

# NOTICE OF PREPARATION OF A SUPPLEMENTAL DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

**Date:** November 1, 2023

**TO:** Responsible and Trustee Agencies, Organizations, and Interested Parties

**Lead Agency:** Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority  
Contact: Patrick Womble, Environmental Resources Manager  
7040 North Highway 59  
Merced, California 95348

**SUBJECT:** Notice of Preparation of a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Report for the Highway 59 Landfill Composting Facility: Supplement to the Highway 59 Landfill Valley Fill Project Environmental Impact Report

In May 2016, the Merced County Regional Waste Management Authority (MCRWMA) certified the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Highway 59 Landfill Valley Fill Project (Valley Fill EIR) and approved the project. The approved Valley Fill Project includes relocation of several currently permitted on-site facilities and a vertical reconfiguration of the landfill disposal area. The reconfiguration, as approved, allows for continued operation of the existing landfill for an additional 11 to 15 years without expanding the boundary of the existing permitted facility. As part of the proposed relocation of facilities, the Valley Fill EIR evaluated the installation and operation of concrete padded areas to the east of the existing administrative offices and parking for the purposes of household hazardous waste disposal, materials recycling, a relocated shop, and two aboveground storage tanks. As a result of project approval in 2016, MCRWMA amended its existing solid waste facility permit (SWFP) in 2016 and then again in 2019 to:

- ▶ incrementally increase the maximum daily tonnage up to 3,000 peak tons per day in 2035 and beyond;
- ▶ incrementally increase the allowable traffic up to 800 vehicles per day by 2035; and
- ▶ increase the height of the existing disposal area by 50 feet; and add dewatered sewage sludge to the list of wastes.

The EIR also included continued operation of the landfill's existing composting operation with a green waste composting operation (with an annual capacity of 25,000 tons per year). Since approval of the original project, the California State Legislature passed Senate Bill 1383 (Lara), which introduced additional requirements for the increased processing of organics to reduce methane emissions statewide, including within MCRWMA's jurisdiction. In response, MCRWMA is proposing the modification of current composting operations within the existing Highway 59 Landfill property to increase organics processing.

In accordance with the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), MCRWMA is preparing a Supplemental Draft EIR to the Valley Fill EIR to address the expansion of the current 25,000 ton per year green waste windrow composting facility and development and operation of a covered aerated static pile (CASP) green waste and food waste compost facility. The intent of this Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to inform agencies and interested parties that the MCRWMA is preparing a Supplemental Draft EIR for the proposed Highway 59 Landfill Composting Facility, a modification to the previously approved project addressed in the Valley Fill EIR. The purpose of the NOP is to provide responsible and trustee agencies, organizations and other interested parties with a description of the project and its potential environmental impacts and to allow the opportunity to provide input regarding the scope and content of the EIR, including possible environmental impacts, mitigation measures, and alternatives.

The public scoping period is for 30 days and will run from **November 1 – November 30, 2023**.

**Project Location:** The Highway 59 Landfill is located immediately east of State Route (SR) 59 in unincorporated Merced County, approximately 6 miles north of the City of Merced (see Figure 1). The street address is 7040 North Highway 59. The Highway 59 Landfill consists of five parcels which are County Assessor's parcel numbers (APNs) 175-050-003, 175-060-001, 175-060-003, 170-070-001 and 170-070-002 (Figure 2). The landfill is located in Sections 13, 14, 23, 24, and 25, Township 6 South, Range 13 East on the U.S. Geological Survey Winton and Yosemite Lake 7.5-minute

quadrangles. The Valley Fill project site is located in the southwest portion of the landfill, as shown in Figure 2, and within two of the five landfill parcels (APNs 175-060-001 and a portion of 175-060-003). The total land area associated with the Valley Fill Project is approximately 230 acres.

