

Screwworm Alert: What Every Rancher Needs to Know Right Now

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What Exactly is Screwworm?

Screwworm is a fly, that during the larvae stage, literally screw themselves into open wounds of their hosts. The fly is metallic blue-green, about the size of a housefly, with orange eyes and three dark stripes on its back. The larvae have biting mouth parts that look like a mustache, and cause wounds to enlarge as they feed, creating a foul-smelling discharge of blood and tissue.



Figure 1. Screwworm life cycle. From USDA APHIS.

Why the Sudden Concern?

Screwworm has advanced approximately 400 miles northward towards the US since November 2024, recently detected in farms in Oaxaca and Veracruz, Mexico, about 700 miles from the U.S.-Mexico border.

The last time screwworm was in the United States was in 1966 when we successfully eradicated it. It took decades and billions of dollars and coordination of US and Central American countries to eradicate the screwworm to the Darién Gap, the border between Panama and Columbia, a geographic divide believed to keep the flies out of Central and North America. In 2022, the flies started spreading north, likely due to illegal movement of cattle, plus inspectors being stretched thin.

What You Need to Watch For

Early detection is critical. Here's your checklist for spotting potential screwworm:

In Your Cattle:

- Irritated behavior around wounds
- Head shaking or biting at wounds
- The smell of decaying flesh
- Enlarged, draining wounds that won't heal
- Visible maggots in wounds (they position themselves head-down)

The Adult Fly:

- Greenish-blue metallic color about the size of a housefly
- Orange eyes
- Three dark stripes across the back

Remember, nearly any wound is susceptible—barbed wire cuts, dehorning sites, castration wounds, ear tag sites, and especially navels of newborns.

Prevention is Key:

- Walk your fences and remove any sharp objects that could cause wounds
- Treat all wounds immediately with approved insecticides
- Treat umbilical cords of newborns right away
- Stay on top of tick control—they create wounds too

Be Ready to Report: If you see anything suspicious, don't wait. Contact:

1. Your local veterinarian immediately
2. California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA)
3. USDA-APHIS Veterinary Services
4. Your local UCCE office

The Bigger Picture

USDA has already suspended live cattle imports from Mexico on a month-to-month basis while monitoring the situation. They're also investing \$165 million in emergency funding, primarily to ramp up production of sterile flies. The sterile insect technique is how we beat screwworm before, releasing millions of sterilized male flies that mate with females but produce no offspring.

The facility in Panama can produce 100 million sterile flies per week, but experts say that's not enough. There's a push to build a sterile fly production facility in the U.S. as backup.

The Bottom Line

Is screwworm coming? Probably, unless we get lucky or smart real fast. Should you panic? Absolutely not. Should you be prepared? YES!

Think of it like fire season—we hope it doesn't happen, but we keep our defensible space clear, our equipment ready, and our evacuation plans current. Same principle here. Stay informed, keep wounds treated, and keep your eyes open for suspicious flies or non-healing wounds.

Remember, we've beaten this pest before, and if it comes to it, we'll beat it again. The difference this time? We know what we're dealing with, and we've got better tools and communication than our predecessors had in the 1950s. More information will be coming out. Conferences to share information with veterinarians have been happening to ensure people are prepared. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Got Pigs?

In collaboration with the UC Davis School of Veterinary Medicine and UC ANR, the University of Minnesota is conducting a research study to understand the pig health and training needs of small-scale, niche, organic, beginning, and related farmers who raise pigs in California. The survey is anonymous and voluntary and takes approximately 20 minutes to complete. Participants who complete the survey may enter a drawing for a chance to win a \$50 Amazon gift card. Responses will help inform future training and outreach efforts.

Thank you! Take the survey at:

z.umn.edu/pigsurvey

Celebrate the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralist (IYRP)

This is our year to celebrate rangelands and you – the people who steward them. There will be different events over the year, with the first being in Monterey. Be on the lookout for more options throughout the year.

California Targeted Grazing Short Course

Practitioners, resource managers, landowners, and students: learn how targeted grazing can address fuel and vegetation management with UC Cooperative Extension!



