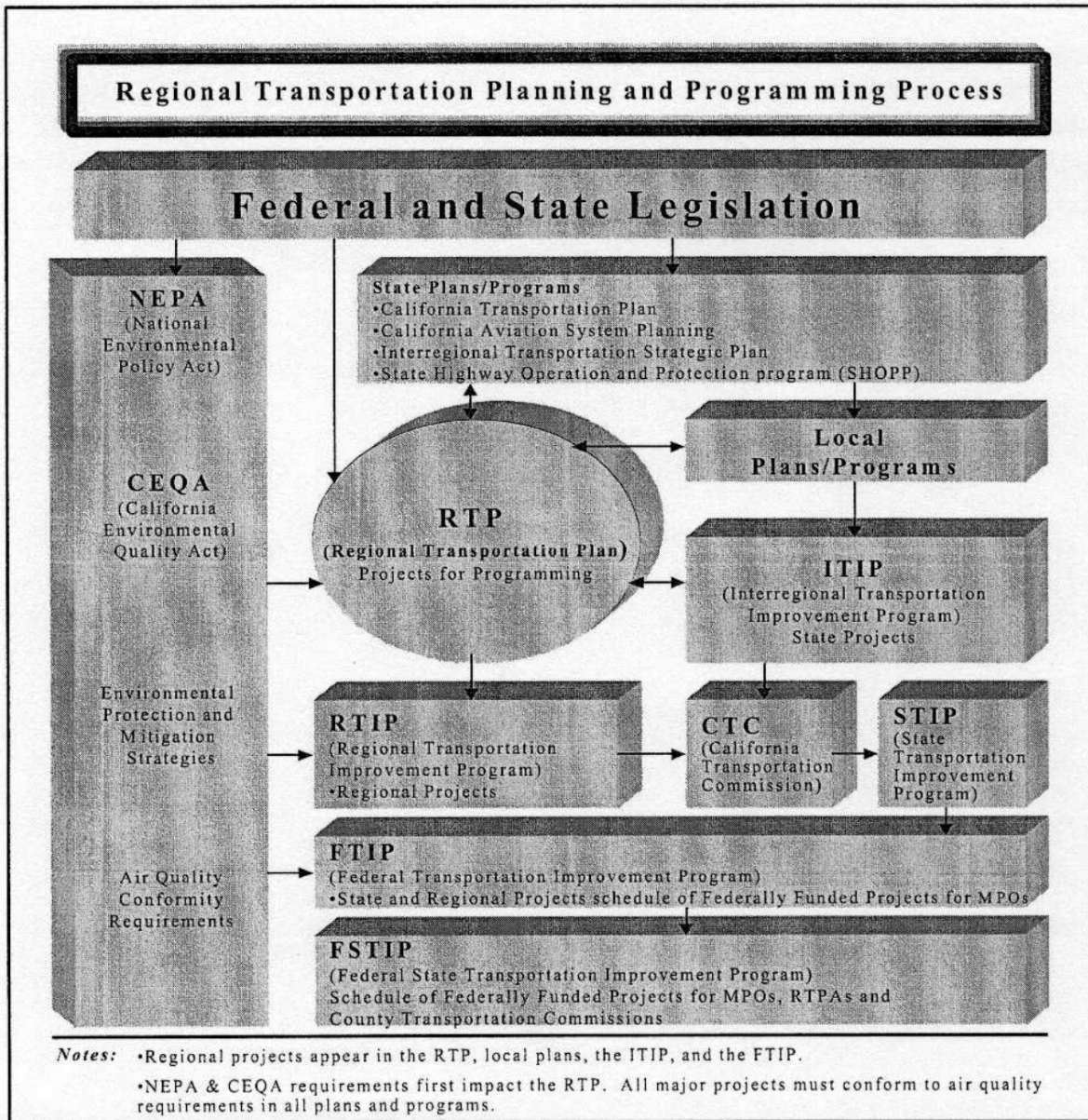


Loyalton First/Lewis

Sierra County Transportation Commission.

Regional Transportation Planning and Programming Flow Chart

The Regional Transportation Planning and Programming Process is a complex, cooperative process that includes all levels of Government with the opportunity for input from all stakeholders at each level. The following diagram shows the flow of legislation from planning to project development. Following the diagram is a glossary providing a narrative of the diagram components.



