



**COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC
DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

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NOTICE OF PREPARATION

Date: September 21, 2026

To: Agencies, Organizations, and Interested Persons

From: Merced County
Community and Economic Development Department
2222 "M" Street
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Contact: Ana Browning, Planner II
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Subject: **Notice of Preparation of a Subsequent Environmental Impact Report and Public Scoping Meeting for the Jeepster Farms Mining Expansion Project (Conditional Use Permit Nos. CUP24-004 and CUP25-018).**

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that the County of Merced (County), as lead agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), will prepare a Subsequent Environmental Impact Report (SEIR) for the Jeepster Farms Mining Expansion Project (proposed project). The proposed project would expand the footprint of an existing aggregate mine located at 3000 White Rock Road to include an adjacent parcel where the mining of aggregate material would be permitted through 2047, eliminate any phasing restrictions associated with the original permit, and increase the permitted lifetime extraction limit from 6 million tons to 8 million tons, the active disturbance cap from 60 acres to 80 acres, and the depth of extraction to 33 feet below ground surface (bgs). No other changes to operations or the reclamation plan are proposed, with the exception of a minor increase in internal truck trip length for transport of material from the Jeepster Farms parcel to the processing facilities at the existing mining operation. The project applicant, Jeepster Farms, LLC, has submitted an application to the County for review and approval of the project along with requested entitlements. The County is processing the application for the project and associated approvals including a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) which must be approved before development can occur.

In accordance with Section 15082 of the State CEQA Guidelines, the County has prepared this Notice of Preparation (NOP) to provide agencies, organizations, and interested parties with sufficient information about the proposed project and its potential environmental effects to provide meaningful input on the scope of the SEIR. As specified by the State CEQA Guidelines, this NOP will be circulated for a 30-day period, which starts on **September 21, 2026**, and concludes on **October 21, 2026**. During this time, the County is requesting input from agencies, organizations, and interested parties regarding the scope and content of the environmental analysis to be included in the upcoming SEIR. In accordance with CEQA, the County requests that agencies provide comments on the environmental issues related to the statutory responsibilities of their particular agency.

Buildings and Safety Division
Dewayne Jones, Deputy

**Economic and Castle Airport
Development Division**
Vacant, Deputy

**Environmental Health
Division**
Amanda Duran, Deputy

Planning Division
Tom Navarro, Interim Deputy

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE

This NOP contains a description of the project, its location, and a preliminary overview of the environmental resource topics to be addressed in the SEIR.

Project Location

The existing aggregate mine is located at 3000 White Rock Road (Assessor's Parcel Number [APN] 068-020-024). This parcel is approximately 471 acres; the existing aggregate mine consists of a 357-acre portion of this parcel where mining and reclamation activities are authorized pursuant to CUP No. 99-009. The proposed project would expand mining operations to an adjacent 160-acre parcel (APN 068-020-021) that is owned by the project applicant (Jeepster Farms parcel). In total, the proposed project would increase the permitted mining and reclamation area from 357 acres to 467 acres. The location and boundaries of 3000 White Rock Road, the existing aggregate mine, and the Jeepster Farms parcel are shown below on Figure 1.

Project Summary

The Merced County Planning Commission certified the *Jaxon Enterprises, Inc. Mine Expansion and Reclamation Plan, Merced County, California, Final Environmental Impact Report* (State Clearinghouse [SCH] No. 2003021087) in May 2008 for the expansion and continued operation of an existing aggregate mining operation in an unincorporated area of Merced County, California.¹ The certified 2008 Environmental Impact Report (2008 EIR) evaluated the environmental effects associated with expansion of the existing mining operation, increased aggregate extraction, modifications to mining operations, and implementation of a revised reclamation plan (original project). Following certification of the 2008 EIR, the County approved the original project under CUP No. 99-009.

Consistent with State CEQA Guidelines Sections 15162 and 15378, since the project applicant is proposing changes to a previously approved project that was the subject of a certified EIR, the proposed project consists only of the changes to the previously approved project that could have a direct or indirect physical effect on the environment. These changes include expanding the permitted area of disturbance to allow the mining of aggregate material at the 160-acre Jeepster Farms parcel through 2047, which would increase the lifetime extraction of aggregate material from 6 million tons to 8 million tons. The proposed project would also increase the active disturbance cap from 60 acres to 80 acres at any one time and would remove all phasing limitations. The depth of excavation is anticipated to increase from 23 feet bgs to 33 feet bgs. No other changes to operations or the reclamation plan as described in the 2008 EIR are proposed, with the exception of a minor increase in internal truck trip length for transport of material from the Jeepster Farms parcel to the processing facilities at the existing mining operation.