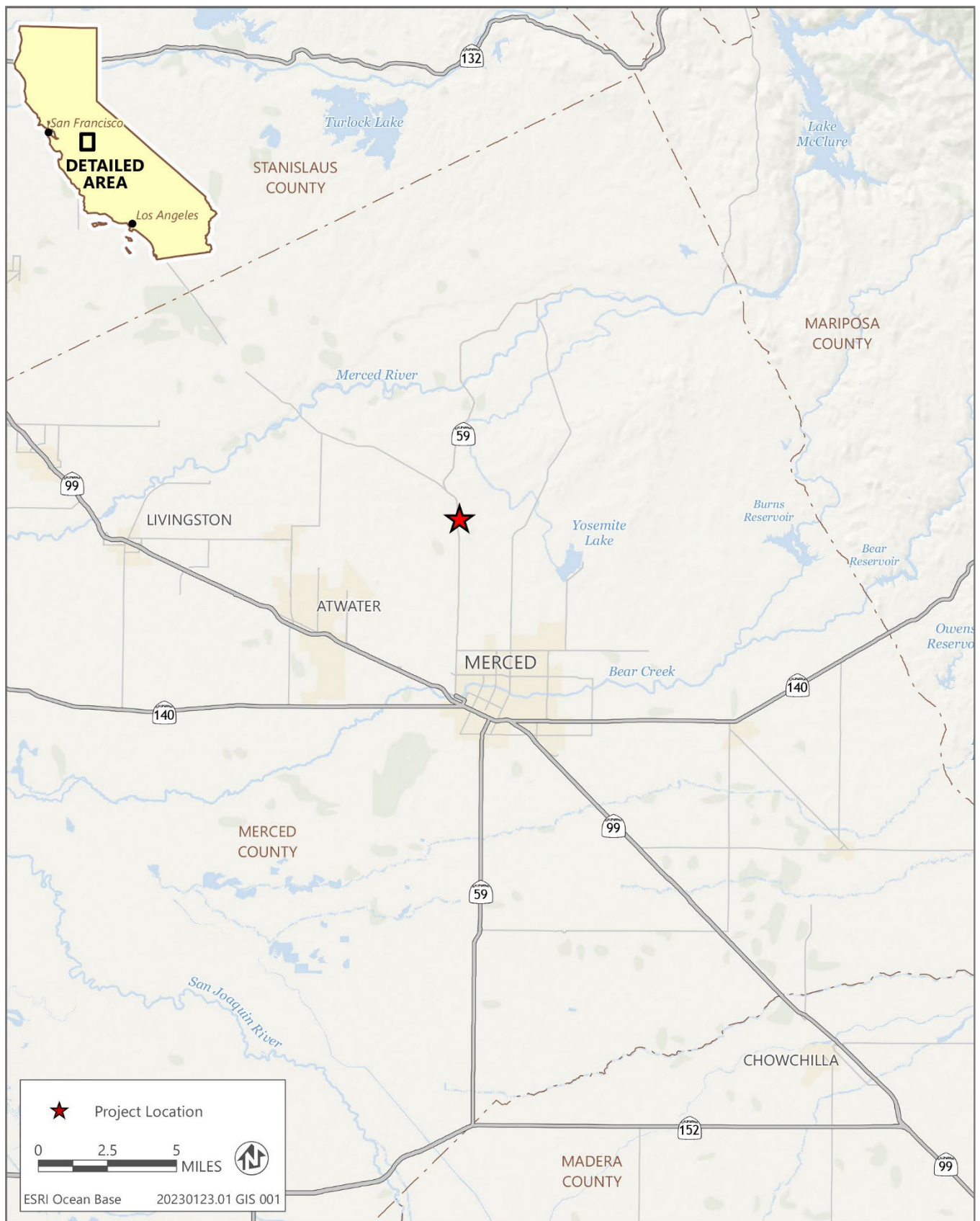
The proposed compost facility would be within a 7.5-acre area in the central portion of the landfill, east of the existing scale house and scales located along Highway 59. This area is currently occupied by the existing green waste composting facility and food waste transfer operation at the Highway 59 Landfill. Access to the project site is available via the main entrance to the landfill along SR 59.

