

State quizzes goats' *Goat Ranch* owner

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One month after Santa Cruz Biotechnology cleared out its 1,600 goats, the state wants to know what happened to the animals.

The state Regional Water Quality Control Board has written to the company owned by John and Brenda Stephenson demanding the information.

"It's pretty simple for us," said Bill Arkfeld of the water quality board's district office in San Luis Obispo, near where the Stephensons own several thousand acres of grazing land.

"If they are moving to a part of our region, there is reasonable evidence there could be problems at the new site."

Arkfeld also said it would be "negligent" of the state not to alert local health officials and that the state has the authority to fine the Stephensons if they don't provide some information.

The Stephensons and their representatives could not be reached to comment Monday.

The state Coastal Commission ordered the 4-year-old goat ranch near Davenport to close because of high bacteria counts in runoff from the ranch, damage to coastal meadows and lack of permits from the state and county.

The animals are raised for their blood, which supplies the company's Westside Santa Cruz headquarters with antibodies marketed worldwide for cancer research.

The owners quickly complied with the order but have not revealed where they took the goats.

The Stephensons said at one point that they were considering taking them to Texas or Nevada, but opponents of the goat ranch have repeatedly speculated that the goats were moved to Stephenson property near Shandon in San Luis Obispo County.

Staff members at the San Luis Obispo County's Health Department said they could not confirm whether the goats had been moved to their jurisdiction. But the county Assessor's Office has records of several parcels owned by the Stephensons including at least one with barns.

The Stephensons said in an earlier interview with the Sentinel that their San Luis Obispo County property was strictly for personal use, not business.

Arkfeld said the state agency wants to know where the goats are so it can monitor potential water-quality problems.

Arkfeld said he hadn't personally been to the Stephenson property near Shandon but he said his staff would "probably snoop around regardless just to go do a basic water-quality check."