



House Moran Consulting, Inc.
Water Resources and Environmental Engineering

MEMORANDUM

FROM: Annje Dodd, PhD, PE
TO: Benmore Valley Ranch, LLC
RE: CEQA Categorical Exemption Determination – Type 3 Outdoor Commercial Cannabis Cultivation at Benmore Ranch, Lake County, California
DATE: April 19, 2018

The purpose of this Memorandum is to provide the information supporting a CEQA Categorical Exemption Determination for the proposed Type 3 Outdoor Commercial Cannabis Cultivation activities at Benmore Ranch, Lake County, California.

BASELINE/PRIOR USES

The areas in which proposed cannabis cultivation would occur are within Lake County's designated "Agricultural District Zone" and areas previously used for growing grapes as part of an approximately 240-acre commercial wholesale grape operation. During commercial wholesale grape operations, approximately 6 tons per acre of grapes were harvested and shipped in trucks large enough to hold 25 tons of grapes. Other activities included wind machines, generators to power wind machines, harvest trucks, staff to harvest grapes and maintain the vines, installation and maintenance of irrigation equipment, and spraying of the herbicide RoundUp.

CATEGORICAL EXEMPTIONS

Categorical Exemptions are activities and classes of projects which have been determined by the State of California not to have a significant effect on the environment and which are, therefore, exempt from CEQA. Existing Facilities (Class 1 exemptions) and Minor Alterations to Land (Class 4 exemptions) are exempt under Title 14, Chapter 3, Article 19, Sections 15301 and 15304 of the California Code of Regulations.

Class 1 exemptions consist of the operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, **involving negligible or no expansion of use** beyond that existing at the time of the lead agency's determination. The key consideration is whether the project involves negligible or no expansion of an existing use.



Class 4 exemptions consist of minor alterations in the condition of land, water, and/or vegetation which do not involve removal of healthy, mature, scenic trees except for forestry or agricultural purposes. Examples include, but are not limited to:

- Grading on land with a slope of less than 10 percent;
- New gardening or landscaping, including the replacement of existing conventional landscaping with water efficient or fire resistant landscaping; and
- Filling of earth into previously excavated land with material compatible with the natural features of the site.

PROPOSED USES

A total of five “Type 3” cultivation licenses are proposed for the site, representing 5-acres of cultivation. The proposed cannabis cultivation will be organic, outdoor, in-ground, cultivation without the use of light deprivation or artificial lighting. All cultivation activities will occur on slopes of less than 10-percent. No mass grading will be conducted. In-situ soil will be amended with organic manure and worm castings. Cold-frame greenhouses with 6 mil film will be assembled over the existing grade to protect plants from the elements. Wind machines and generators would not be used as part of the cannabis cultivation operations. Bulk cannabis will be harvested and dried on-site and then shipped off-site to a processing facility. No trimming or processing of cannabis is proposed. Leaves de-leafed as part of maintaining plants, stocks, and root balls will be composted on-site and reused. Approximately 1.5 tons per acre of bulk cannabis will be produced and shipped off-site in box trucks that have the capacity to haul approximately 3.5 tons.

All cannabis cultivation will be enrolled in and comply with the State Water Board’s Cannabis Cultivation Regulatory Program. The Order establishes water resource protection requirements, provides a mechanism for water quality compliance, and enables the Regional Water Board to better focus its enforcement resources on environmentally damaging operations.

No existing trees will be removed as part of the proposed project.

DETERMINATION

The proposed commercial cannabis cultivation activities will utilize existing agricultural areas constructed in connection with the prior commercial grape operation, and do not expand the prior commercial grape operation use, and, to the extent some changes are necessary in the irrigation or other methods of cultivation, would consist of minor alterations to the land.

In fact, the proposed commercial cannabis cultivation activities are less impactful overall on a per-acre basis than the prior commercial wholesale grape operation. As noted the proposed project consists of approximately 5 acres of outdoor, in-ground organic cultivation, along with on-site drying, whereas the prior grape operation encompassed approximately 240 acres. Compared to the prior grape operation, the proposed project will utilize less water, require fewer staff, and will not use pesticides. The proposed project would also ship less product, requiring fewer truck trips, would not require generators, and would not require substantial grading.



Thus, the proposed Type 3 Outdoor Commercial Cannabis Cultivation at Benmore Ranch is Categorical Exempt from CEQA and no further analysis is required.