California Department of Food and Agriculture

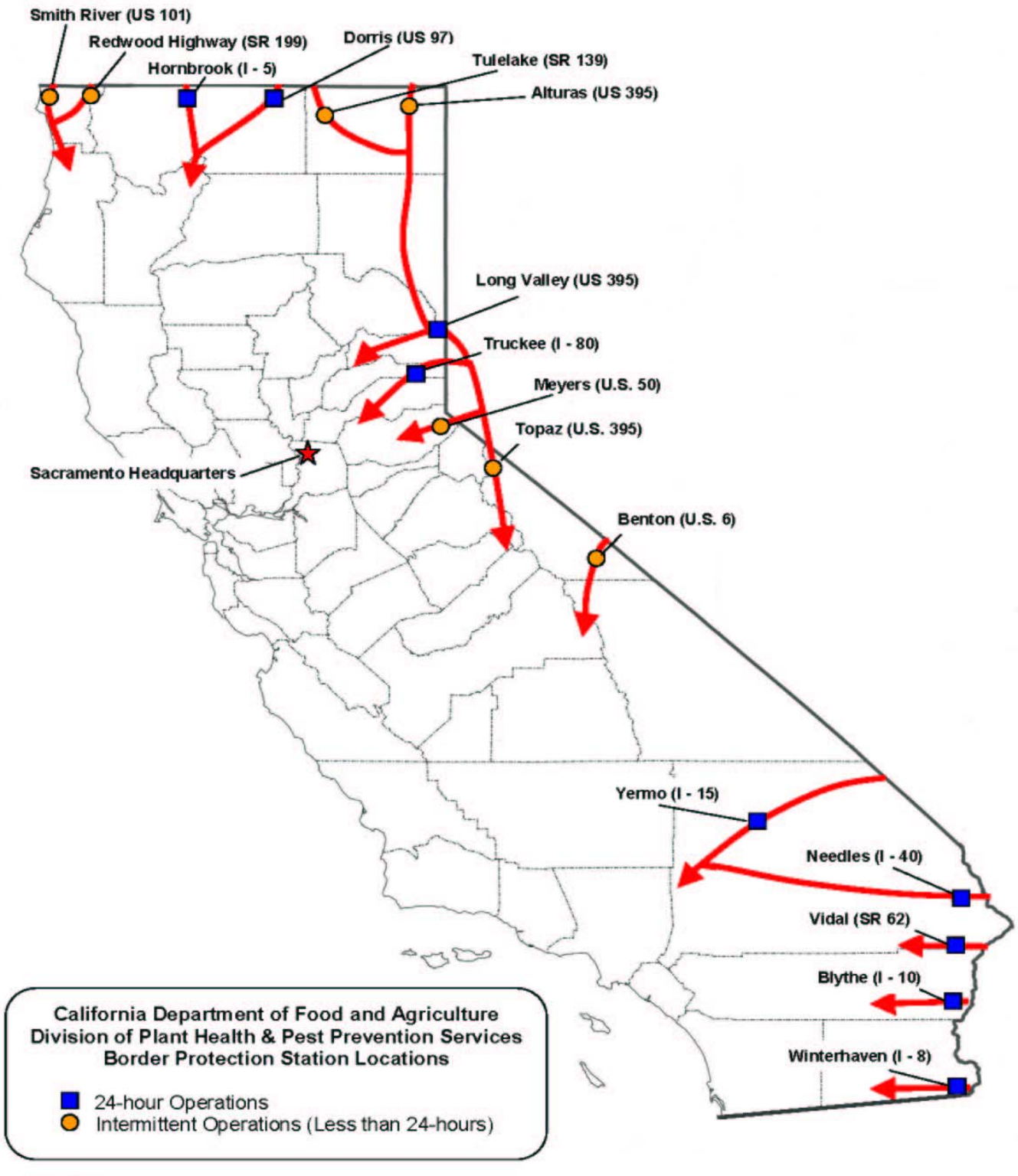
Working for the

Border Protection Stations

The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) operates sixteen border stations on major roads leading into California. Their mission is to prevent the introduction of invasive species. You may have casually observed some of these stations as you traveled about. This is your chance to discover what is actually happening along the border.