**Project Description:** The proposed modification to the approved Valley Fill Project involves expansion of the current 25,000 ton per year green waste windrow composting facility and development and operation of a covered aerated static pile (CASP) green waste and food waste compost facility to comply with California's Short-Lived Climate Pollutant Reduction Strategy organic waste disposal targets. The compost facility would be designed to accept up to 50,000 tons per year of green waste and food waste and capable of storing up to 100,000 cubic yards on-site of organic material. Additional site improvements would include construction of a new lined wastewater storage pond, on-site drainage improvements, and improvements to working surfaces such as paving active composting and/or processing areas or amending/compacting the soil.

The CASP and processing and composting equipment would be installed on a concrete pad draining to a new lined pond within the project site. The organic waste would be delivered to the proposed compost facility by collection vehicles, transfer trailers, and self-haul vehicles. Once received, the organic waste would be sorted to remove non-compostable wastes and contamination, then pre-processed by grinding. The active composting area would be located on a compost pad. Some organic material may be delivered pre-processed and feedstock-ready from local material recovery facilities and may be deposited directly into the CASP unit without further processing. Once active composting is complete, the materials are then moved to a curing area, then to final screening and finishing at the compost storage area until products are sold.

**Potential Environmental Effects:** The EIR will describe the significant direct and indirect environmental impacts of the project. The EIR also will evaluate the cumulative impacts of the project, defined as impacts that could be exacerbated when considered in conjunction with other related past, present, and reasonably foreseeable future projects. The project could result in potentially significant environmental impacts in the following resource areas, which will be further evaluated in the EIR:

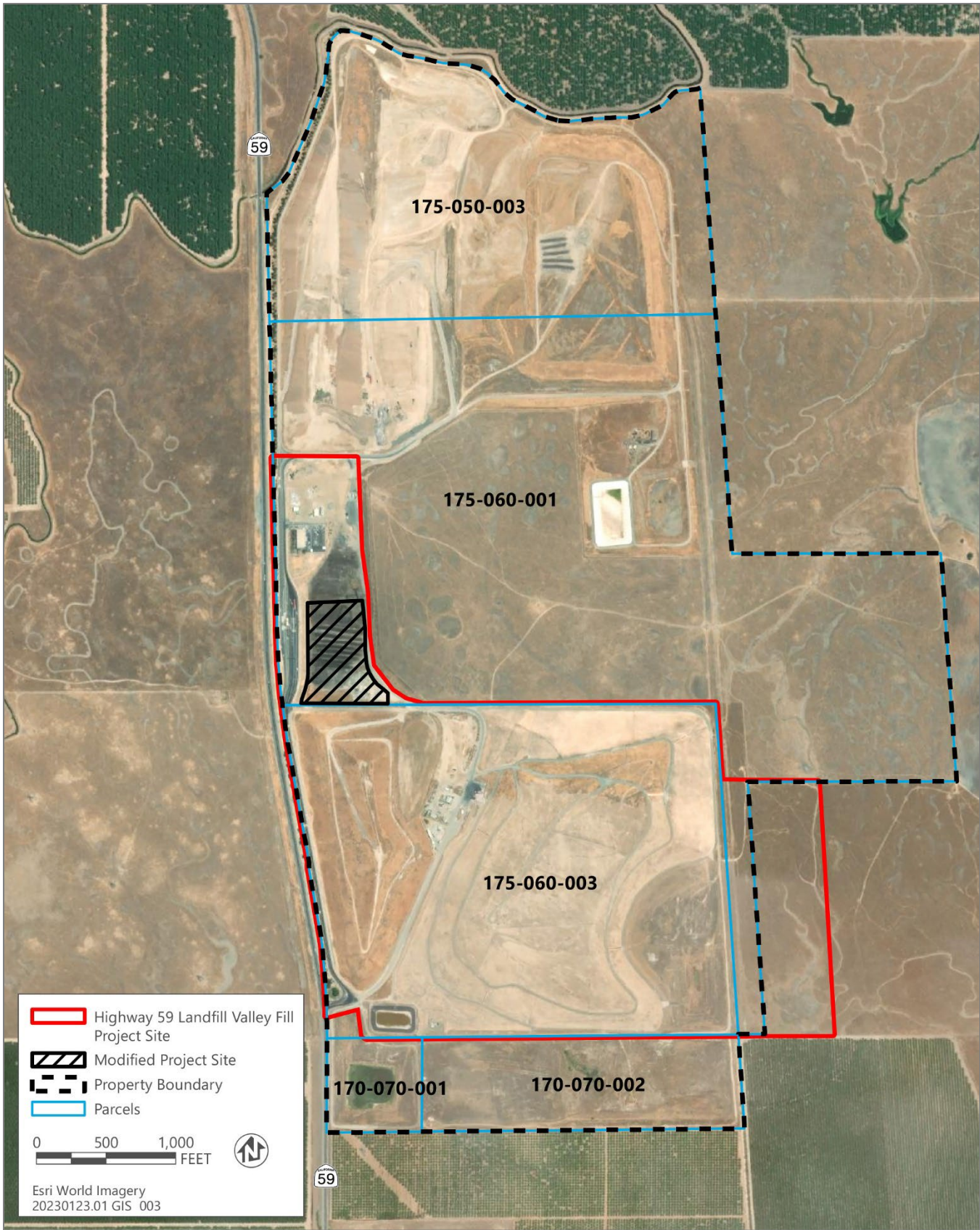
- ▶ Air Quality: Temporary increases in air pollutant emissions associated with construction and long-term increases associated with project operations and associated vehicular trips will be modeled and discussed in the Supplemental EIR.
- ▶ Biological Resources: Although the project site is disturbed and located within an existing landfill, the potential for impacts to biological resources, including special-status species, will be evaluated in the Supplemental EIR.
- ▶ Cultural Resources and Tribal Cultural Resources: The analysis of archaeological and historical resources will be developed based on the previously prepared Valley Fill EIR and an updated cultural records search of the Central California Information Center. The analysis of tribal cultural resources will be based on the outcome of AB 52 (Statutes of 2014) consultation.
- ▶ Energy: The Supplemental EIR will include a discussion and evaluation of energy use during construction and operation of the project.
- ▶ Greenhouse Gas Emission: The Supplemental EIR will describe the temporary increases in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with mobile-source exhaust from construction worker commute trips, truck haul trips, and equipment to construct project components; and long-term increases associated with project operations, including stationary and mobile sources.
- ▶ Noise: The noise analysis will evaluate potential noise and vibration impacts to residential areas as well as evaluate whether increases in traffic volumes would exceed County of Merced's noise standards.