¹ Aggregate mining is the process of extracting sand, gravel, and crushed stone from the Earth to produce essential construction materials.

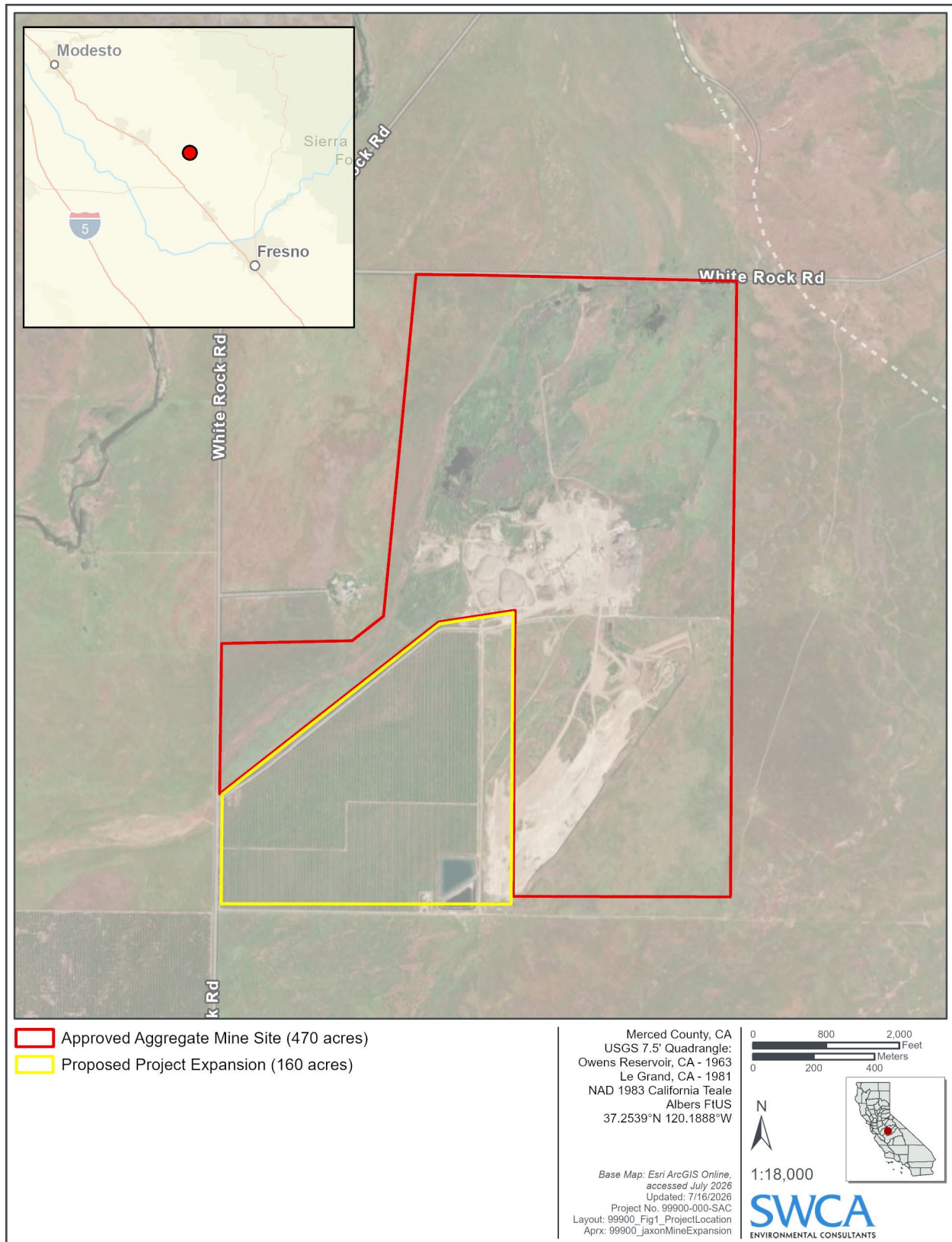


Figure 1 – Project location and boundaries.

The proposed project would authorize extraction of an additional 2 million tons of aggregate material between 2027 and 2047. Annual extraction and marketed material across the existing aggregate mine and the Jeepster Farms parcel would be limited to 550,000 tons and 500,000 tons, respectively, consistent with the 2008 EIR and CUP No. 99-009. The proposed increase in the active disturbance area from 60 acres to 80 acres is intended to provide additional operational flexibility by allowing mining to occur in different portions of the combined mining area based on aggregate quality, sequencing, and market demand while maintaining an overall limit on the acreage actively disturbed at any one time.