Yermo Station, Interstate 15, just east of Barstow

Our stations are located all along California's border with other states, as seen in the map, below.


Smith River (US 101)
Redwood Highway (SR 199)
Hornbrook (I - 5)
Dorris (US 97)
Tulelake (SR 139)
Alturas (US 395)
Long Valley (US 395)
Truckee (I - 80)
Meyers (U.S. 50)
Topaz (U.S. 395)
Sacramento Headquarters
Benton (U.S. 6)
Yermo (I - 15)
Needles (I - 40)
Vidal (SR 62)
Blythe (I - 10)
Winterhaven (I - 8)
California Department of Food and Agriculture
Division of Plant Health & Pest Prevention Services
Border Protection Station Locations
24-hour Operations
Intermittent Operations (Less than 24-hours)

1/19/2005 gwl

Inspecting a truck at Blythe

We inspect commercial shipments for invasive pests and for compliance with plant quarantine regulations.

At Hornbrook

Hay truck at Dorris

Hay may be infested with weeds not known to occur in California

Bee colonies at Truckee

Thousands of shipments of bee colonies enter California each year to pollinate crops. They may be infested with weeds, “small hive beetle”, or “red imported fire ant”, among other hitch-hiking pests.

Sampling mangoes at Blythe, with CDFA Secretary A.G. Kawamura looking on

When inspection turns up harmful pests, the shipper sometimes faces difficult choices. The mangoes below were found to contain Mexican fruit fly larvae and went to the landfill to be buried.

Palo Verde Valley landfill, Blythe

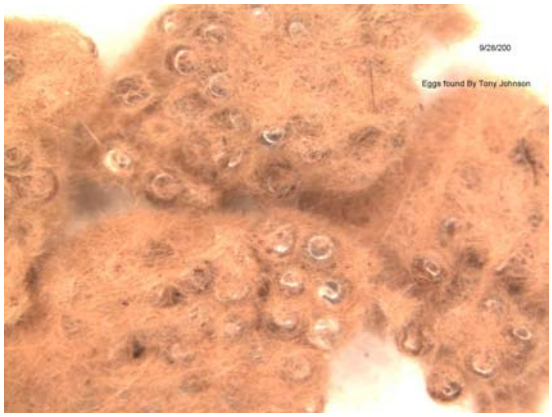
“Trunking” a car at Hornbrook

Private vehicles can bring dangerous commodities, too. The citrus nursery stock below, coming in a private vehicle from Texas, had the potential to severely impact the California citrus industry with diseases or insect pests. The trees were destroyed.

Citrus trees intercepted at Needles

Self-mover at Hornbrook

RV inspection at Blythe



Gypsy moth eggs, found at Needles

Gypsy moth, when its population explodes, is a devastating pest of forests and watersheds in the northeastern United States. It over-winters in the egg stage, the female having laid an orange, cottony mass containing about 600 eggs, in any nook or cranny on any conceivable outdoor article. Thus the need to inspect outdoor furniture on the self-mover, and the underside of the recreational vehicle, above.

At Needles

Boats can, unknown to their owners, be carrying life stages of invasive aquatic species, such as zebra mussel, quagga mussel, or hydrilla. The above boat was coming from an area known to be infested with zebra mussel, a fresh water pest from Europe that came to North America in ballast water that was illegally dumped in one of the Great Lakes by a European freighter.

