Request for Comments: Proposed Rescission of MDARD's Scleroderris Exterior Quarantine

The Michigan Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (MDARD) is asking Michigan stakeholders to provide comments on a proposed rescission of the state's Scleroderris Exterior Quarantine.

Exterior plant pest quarantines restrict the import of plant material from infected areas to help safeguard Michigan agriculture and natural resources against harmful pests. In March 1983, MDARD implemented an exterior plant pest quarantine for scleroderris canker, a fungus disease that affects conifer forests. In a recent risk analysis, MDARD determined that there has been a decline in scleroderris detections and that the disease has not had broad, negative economic or environmental effects in Michigan or other infested states. Based on that analysis, MDARD proposes to rescind the quarantine.

Stakeholders can provide comments about the proposed recission through an online form. All comments must be submitted by **11:59 PM ET on Monday, January 5, 2026**.

Michigan's Pest Risk Analysis and Proposed Action

To ensure that regulatory decisions remain aligned with current science, MDARD recently conducted an internal pest risk analysis (PRA) for scleroderris canker. This analysis used a standardized framework to evaluate the pest's potential for establishment, spread, and economic or environmental impact in Michigan.

Based on this assessment, scleroderris canker was assigned a low concern rating. Key factors supporting this conclusion include:

1. Established Presence: The disease has been present in North America since 1951, including in Michigan and several other states (Wisconsin, Minnesota, New York, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Maine).
2. Lack of Significant Impact: There have been no reported issues of disease establishment or broad negative economic or environmental effects in Michigan or other infested states[1,4].

As a result, MDARD is proposing to rescind the Scleroderris Exterior Quarantine. If finalized, this action would lift all restrictions on the domestic trade of regulated articles entering Michigan, including:

- Trees (including cut Christmas trees) of any species in the genera *Larix* (larch), *Pinus* (pine), *Picea* (spruce), and *Pseudotsuga menziesii* (Douglas fir).

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[1] Canadian Food Inspection Agency. (2019). *Scleroderris canker – Gremmeniella abietina*. Government of Canada. https://inspection.canada.ca/en/plant-health/invasive-species/plant-diseases/scleroderris-canker

Background

Scleroderris canker, caused by the fungus *Gremmeniella abietina*, was first detected in Michigan's Upper Peninsula in 1951.[2,3] At the time, scleroderris canker raised significant concern due to its potential to cause widespread damage to conifer forests, particularly red, jack, and Scots pines. The discovery of a more aggressive European strain in New York in 1959 further heightened alarm, as it was capable of killing mature trees and spreading rapidly through plantations and nurseries[2].

Over time, however, the disease has proven to be less damaging and less likely to spread as readily than initially feared.[2,4,5] The European strain has remained largely confined to parts of the Northeast, while the more common North American strain typically affects only young trees and rarely causes serious mortality in mature forests.[2,6,7]

Additional information about scleroderris canker.

Regulatory History

In response to early concerns, Michigan and several other states implemented quarantines to prevent the spread of the European strain:

- **New York (1977):** Established a quarantine to restrict the movement of susceptible plant materials from infected areas. While there are no longer commercial pine growers in the affected region, the quarantine remains in place, and the state continues to monitor the movement of regulated materials, particularly during the holiday season. The regulatory posture has remained steady for many years, reflecting a localized and stable risk profile.
- **Michigan (1983):** Issued a Scleroderris Exterior Quarantine prohibiting the import of regulated conifer materials (e.g., Christmas trees, nursery stock,

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[2] Skilling, D. D., Schneider, B., & Fasking, D. (n.d.). *Scleroderris canker in North America* (Research Paper NC-275). U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, North Central Forest Experiment Station. https://www.nrs.fs.usda.gov/pubs/rp/rp_nc275.pdf

[3] Laflamme, G. (2009). Earliest documented report of Scleroderris canker in North America: Damage believed until now to be caused by summer frost. *Phytoprotection, 90*(3), 89–95. https://doi.org/10.7202/045777ar

[4] Laflamme, G., & Rioux, D. (2015). Conditions conducive to an epidemic of *Gremmeniella abietina*, European race, in red pine plantations. *Journal of Forest Science, 61*(4), 175–181. https://doi.org/10.17221/67/2014-JFS

[5] Romeralo, C., Botella, L., Santamaría, O., Díez, J. J., & Laflamme, G. (2023). *Gremmeniella abietina*: A loser in the warmer world or still a threat to forestry? *Current Forestry Reports, 9*, 332–349. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40725-023-00193-2

[6] EFSA Panel on Plant Health (PLH), Jeger, M., Bragard, C., Caffier, D., Candresse, T., Chatzivassiliou, E., ... & Pautasso, M. (2017). Scientific opinion on the pest categorisation of *Gremmeniella abietina*. *EFSA Journal, 15*(11), 5030. https://doi.org/10.2903/j.efsa.2017.5030

[7] EPPO. (2024). *Gremmeniella abietina*. EPPO datasheets on pests recommended for regulation. https://gd.eppo.int/taxon/GREMAB/datasheet

wreaths) from infected areas in New York and Vermont. This was a precautionary measure, as the European strain had not yet been detected in Michigan.

- **Vermont (1987):** Implemented a joint quarantine with its Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation. The quarantine was repealed in 2021 due to a lack of recent detections and reduced risk.
- **New Hampshire:** Participated initially in regional monitoring and regulatory efforts, but never implemented state-level regulations related to scleroderris canker.

Changing Risk Landscape

Several developments have contributed to a reduced concern about scleroderris canker:

- Limited spread of the European strain and a decline in new detections.[4,5,8]
- Improved nursery practices and planting guidelines that reduce the risk of disease transmission.
- Natural limitations in the pathogen's ability to spread and cause severe outbreaks.[4]

Public Comment Invitation

Please use the online form to provide comments on the proposed recission by **11:59 PM ET on Monday, January 5, 2026**. Your input is important and will help ensure that any regulatory changes are well-informed and appropriate. After the comment period, MDARD will review all feedback and determine whether to proceed with the rescission.

[8] Warren, G. R., Harrison, K. J., & Laflamme, G. (2011). New and updated information on scleroderris canker in the Atlantic Provinces. *The Forestry Chronicle, 87*(3), 382–390. https://doi.org/10.5558/tfc2011-028