The county transportation commission exists to manage state and federal transportation funds for the county. This is a separate governing body within the county whose members are appointed by the Board of Supervisors or the City of Loyalton.

The Sierra County Transportation Commission adopts the "Sierra County Regional Transportation Plan" that includes five road classifications in their plan.

Road Classification

Figure 2 depicts the county's main roadway system, along with their functional classification as per the Sierra County General Plan. The following provides the definition of each functional classification in the county.

- **Arterials** constitute routes of interregional significance whose design provides for relatively high overall travel speeds, with minimum interference to through movement. These routes provide for travel in to, out of, and through the county. In Sierra County, the major arterials consist of I-80, US 395, SR 49, and SR 89
- **Collectors** are paved, year-round roadways providing connections between major regional destinations or arterials. An example is Westside Road.
- **Resource** collectors are paved or unpaved roadways with the primary purpose of providing access to recreation uses and mining and forest product sites. These roads can be seasonal or year-round. Residential areas should not have direct access to these roads. Gold Lake Road is an example of a resource collector.
- **Unpaved local collectors** are unpaved roads providing connectors within sub-areas of the county. Unpaved status is desired to limit regional use and growth inducement due to cost concerns, or to limit vehicle speed. Examples are Henness Pass Road (unpaved sections), Smithneck Road, Lavezzola Road, and Mountain House Road.
- **Local** roads are paved, gravel, or dirt roads providing access to residential areas. The roads can be either seasonal or year-round. The *City of Loyalton General Plan* designates two types of street designs:
 - The traditional local street includes two twelve-foot wide traffic lanes, with parking, curb, gutter and sidewalk areas in addition to the traffic lanes within a sixty-foot wide right-of-way.

None of the roads in the City of Loyalton qualify for funding by the Sierra County Transportation Commission. Table 20 of a recent SCTC plan includes the following assessment "The majority of the City of Loyalton's roads need repair." and the plan also states the following:

Roadway Transportation Needs and Issues

The review of state highway and local roadway transportation conditions combined with stakeholder input indicates the following:

- The City of Loyalton streets need repair – Pavement conditions on local roadways was the second most concerning issue for RTP survey respondents. Practically every street in the City of Loyalton needs to be re-slurried.

- **Financially Unconstrained STIP Improvement Projects** (Table 16) – This table lists Sierra County’s wish list of improvements if additional funding sources become available. Most of these projects are needed roadway rehabilitation or pavement overlay projects. As can be seen roughly \$97 million worth of roadway improvements are unfunded in Sierra County.

Findings

F1. Because confusion exists where the three separate road jurisdictions operate, members of the community have been unable to properly communicate road complaints and reporting of safety concerns.

F2. Since the painting of “STOP” and limit lines, and the replacement of faded “STOP” and other signs have been neglected for several years, valid safety concerns exist on road intersections in both Sierra County and the City of Loyalton.

F3. The departure of experienced road maintenance staff has left gaps in the service provided to residents in Sierra County, especially snow removal, road surface painting and ongoing regular residential road resurfacing.

F4. The roads budget within the City of Loyalton is extremely small, and not adequate for the extensive repairs that the city’s streets need.

Recommendations

The Sierra County Grand Jury Recommends that:

R1. The Sierra County Director of Public Works and The City of Loyalton develop and deploy a user friendly, effective citizen complaint policy that includes jurisdictional awareness, cross agency cooperation and public transparency of the process and results by the end of September 2026.

R2. The Sierra County Director of Public Works shall adopt and enact formal snow removal training for snow removal equipment operators to enhance its services for the safety of its residents in residential and rural areas to include preplanned piling practices, minimizing unnecessary driveway berms and service scheduling to maximize residential road emergency access by the end of September 2026.

R3. Sierra County and City of Loyalton develop and implement a plan to address the maintenance of neglected road intersection safety “STOP” and other markings, that include painted striping and above road signage by the end of December 2026.

R4. The Sierra County Board of Supervisors and the City of Loyalton work collaboratively to formalize that road safety issues receive the highest priority above and before optional projects and expansions.

R5. The Sierra County Director of Public Works develop a map to display to the public that clearly shows which roads are county roads, state highways and private roads to improve public communication about road responsibility by the end of November 2026.

R6. The Sierra County Director of Public Works shall develop a written document that explains how road maintenance is prioritized, to help residents understand why some roads are fixed before others by the end of 2026.