Adult zebra mussels

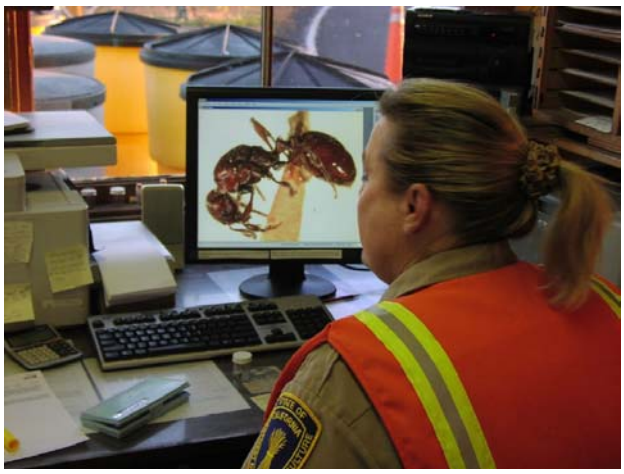
Hydrilla, an aquatic weed, clogs waterways in Florida, disrupting natural ecosystems and making boating impossible

Checking nursery stock at Hornbrook

Limes at Vidal Junction

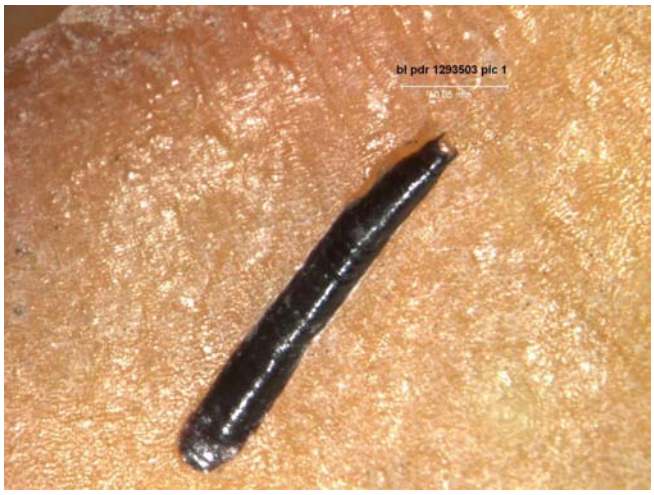
Cutting fruit at Needles

When insects, weeds, or symptoms of disease are found, digital pictures are emailed to the appropriate laboratory in Sacramento where taxonomists identify them, often within a few minutes. Then, depending on the pest, the shipment is released, fumigated, destroyed, returned out of state, and so on.



Taking the picture at Dorris

Red Imported Fire Ant at Vidal



Black thread scale on Mexican mangoes at Blythe. The insect secretes a fluid that hardens over its body, like a shell

Why is this important?

Many non-native, invasive species are capable of seriously disrupting, or even destroying, existing ecosystems. Some examples:

Lymantria dispar (gypsy moth)

The gypsy moth was imported into Massahusetts in the 19th century by people who thought they could start a silk industry. They escaped into the environment and quickly became established all over the northeastern U.S.

The gypsy moth is known to feed on the foliage of hundreds of species of plants in North America but its most common hosts are oak and aspen. Every few years populations explode, and untold numbers of caterpillars totally defoliate thousands of acres of forest land. Residents of the northeast have described lying in bed at night, being kept awake by the sound of the caterpillars eating, and hearing the ones that lose their grip fall from the trees on to the roof in such numbers that it sounded like rain.

Dead trees disrupt the lives of all the other living things that are associated with forests, including man. Fire risk is heightened. Soil is easily eroded, damaging watersheds and increasing silt loads in waterways. Control measures put toxic substances into the environment - over the last 20 years, several millions of acres of forest land have been aerially sprayed with pesticides in order to suppress gypsy moth populations.

Average annual expenditures for gypsy moth eradication, suppression, and research in the United States from 1980 to 1994 totaled $38 million per year (in 2005 dollars). This figure does not include millions of additional dollars in economic losses attributed to this pest.

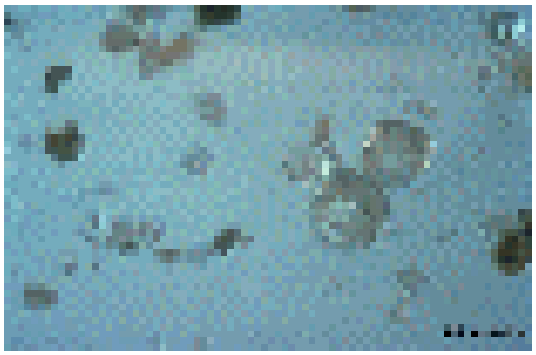
Gypsy moth is an adept hitchhiker, laying its eggs on items stored or used outside (recreational vehicles, campers, lawn furniture, firewood, children's play sets, etc.), and is moved by unsuspecting vacationers and people moving to California.