Mining operations at the Jeepster Farms parcel would use the same general mining methods, equipment types, processing facilities, workforce, and operational practices as those described in the 2008 EIR. Aggregate would continue to be extracted using conventional surface mining equipment, including excavators, loaders, and haul trucks, and transported via internal haul roads to the existing processing facilities. No expansion of the processing plant, asphalt batch plant, or permanent support facilities is proposed. The project would not increase annual extraction or processing capacity, require additional employees, or result in increased truck traffic on the public roadway network. Site access would continue to use the existing entrances, with only minor extensions to the internal haul road network necessary to serve the Jeepster Farms parcel.

Lastly, the proposed project would also amend the reclamation plan for the existing aggregate mine to include an area that was mined outside of the permitted area and approve a new reclamation plan for the Jeepster Farms parcel. Consistent with the plans for the existing aggregate mining phases, reclamation of mined areas would occur as soon as feasible, with slopes graded at a 3:1 ratio followed by the replacement of overburden and topsoil, and revegetation to match existing nearby vegetated areas.

Mining activities proposed for the Jeepster Farms parcel would be authorized under a newly issued Conditional Use Permit, CUP No. 24-004, which is being processed independently from the existing CUP No. 99-009. Although the proposed operation represents an expansion of the existing aggregate mining area previously associated with CUP No. 99-009, CUP No. 24-004 would govern all mining-related activities within the Jeepster Farms parcel and would function as a distinct entitlement from the original permit. Mining and reclamation activities at the existing aggregate mine would be permitted under CUP No. 25-018 as described herein going forward.

Required Approvals

Before approving the project, the County is required to undertake CEQA review, including certification that the SEIR adequately identifies any significant environmental effects of the project pursuant to CEQA and the State CEQA Guidelines, and adoption of a mitigation monitoring and reporting program to reflect the measures required to mitigate significant impacts, if any, of the project. The SEIR is intended to provide the CEQA documentation for approval of the proposed project. In addition to the County, federal, state, and regional agencies that may have jurisdiction over aspects of the project may require certain permits and approvals. Discretionary actions and approvals of regulatory agencies that may be necessary for the project include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **County of Merced**
 - Certification of the SEIR
 - Approval of new conditional use permits for mining operations at the existing aggregate mining site (CUP No. 25-018) and the Jeepster Farms parcel (CUP No. 24-004).
 - Approval of an amendment to the existing mine reclamation plan for the existing aggregate mine pursuant to the Surface Mining and Reclamation Act (SMARA)
 - Approval of a new reclamation plan for the new Jeepster Farms Mine pursuant to SMARA

- Approval of revised reclamation financial assurances, if required
- **California Department of Conservation, Office of Mine Reclamation**
 - Review and concurrence with the amended and new mining reclamation plans and associated financial assurances pursuant to SMARA
- **San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District**
 - Modification of existing air quality permits (e.g., Authority to Construct and/or Permit to Operate), if required
- **Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board**
 - Modification of existing water quality permits or authorizations, if required
- **California Department of Fish and Wildlife**
 - Consultation and any required permits or approvals, if applicable
- **U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**
 - Authorization under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, if project activities are determined to affect jurisdictional waters or wetlands

Potential Environmental Impacts of the Project

The SEIR will evaluate whether implementation of the proposed project may potentially result in one or more significant environmental impacts. An initial study will be prepared to inform the scope and content of the SEIR and will be included as an appendix to the SEIR. The focus of the analysis in the SEIR will be on impacts that are determined to be potentially significant, and topics that are determined to have less-than-significant or no impacts will be addressed in the initial study. The full range of environmental topics will be addressed, including:

- **Aesthetics**, including adverse effect on a scenic vista, degradation of scenic resources, degradation of the existing visual quality of the area, and/or light or glare that could affect daytime and nighttime views;
- **Agriculture and Forestry Resources**, including loss or conversion of farmland to nonagricultural uses;
- **Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions**, including emissions of air pollutants and greenhouse gases during construction and operation, and odors;
- **Biological Resources**, including adverse effects on special-status species, riparian habitat, other sensitive habitats, and/or federally-protected wetlands, interference with the movement of any native resident or migratory fish or wildlife, and/or conflicts with local policies and/or conservation plans;
- **Cultural Resources and Tribal Cultural Resources**, including adverse changes in the significance of historical or archaeological resources, and/or disturbance of human remains;
- **Energy**, including project's energy usage from all applicable sources;
- **Geology and Soils**, including exposure of people or structures to the risk of loss, injury or death from seismic-related effects, soils constraints and/or landslides, soil erosion or the loss of topsoil, and/or issues related to septic tanks; and disturbance of paleontological resources;
- **Hazards and Hazardous Materials**, including hazards to the public or environment due to the routine transport, use or disposal of hazardous materials, or release of hazardous materials,

emission or handling of hazardous materials within one-quarter mile of a school, development on a site included on a list of hazardous materials sites (e.g., Cortese List), interference with an adopted emergency response or evacuation plan, and/or exposure to risk of injury or loss from wildfire;