Source: Adapted by Ascent Environmental in 2022.

Figure 1 Regional Location





Source: Adapted by Ascent Environmental in 2022.

Figure 2 Project Location

- ▶ **Transportation:** The transportation section of the Supplemental EIR will describe traffic operations, potential hazards associated with design, and construction-related traffic. Potential VMT changes will be evaluated and discussed.

The aforementioned issue areas and associated impacts will be evaluated in detail in the Draft Supplemental EIR. As necessary, feasible and practicable mitigation measures will be recommended to reduce any identified significant or potentially significant impacts.

MCRWMA anticipates that the project would not result in significant environmental impacts to the following resources and does not propose to evaluate them in detail in the Draft Supplemental EIR: aesthetics, agriculture and forestry, geology and soils, hazards and hazardous materials, hydrology and water quality, land use and planning, mineral resources, population and housing, public services, recreation, utilities, and wildfire. Brief discussion of these resources will be provided in the Draft Supplemental EIR with explanation as to why significant impacts on these resources are not anticipated.

**COMMENT PERIOD:** Written comments on the NOP can be sent anytime during the NOP review period which begins November 1, 2023 and ends December 1, 2023 at 5:00 pm. Your views and comments on how the project may affect the environment, and what potential environmental impacts the Draft Supplemental EIR should consider, are welcomed. Please send your written or electronic responses, with the name of your agency contact person, to the following address:

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**Public Scoping Meeting:** MCRWMA will host a public scoping meeting on Thursday, November 16, 2023 at 3:00 pm as part of the regularly scheduled Merced County Association of Government's Governing Board Meeting at the Board of Supervisors' Chamber, 2222 M Street, Merced, CA 95340. The meeting will inform interested parties about the project, and provide agencies and the public with an opportunity to provide comments on the scope and content of the Draft Supplemental EIR.