UC Cooperative Extension
University of California
Agriculture & Natural Resources

Workshop Details:

DATES & TIME:

- Online Zoom meetings every Tuesday from February 17, 2026 - April 21, 2026 from 6 - 7:30 PM PDT.
- In-person field day at UC Davis on Saturday, April 25, 2026.

COST: \$60.00 per person

Register by February 13, 2026!



UC DAVIS
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North American Regional Women Pastoralist Gathering

**February 7, 2026
Monterey, CA and on Zoom**

**Join us to celebrate the
International Year of the Woman Farmer and
Rancher
AND
International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralist!**

**In person in Monterey, CA or create a local
Gathering and join grazing women in your area for a
day of learning and sharing. All Satellite Gatherings
will have same agenda as the women in Monterey
and join in real time. For more information and
registration go to <https://link.ucanr.edu/nagathering>**

**For California women, there is a stipend
to help offset travel. Information and
application can be found here
<https://link.ucanr.edu/stipend>**



**INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF
RANGELANDS AND
PASTORALISTS**

2026



79th Society for Range Management Annual Meeting

February 7-11, 2026 - Monterey, CA

Tour Options along the Central Coast and Hawaiian Ranches

V6 Ranch - Jack Ranch - Santa Lucia Preserve - Pinnacles National Park - Hollister Hills Recreation Area - Pacines Ranch - Big Island Ranches - Whale Watching - Wine Tasting - Ebike along 17 Mile Drive



Interested in Rangelands? SRM has something for you!

Highlighted speakers: Karen Ross - Dave Daley - Nicolette Niman

Viewing of "You Can't See Them from the Road"

Producer Forum: Sustained profit; economics; herd health diagnostics

Work shops and sessions on grazing management, remote sensing, virtual fencing, invasive species, soil health, wildlife, fire management, Trade Show and more!

Information at: <https://rangelands.org/annual-meeting>

Early Bird Registration by January 16th at:

<https://rangelands.org/registration-3>



Society for Range Management Annual Meeting February 7-11, 2026, Tour Spotlight

Register here by January 16th for Early Bird Pricing:

<https://rangelands.org/registration-3>



Saturday, February 7th and Sunday, February 8th - **Ramblin' Range Route** leave Monterey and head south towards Paso Robles with stop to discuss targeted grazing, arriving at V6 Ranch for ranch tour, dinner and overnight stay. Sunday morning tour the Jack Ranch, part of the Hearst Ranch before heading back to Monterey

Social Tours:

Pedals to Pebbles- Bike tour along 17 Mile Drive with stops to learn about local geology, natural resource issues and management.

Whale Watching - semi-private three hour whale watching tour

Sunday, February 8th, **Producer Forum Tour- Cowboy Corridors and Stockmanship**

Stops will include Hollister Hills State Vehicular Recreation Area with Joe Morris and Pacines Ranch for lunch. After lunch will be stockmanship session.



Wednesday, February 11th, **Estates and Ecosystems**

Tour two Spanish Land Grants that are now the Santa Lucia Preserve and hear how the Santa Lucia Conservancy manages the land (with cattle grazing) with the home owners for multiple ecosystems goals, and no permanent fences.

Thursday, February 12th, **Flames Feathers and Fields**

Immerse yourself in the beauty and rich ecological heritage of San Benito County on this exclusive one-day tour! We will explore two remarkable rangeland sites and discover how partnerships, conservation, and cultural history come together to protect and provide stewardship for these vital landscapes. Our last stop will be at Pinnacles National Park to see how they have reintroduced grazing in the park for habitat goals.



Saturday, February 14th and Sunday February 15th, **Hawaii Ranch Tour**

A two-day tour of Hawaii Island Ranches will highlight the unique challenges and opportunities of rangelands on the wetter and drier side of the Big Island, as well as management concerns due to an active volcano on the island.

Livestock Lines

Stanislaus & San Joaquin Counties

Look What's Inside:

- Screwworm
- Survey for hog producers
- Upcoming meetings and tours



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