- **Hydrology and Water Quality**, including violation of water quality standards or waste discharge requirements, interference with groundwater recharge, alteration of existing drainage patterns, generation of runoff that exceeds the capacity of existing or planned drainage facilities, placement of housing in the 100-year floodplain, impediments to flood flows, loss, injury or death due to flooding and/or inundation by seiche, tsunami or mudflow;
- **Land Use and Planning**, including physical division of established communities and consistency with adopted plans;
- **Mineral Resources**, including the loss of availability of known mineral resources and/or locally important mineral resources;
- **Noise**, including noise from construction, traffic, and other operational noise sources;
- **Population and Housing**, including direct and indirect unplanned population growth;
- **Public Services and Recreation**, including on the need to construct new public service and recreation facilities to maintain acceptable service ratios, and physical deterioration of existing parks and recreational facilities;
- **Transportation**, including conflicts with plans or policies related to circulation, transit, roadways, bicycle, or pedestrian facilities, conflict with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15064.3(b), increased hazards due to design features or incompatible uses, and/or inadequate emergency access;
- **Utilities and Service Systems**, including construction or relocation of public utility facilities, water supply, wastewater treatment capacity, and conflicts with solid waste reduction goals and regulations;
- **Wildfire**, including evaluation of whether the project would impair implementation of any emergency response or emergency evacuation plan; expose future residents to pollutant concentrations from wildfires; result in new infrastructure that will exacerbate fire risk; and expose people to risk of flooding and landslides as a result of post-fire runoff.

The issues to be addressed in the SEIR will be finalized after comments on the NOP are received. The SEIR will also address all other CEQA-mandated topics. Where the potential for the proposed project to cause significant environmental impacts is identified, the SEIR will include feasible mitigation measures to avoid or substantially lessen those impacts. The analysis for all topics will address direct and indirect impacts of the project, as well as cumulative impacts. Consistent with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15130, cumulative impacts will be discussed where the incremental impact of the project is cumulatively considerable when combined with other area projects. The SEIR will also evaluate the potential for the project to induce growth. In accordance with State CEQA Guidelines Section 15126.6, the SEIR will describe a range of reasonable alternatives to the project capable of meeting most of the project objectives and that would avoid or substantially lessen any potential significant effects identified for the project.

Public Scoping Comment Period

The County has established a 30-day public scoping period from **September 21, 2026, through October 21, 2026**. As required by the State CEQA Guidelines, within 30 days after receiving the NOP,

each responsible and trustee agency is required to provide the lead agency with specific detail about the scope, significant environmental issues, reasonable alternatives, and mitigation measures related to the responsible or trustee agency's area of statutory responsibility that will need to be explored in the SEIR. In the response, responsible and trusted agencies should indicate their respective level of responsibility for the project.

This NOP is being furnished to obtain suggestions and information from other agencies, organizations, and the public on the scope of issues and alternatives to consider in developing the SEIR. Written comments from interested parties are invited to ensure that the full range of environmental issues related to development of the SEIR are identified. All comments received, including names and addresses, will become part of the official administrative record and may be made available to the public.

During the public scoping comment period, the NOP is available for public review online at the following website:

<https://www.countyofmerced.com/414/Environmental-Documents>

A printed copy of this NOP is also available for review in person at the Merced County Community and Economic Development Department, 2222 "M" Street, 2nd Floor, Merced, CA 95340 and at the Merced County Library.

Public Scoping Meeting

During the 30-day public scoping period, the County will hold a public scoping meeting on September 30, 2026, at 4:00 p.m. The meeting will be held virtually via an online webinar at <https://tinyurl.com/Jeespter-Farms-Scoping-Meeting>. The public scoping meeting will provide an additional opportunity to receive and disseminate information, identify potential environmental issues of concern, and discuss the scope of analyses to be included in the SEIR. The scoping meeting is not a public hearing, and no decisions on the project will be made at this meeting. The meeting is provided as an additional opportunity for agencies, organizations, and the public to receive information on the project and obtain information on how to submit written comments on what environmental issues should be addressed in the SEIR. All public agencies, organizations, and interested parties are encouraged to attend and participate in the meeting.

Scoping Comments

All scoping comments must be received in writing by **5:00 p.m. on Wednesday, October 21, 2026**, which marks the end of the 30-day public scoping period. All written comments should indicate an associated contact person for the agency or organization, if applicable, and reference the project name in the subject line. Pursuant to CEQA, responsible agencies are requested to indicate their statutory responsibilities in connection with the project when responding. Please mail or email comments and direct any questions to the following contact person:

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