This insect has been intercepted 1,397 times (an average of 83 times per year) at the Border Protection Stations (BPS) since 1988.
Zebra mussel, a mollusk that clogs pipes, such as pipes that cool power plants, or pumping stations in water delivery systems, was discovered infesting the Great Lakes in 1984. Since that time it has spread throughout many of the waterways in the eastern United States. Between 1990 and 2000, an estimated $5 billion was spent to control this pest. Boats used in infested waters often move this and other aquatic pests from one waterway to another.

Clogging water delivery systems is a bad thing, but the zebra mussel also alters the natural ecosystem, competing with native species for resources necessary to survival.

Since1995, Border Station inspectors have intercepted zebra mussel on watercraft 71 times.

A clump of zebra mussels overwhelming a native clam

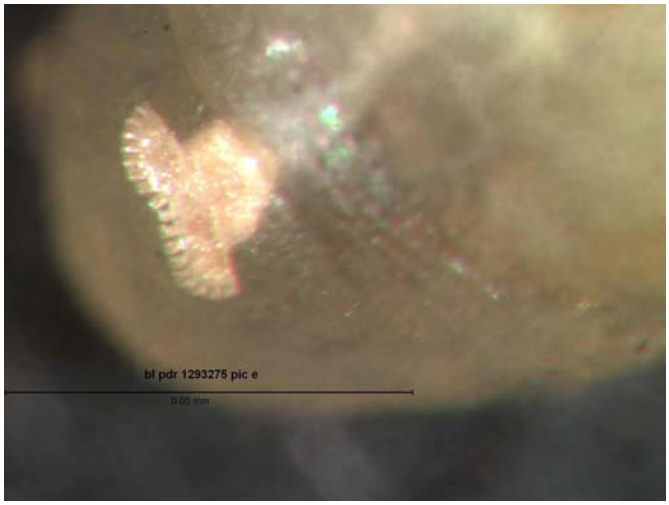


Zebra mussel larvae, or "veligers", here shown with common planktonic organisms

Free swimming veligers may be in the bilge water or live well of a boat being trailered from one waterway to another.

Exotic fruit flies, such as Mediterranean fruit fly and Mexican fruit fly, are established in other places but are not known to occur in California. Each of these insects has an extensive range of hosts and would flourish in California's temperate climate. If they were to become established in the state, the control costs and economic impacts would be enormous. A recent limited outbreak of Mexican fruit fly in California cost taxpayers $12 million to eradicate. Both of these insects are regularly intercepted at the border

Mexican fruit fly, above and below, pictures taken at Blythe



Anterior spiracle, a characteristic key to the identification of larvae in the family Tephritidae

Working and living in border station communities

Border station communities are typically some distance from large centers of population. They fall into two types, rural or resort.