Required Responses

The following responses are required, pursuant to Penal Code sections 933 and 933.05:

-Regarding Recommendation R1 and R3, the Board of Supervisors and The City of Loyalton shall respond in writing to the presiding judge of the superior court within (90) days of the release of this report.

-Regarding Recommendation R2, the Board of Supervisors shall respond in writing to the presiding judge of the superior court within (90) days of the release of this report.

Invited Responses.

-Regarding Recommendation R1, R5 and R6, the Sierra County Director of Public Works is invited to respond in writing to the presiding judge of the superior court within (60) days of the release of this report.

SIERRA COUNTY GRAND JURY

2025-26

Candy Corcoran – Loyalton

Charisse Erickson- [REDACTED] – Sierraville

Joshua Geiszler – Loyalton

Jennifer Hollis – Loyalton

Partrick Manning – Downieville

John Mitchell – Calpine Foreperson

Laura Lee Sexton – Loyalton

Kortney Stringer – Sierra City*

Michael Taylor – Downieville*

Caleb Walker – Calpine

Scott Whittier – Loyalton*

(* did not finish term)

Mailing Address:

Sierra County Grand Jury

PO Drawer C

Downieville, CA 95936

Sierra County Grand Jury 2025-26 Public Information Presentation

The Sierra County Grand Jury consists of 11 members. Action is taken by a vote of 8 or more jurors. Unlike a trial jury, no unanimous votes are recorded and individual members votes are entirely confidential. The Foreman is charged to verify that 8 or more Jurors voted in favor.

Every Grand Juror is sworn to absolute secrecy about the actions and discussions of the Grand Jury. However this presentation is in response to the following instruction to the Grand Jury.

“There is an apparent lack of knowledge by the citizens as to Grand Jury functions and organization. Requests to the Grand Jury to provide speakers at local clubs, citizen groups or schools should be encouraged and honored. However, any talks should be limited to Grand Jury functions, organization, and procedures, and any comments about work done should be restricted to those reports that have already been made public.”

GRAND JUROR’S OATH

Penal Code Section 911

“I will support the Constitution of the United States and the State of California, and all laws made in pursuance thereof and in conformity therewith, will diligently inquire into, and true presentment make, of all public offenses against the people of this State, committed or triable within this county, of which the Grand Jury shall have or can obtain legal evidence. I will keep my own counsel, and that of my fellow grand jurors and of the government, and will not, except when required in the due course of judicial proceeding or authorized by statute, disclose the manner in which I or any other grand juror may have said, nor the manner in which I or any other grand juror may have voted on any matter before the Grand Jury. I will present no person through malice, hatred, or ill will, nor leave any unrepresented though fear, favor, or affection, or for any reward, or the promise or hope thereof: but in any my presentments I will present the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, according to the best of my skill and understanding.”

Sierra County Grand Jury 2025-26 Public Information Presentation

As constituted today, the Grand Jury is part of the judicial branch of government – “an arm of the court”. It does not have the functions of either the legislative or administrative branches and it is not a police agency. It is an inquisitional and an investigative body and is part of the machinery of government whose object is the detection and correction of flaws in government and the detection of crime among its citizens. The primary function of the Grand Jury, and the most important reason for its existence, is the examination of all aspects of county and municipal governments and special districts, seeing that monies are handled judiciously and that all accounts are properly audited and in general, assuring honest, efficient government in the best interests of the people.

The Grand Jury has three ways to exercise its powers:

1. Reports: Written communications of unsatisfactory conditions with recommendations for improvement, where no crime is charged.
2. Indictments: Formal written complaints charging a person with a crime. (Criminal Grand Jury only - not a Civil Grand Jury function)
3. Accusations: Similar to indictments except that conviction would result in removal from office rather than criminal penalties.

“The Grand Jury has no power of enforcement and serves as a recommending agent only.”

“...the role of the Grand Jury is changing, not necessarily in absolute priority, but in the amounts of time available to it to dedicate to its review of the various County offices and processes of local government, commonly called its “watchdog” role.”

