

**NOTICE OF EXEMPTION**

**TO:** Santa Barbara County Clerk of the Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Santa Barbara County Public Works Department, Resource Recovery and Waste Management Division

The project or activity identified below is determined to be exempt from further environmental review requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) of 1970, as defined in the State and County Guidelines for the implementation of CEQA.

**APN:** 081-150-032                      **Case No.:** Not Applicable

**Location:** 14550 Calle Real, Goleta, CA 93117

**Project Title:** Baron Ranch Prescribed Grazing for Invasive Species Management

**Project Applicant:** Santa Barbara County Public Works Department, Resource Recovery and Waste Management Division

**Project Description:** Use of goats for prescribed grazing of an approximate 8.78 acre area of the Baron Ranch for invasive species control/management. The area proposed for grazing consists of a former avocado orchard. The area to be grazed will be secured using temporary electric fences and guard dogs. Support facilities include a livestock and living trailer that will be temporarily placed in a disturbed area of the Ranch. Grazing will occur over an approximate 5-to-7-day period. The grazing will occur in summer 2024 and may be repeated in spring/summer 2025.

**Name of Public Agency Approving Project:** Santa Barbara County Public Works, Resource Recovery and Waste Management

**Name of Person or Entity Carrying Out Project:** Golden State Goats, LLC. under contract to Santa Barbara County Public Works, Resource Recovery and Waste Management

**Exempt Status:**

- Ministerial
- Statutory Exemption
- Categorical Exemption
- Emergency Project
- Declared Emergency

**Cite specific CEQA and/or CEQA Guidelines Section:** CEQA Guidelines Section 15301 Existing Facilities.

**Reasons to support exemption findings:**

The 1,083 acre Baron Ranch property was purchased by the Resource Recovery and Waste Management Division (RRWMD) of the County of Santa Barbara Public Works Department in 1991 to serve as a buffer between the Tajiguas Landfill and other private property to the east. Historically the Ranch was used for avocado and cherimoya orchards until 2016 when production was intentionally discontinued due to the age of the trees, declining production and revenues, and native plant restoration activities. Most of the Ranch also burned in the 2021 Alisal Fire. Over 50 acres of the Ranch including former active and inactive orchard areas have been restored with native vegetation as a part of CEQA and resource agency permit requirements for projects at the Tajiguas Landfill. Former disturbed orchard areas which have not been actively restored are comprised primarily of introduced non-native annual grasses and other non-native invasive species. Consistent with CEQA Guidelines Section 15301, Existing Facilities the proposed project consists of the maintenance of an approximate 8.78 acres area of an existing county-owned facility/property to assist with the control of invasive species. Therefore, the project can be found to be categorically exempt from CEQA.

The proposed project does not involve unusual circumstances, including future activities, resulting in or which might reasonably result in significant impacts which threaten the environment. The exceptions to the categorical exemptions pursuant to Section 15300.2 of the State CEQA Guidelines are:

**(a) Location. Classes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 11 are qualified by consideration of where the project is to be located – a project that is ordinarily insignificant in its impact on the environment may in a particularly sensitive environment be significant. Therefore, these classes are considered to apply all instances, except where the project may impact on an environmental resource of hazardous or critical concern where designated, precisely mapped, and officially adopted pursuant to law by federal, state, or local agencies.**

**(b)**  
CEQA Guidelines 15301 is a Class 1 exemption therefore this exception does not apply.

**(c) Cumulative Impact. All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.**

Prescribed grazing using goats is currently being conducted at the Baron Ranch under contract to the Santa Barbara County Fire Safe Council Fire to reduce fire fuel loads. The prescribed grazing for the Fire Safe Council is also being conducted in former orchard areas or other areas of non-native introduced grasses. The Fire Safe Council Grazing has been subject to separate environmental review and biological monitoring. The area proposed for grading would also be monitored for biological resources prior to beginning work. Considering the location (upland areas), vegetation (primarily non-native invasive species) and the timing of the grazing activity (spring/summer) no adverse cumulative impacts are expected to occur. Therefore, this exception is not applicable.

- (d) Significant Effect. A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.**

The project area is within the area designated by USFWS as Critical Habitat Unit STB-6 for the California red-legged frog. Considering the location (upland areas over 300 feet from Pila Creek), vegetation (primarily non-native invasive species) and the timing of the grazing activity (spring/summer when dispersal through upland areas is limited) no adverse cumulative impacts are expected to occur. Therefore, this exception is not applicable.

- (e) Scenic Highways. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings, or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway. This does not apply to improvements which are required as mitigation by an adopted negative declaration or certified EIR.**

U.S. Highway 101, a state designated scenic highway borders the Baron Ranch along its south boundary. However, the project would reduce non-native grasses and other invasive species and would not result in damage to scenic resources. Further, the area proposed for prescribed grazing is not visible from U.S. Highway 101 due to intervening topography. Therefore, this exception is not applicable.

- (f) Hazardous Waste Sites. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.**

The project site is not located on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5. Therefore, this exception is not applicable.

- (g) Historical Resources. A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.**

The vegetation management through prescribed grazing would not result in a substantial adverse change to a historical resource as no subsurface ground disturbance or grading would occur. Therefore, this exception is not applicable.

**Lead Agency Contact Person:** Joddi Leipner **Phone #:** 805-882-3614

**Department/Division Representative:** Joddi Leipner, Environmental Engineering Team Leader

**Date:** July 3, 2024

**Acceptance Date:** July 5, 2024

G:\RR&WM\ENGINEER\TAJIGUAS\828984 TJ Capacity Increase\400 TEC\406 CEQA\Golden State Goats NOE\Baron Ranch Prescribed Grazing CEQA NOE.docx