4H at Alturas

Casino, across the border from Needles

A corral near Benton, the White Mountains in the background

Above Meyers, in the Lake Tahoe basin

Prehistoric “intaglio”, near Blythe

Petroglyphs near Needles

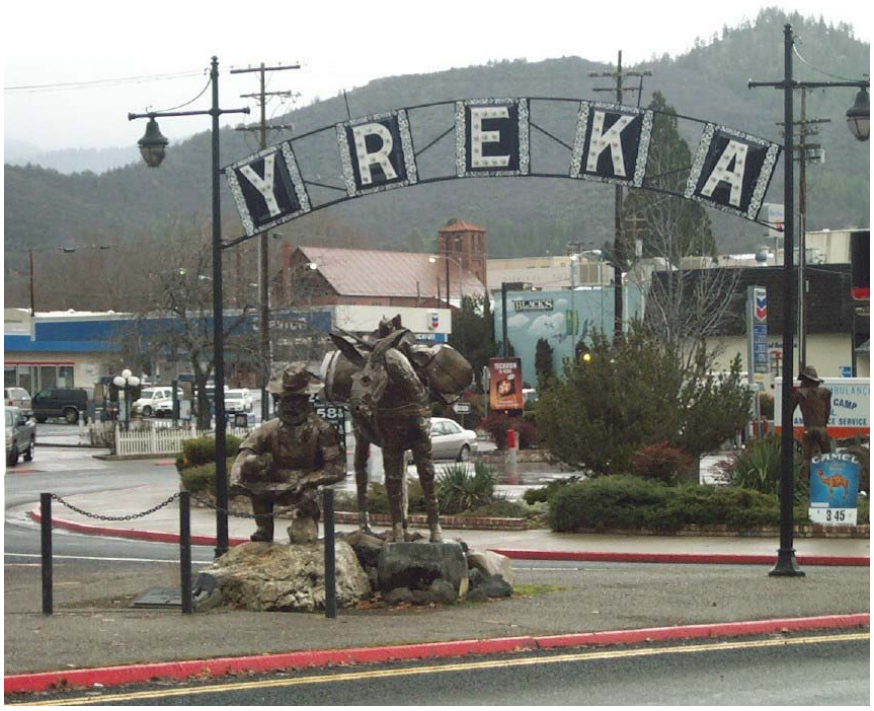
This catfish was caught in the Colorado River at Blythe

Spring weather, near Hornbrook

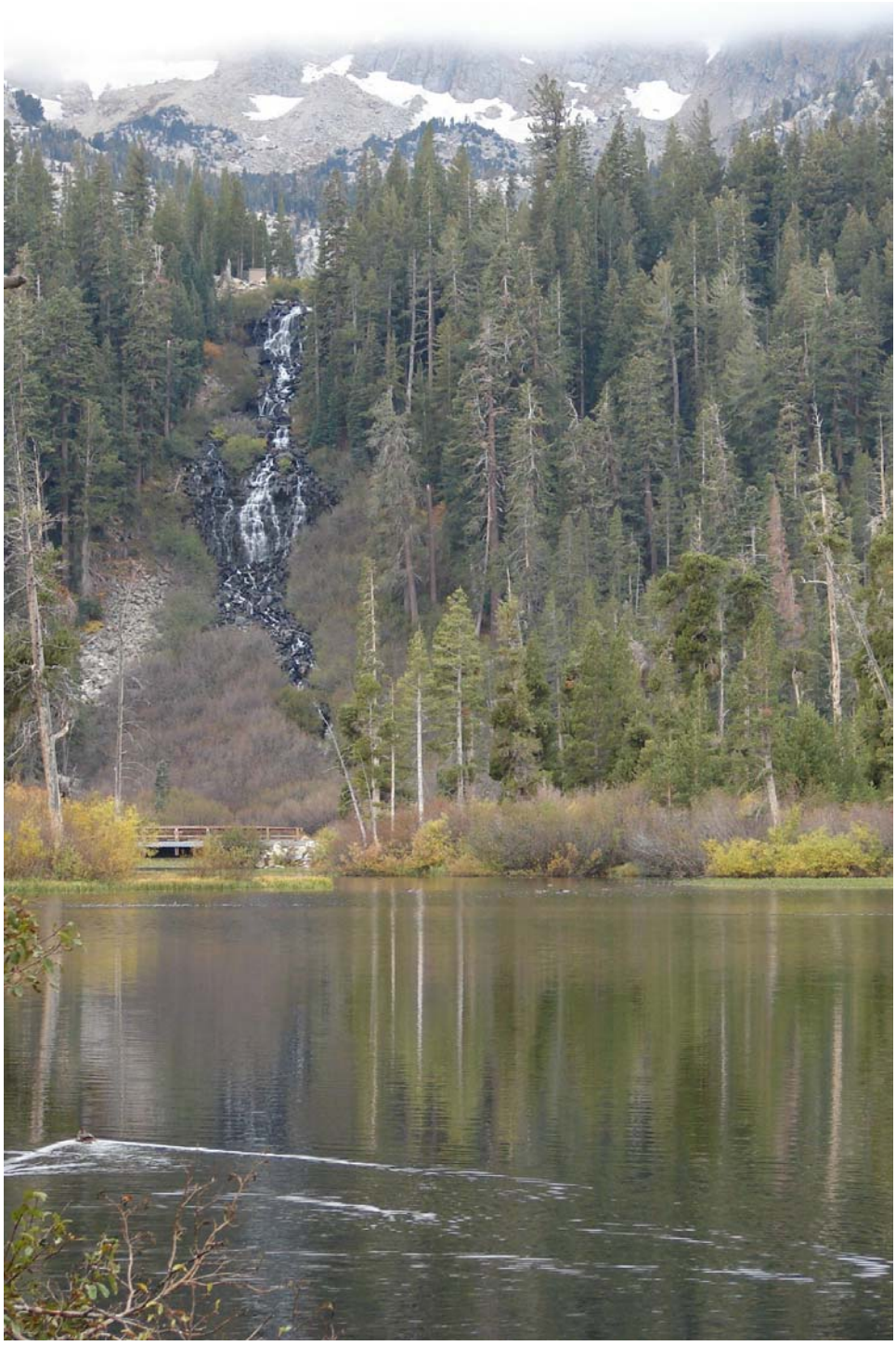
Near Winterhaven is the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area, administered by the Bureau of Land Management, a magnet for off-road vehicle enthusiasts