Sierra County Superior Court – Grand Jury Information

<https://www.sierra.courts.ca.gov/general-information/grand-jury>

Sierra County Superior Court Grand Jury Questionnaire

<https://www.sierra.courts.ca.gov/system/files/forms-and-filings/gj-questionnaire-2025.pdf>

California Grand Jury Association Website

<https://cgja.org/>

CIVIL DUTIES AND POWERS OF THE GRAND JURY

The Grand Jury civil powers are as follows:

1. To investigate the operations and functions of local government including the county and any incorporated cities or special districts within the county to be assured that they are being administered efficiently, honestly, and in the best interest of its citizens. Reports may be issued during the year and do not necessarily have to wait until the final report.
2. To issue a final report on the needs and operations of county departments as stated by law
3. To audit books, records and accounts of all county offices: to contact for an auditor to conduct such audits. Each new Grand Jury should reaffirm the contact auditor or let the new contact as early as possible in its term.
4. The Grand Jury may at any time examine the books and records of any incorporated city or joint powers agency located in the county, which pertain to fiscal matters. In addition to any other investigatory powers granted by this chapter, the Grand Jury may investigate and report upon the fiscal matters of any such city or joint powers agency and make such recommendations as it may deem proper and fit. Note: (Penal Code 925 provides "shall not duplicate any examination of financial statements which has been performed by or for the board of supervisors pursuant to Section 25250 of the Government Code")
5. To examine the books and records of any special-purpose assessing or taxing district located wholly or partly in the county and to investigate and report on the method and system of performing the duties of such district.
6. To report and make recommendations on its own audit of court records and accounts: to report on county officials' records and accounts as ex officio officers of any district.
7. To order the District Attorney to sue for money which the jury feels is due and owing to the county after an examination of the county's books and accounts indicates that it is appropriate to do so.
8. When requested by the Board of Supervisors shall investigate and report upon the needs for increase and decrease in salaries of the county-elected officials. A copy of such report shall be transmitted to the Board of Supervisors.
9. To study the report of the previous Grand Jury and review the recommendations of recent Grand Juries for improvements in county government.
10. To act as an ombudsman, receiving all letters from citizens or agencies and making inquiries and/or recommendations as to those matters referred to the jury. All correspondence addressed to the jury should be answered as expeditiously as possible.

Sierra County Grand Jury 2025-26 Public Information Presentation

11. To inquire into the case of every person imprisoned in the jail of the county on the criminal charge and not indicted.
12. To inquire into the conditions and management of the detention facilities within the county.
13. To investigate and inquire into all sales and transfers of land, and into the ownership of land which under the state laws might escheat to the state.

“The Grand Jury represents the public. Therefore, it is each juror’s duty to think at all times, not in terms of. His own or any particular group interest, or in terms of any personalities, but always in terms of the whole public interest.”

“Grand Jurors should strive not to be influenced by sentiment, conjecture, sympathy, public feeling, passion or prejudice, but they should seek to apply the same objective standard of conduct and responsibility to all persons regardless of race, color, creed, or economic status.”

FOREMAN

“One of the persons summoned to serve as Grand Jurors must be appointed Forman by the Court.” (The judge appoints the foreman, this is not an elected position or a requested assignment.)

The following are the usual, routine duties of the Foreman:

