

CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
CENTRAL VALLEY REGION

RESOLUTION R5-2024-0003

APPROVING AN INITIAL STUDY AND ADOPTING A NEGATIVE DECLARATION
FOR
THE CITY OF LEMOORE AND LEPRINO FOODS COMPANY
RIVER RANCH RECYCLED WATER PROJECT
KINGS COUNTY

The California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Central Valley Region (or Central Valley Water Board) finds:

1. The City of Lemoore (City or Lemoore) provides sanitary wastewater treatment for its approximately 27,000 residents at its wastewater treatment facility (Lemoore WWTF) at 1145 South 18½ Avenue in Lemoore. After treatment, the effluent is disinfected to comply with Title 22 requirements for disinfected secondary-23 recycled water (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 22, § 60301.225) before being combined with Leprino's treated process water prior to discharge (i.e., combined effluent).
2. Leprino Foods Company (Leprino) owns and operates two cheese processing facilities within the City of Lemoore known as the Leprino East Plant and Leprino West Plant at 351 North Belle Haven Drive and 490 F Street, respectively. Starting in 2002, process water from Leprino's two cheese processing facilities has been combined and conveyed to Leprino's treatment facility at 1250 South 19th Avenue where it is treated to reduce organics and nitrogen.
3. The existing discharge of combined effluent is regulated under Waste Discharge Requirements (WDRs) Order R5-2019-0008, which authorizes a discharge of up to 5.0 million gallons per day (mgd) of treated effluent for irrigation of fodder and fiber crops on approximately 1,900 acres of farmland (Stone Ranch Property) owned by Leprino.
4. On 6 May 2022, Leprino and the City submitted a Report of Waste Discharge (RWD) to increase discharge flows from 5.0 mgd to 7.0 mgd (about a 40% increase) and to expand the land application area to include the adjoining 520-acre Nederend Property, also owned by Leprino, bringing the total available acreage to approximately 2,400 acres (Proposed Project). The Stone Ranch and Nederend Properties are collectively referred to as River Ranch.

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5. The Central Valley Water Board plans to adopt revised WDRs for the Proposed Project to allow increased flows up to 7.0 mgd of combined treated effluent and expansion of the land application area for discharge of recycled water at River Ranch.
6. The adoption of revised WDRs for the Proposed Project is a discretionary action taken by the Central Valley Water Board subject to environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (Pub. Res. Code, § 21000 et seq.).
7. As lead agency for the purposes of CEQA, the Central Valley Water Board entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Leprino and Environmental Science Associates to coordinate preparation of an Initial Study for the Proposed Project. Based on the findings of the Initial Study and consultation with trustee agencies, a Negative Declaration was prepared. The Initial Study and Negative Declaration for the Proposed Project reflect the independent judgment of the lead agency.
8. On 13 March 2023, the Central Valley Water Board transmitted a consultation request to representatives of local tribal communities in the vicinity of the Project area. Specifically, the Tule River Indian Tribe and Santa Rosa Rancheria Tachi Yokut Tribe. Neither tribe requested consultation status during preparation of the Initial Study.
9. On 15 November 2023, the Central Valley Water Board circulated a copy of the draft Initial Study, Negative Declaration, and tentative WDRs to interested parties for a 30-day public comment period and posted the documents at the City of Lemoore and Leprino Wastewater Treatment Facilities as well as at City offices and State Clearinghouse webpage. In addition, the documents were sent to adjoining property owners and posted on the [Central Valley Water Board's Tentative Order page](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralvalley/board_decisions/tentative_orders/).

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10. The Central Valley Water Board considered all testimony and evidence at a hearing held on 16 February 2024 in Rancho Cordova and determined that there is no substantial evidence in the record before it that the project will have a significant effect on the environment. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 14, § 15074(b).)

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THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, pursuant to the requirements of CEQA, the Central Valley Water Board, after considering the entire record, including written and oral testimony at the hearing:

1. Approves the Initial Study and adopts the Negative Declaration for adoption of WDRs for increased flows and expansion of the discharge of combined treated effluent from Leprino and the City to the approximately 2,400-acre River Ranch property for irrigation of crops.

I, PATRICK PULUPA, Executive Officer, do hereby certify the foregoing is a full, true, and correct copy of a Resolution adopted by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Central Valley Region on 16 February 2024.

PATRICK PULUPA, Executive Officer