Marlette Lake, near Meyers

Laughlin, Nevada, just upriver from Needles



Siskiyou County seat, near Hornbrook



Just outside Bishop, near Benton

Meyers Station

Smith River Station

Vidal Junction Station

Redwood Highway Station

Snow geese near Dorris

Mt. Shasta, this view from southeast of Dorris

Dorris Station

Tulelake Station.

Tulelake and Benton stations are supplied with state houses, being so remote that it has always been difficult to find housing.

Wide open, near Benton

Ashland, Oregon, over the pass from Hornbrook

Many border station employees grew up in the vicinity of their workplace. Others chose to move from urban and suburban localities in search of a more rural lifestyle.

One among many appealing things about life along the border: the cost of living is typically lower in border station communities than in more highly populated areas.

The following shows differences in median single family home prices for 2002:

LA/Long Beach area	$277,000	Alturas	$55,000
Oakland	388,000	Barstow (Yermo)	71,000
San Diego	330,000	Blythe	129,000
Orange Co.	386,000	Needles	101,000
San Jose	504,000	Smith River	188,000
Sacramento/Yolo Co.	235,000	S. Lake Tahoe (Meyers)	262,000
Modesto	179,000	Yreka (Hornbrook)	134,000
Santa Barbara	274,000	Yuma (Winterhaven)	160,000
Santa Rosa	344,000		

How to apply:

Find out more about entry level employment as a Plant Quarantine Inspector with the Border Protection Stations.

Go to:

http://www.cdfa.ca.gov/

Use the link on the left called “Employment info”

Read the information carefully. You will easily be able to discover information about Civil Service procedures, the exam bulletin for Plant Quarantine Inspector, the minimum qualifications for admittance to the exam, how to obtain an application, and where to send it.

Start with Bulletins: Open State Examinations (All Departments)

It is important to read and understand the bulletin. Determine whether you meet the minimum qualifications. Carefully read the scope of the exam, which lists the critical knowledge and abilities that will be tested in the exam.

Go to CLICK HERE for a copy of the official bulletin which gives instructions for filing for the examination.

Then, go to **job description (specification)** and review the career path that you will be entering when you successfully test for the Plant Quarantine Inspector position.

Once you obtain a place on the civil service list, as jobs come open you will be asked to a hiring interview. At that point, all your education and experience is important and will be evaluated, but essential personal qualities will also carry great importance.

The Border Protection Station Program promotes the following values:

Effective leadership
Mutual respect, cooperation and communication
Professionalism and integrity
Partnership and teamwork
Dependability
Decision-making using the best available information
Empowerment and accountability

Please call the Pest Exclusion Branch with any questions about the program or the exam process. The number is 916 653-1440.