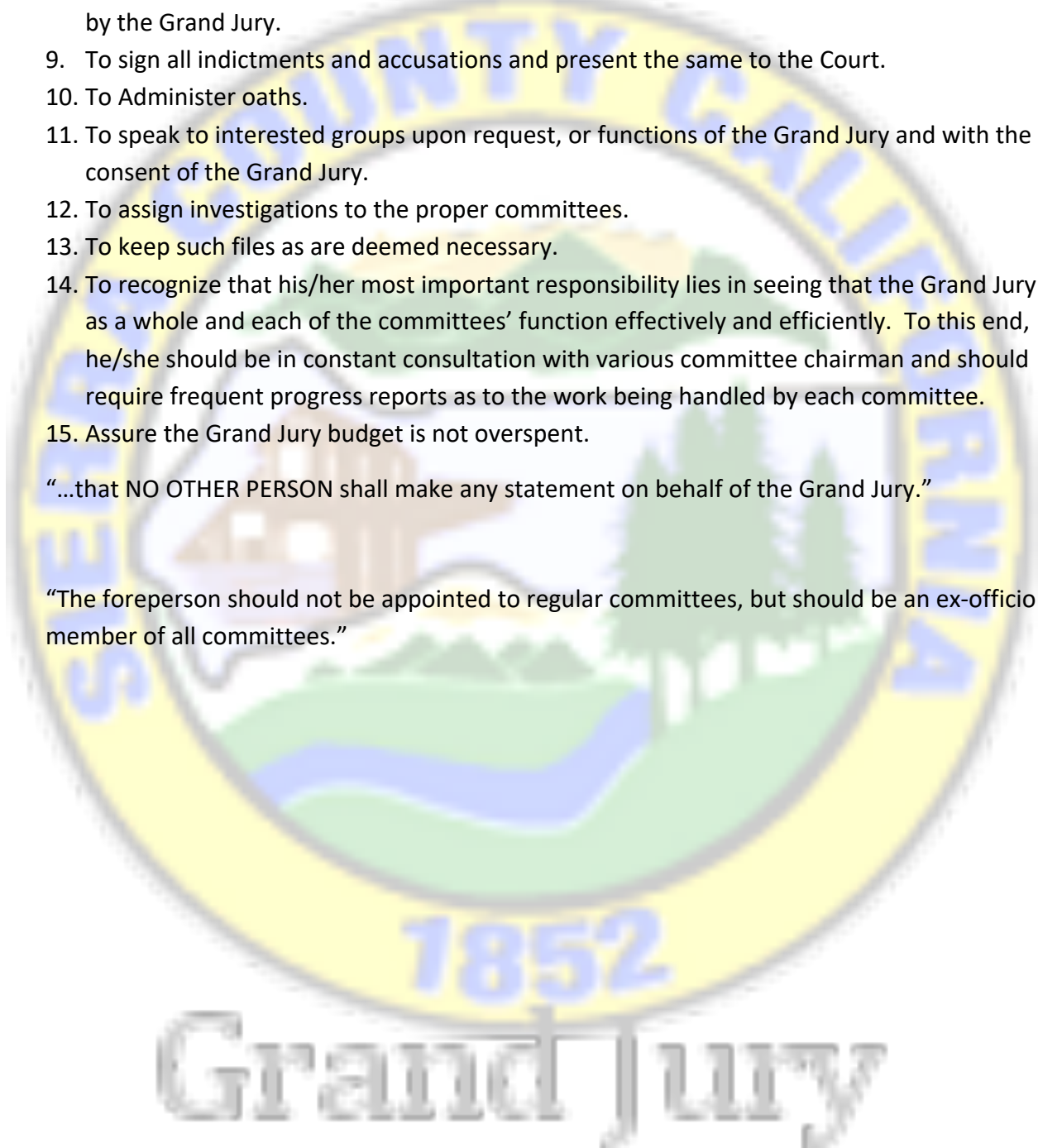
1. To preside at meetings of the Grand Jury as efficiently and effectively as possible so the jury can accomplish its’ work.
2. To consult with the Presiding Judge of the Superior Court when it is considered desirable, and at the discretion of the Grand Jury, and report back to the Grand Jury; to communicate with the Presiding Judge and to request the presence before the Grand Jury when such presence is desired.
3. Prepare the agenda of such matters as are scheduled to come before the Grand Jury so that business may be transacted in the most expeditious manner.
4. To appoint all standing and special committees as may be ordered by the Grand Jury on the basis of the juror’s interests and abilities and obtains a written summary of committee plans and objectives as soon as possible.
5. Make changes in Committee assignments when deemed advisable.

Sierra County Grand Jury 2025-26 Public Information Presentation

6. To act as ex-officio member of all committees.
7. To be the only official spokesman for the Grand Jury unless otherwise designated but only with the consent of the Grand Jury.
8. To sign the final report of the Grand Jury, as well as any and all official reports rendered by the Grand Jury.
9. To sign all indictments and accusations and present the same to the Court.
10. To Administer oaths.
11. To speak to interested groups upon request, or functions of the Grand Jury and with the consent of the Grand Jury.
12. To assign investigations to the proper committees.
13. To keep such files as are deemed necessary.
14. To recognize that his/her most important responsibility lies in seeing that the Grand Jury as a whole and each of the committees' function effectively and efficiently. To this end, he/she should be in constant consultation with various committee chairman and should require frequent progress reports as to the work being handled by each committee.
15. Assure the Grand Jury budget is not overspent.

"...that NO OTHER PERSON shall make any statement on behalf of the Grand Jury."

"The foreperson should not be appointed to regular committees, but should be an ex-officio member of all committees."



SIERRA COUNTY GRAND JURY NEEDS YOUR INPUT

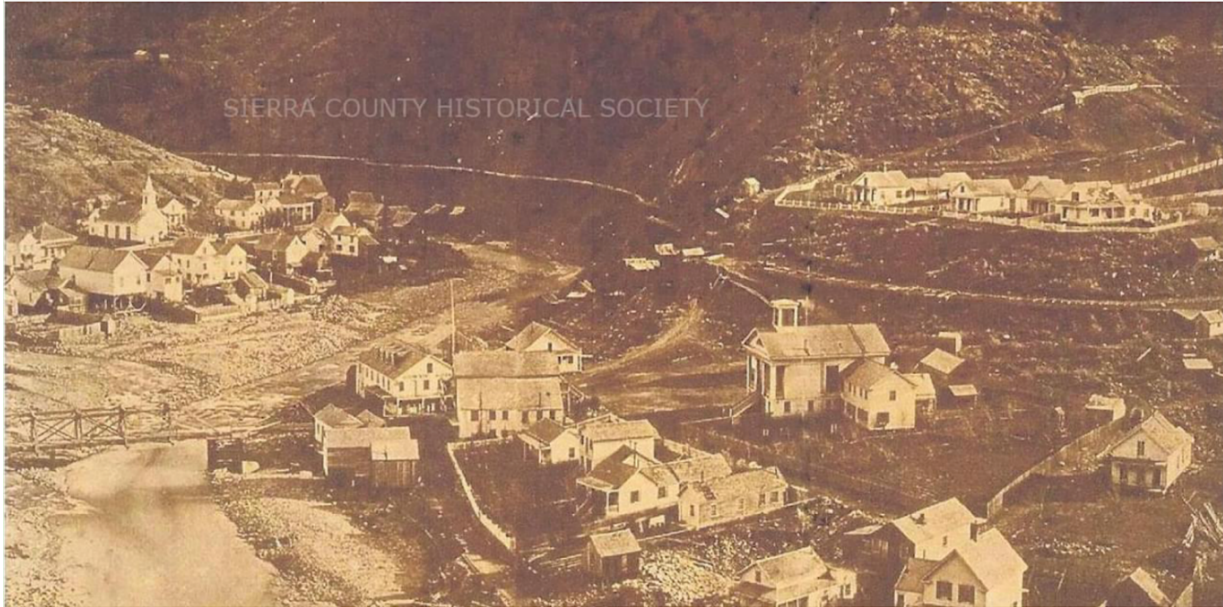
*We welcome your suggestions or
complaints.*

**PLEASE TURN TO THE FORM ON THE BACK OF THIS PAGE
TO MAKE YOUR COMMENTS.**

**MAIL TO: SIERRA COUNTY GRAND JURY
P. O. DRAWER C
DOWNIEVILLE, CA 95936**

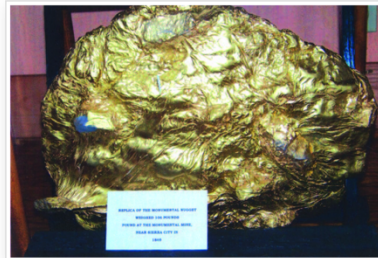
Historic Sierra County

Established in 1852 from parts of Yuba County, Sierra County, California, has a rich history deeply rooted in the California Gold Rush, which brought over 16,000 miners to the area between 1848 and 1860. Known for its rugged, mountainous terrain and the Sierra Valley.



Monumental Nugget

Worth \$7,971,200 @ \$4700 per ounce



— Monumental Nugget

The largest gold nugget ever found in Sierra County, known as the "Monumental", weighed 106 pounds and was discovered on the Sierra Buttes Mine property at approximately the eighth level in 1869. You can see what this monumental chunk of gold looked like when it was brought from the ground when you visit the Kentucky Mine Museum to view the carefully crafted, life size replica now on display. According to Carroll Hayes, whose family purchased the Sierra Buttes Mine in 1904, miners on their way to work at the mine saw a portion of the nugget on the trail after rain had washed away the dirt that had been covering it. They quickly began unearthing the rest of the nugget and couldn't believe their eyes when they saw the "Monumental" chunk of gold. Experience that same sense of awe when you see the incredible "Monumental Nugget"!