

STAFF ANALYSIS

DISCUSSION AND ACTION BY THE BOARD TO APPROVE THE REQUEST BY THE BIG FRESNO FAIR AND BERNAL PARK RACING LLC FOR RACE DATES IN SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER 2025.

Regular Board Meeting
June 19, 2025

ISSUE:

On or about June 3, 2025, the California Horse Racing Board (“CHRB” or “the Board”) received a request for racing dates from The Big Fresno Fair (“Fresno”) and Bernal Park Racing LLC. Fresno and Bernal Park have requested race dates for September 17 through October 7, for a total of seven live racing days (September 19, 20, 21, 26, 27, 28 & October 1). If approved, Fresno will run its race meet with Bernal Park and the meet will be called *The Big Fresno Fair Race Meet Sponsored by John Harris & Bernal Park Racing, LLC*. One day of this proposed race meet—October 1—would overlap with The Big Fresno Fair.

ANALYSIS:

Business & Professions Code § 19440(a)(6) authorizes the Board to allocate racing dates and CHRB Rule 1430 requires that the Board allocate racing dates in a way that “will best subserve the purposes of the Horse Racing Law and which will be in the best interests of the people of California in accord with the intent of the Horse Racing Law.” The Board is authorized to allocate fractional racing weeks of four days or less. See Bus. & Prof. Code § 19414.5. The Board may, at any time, change, limit, restrict, or reallocate racing weeks. Bus. & Prof. Code § 19530(b).

Should the Board decide to award these race days and approve this race meet, HCFA will have the right to simulcast and collect wagers for both out-of-state races as well as other races happening simultaneously in California in the southern and central zones. See Bus. & Prof. Code § 19596.2 (permitting simulcasting of out-of-state thoroughbred races) and § 19601 (permitting simulcasting of in-state races). If the Board does not award HCFA with the above-proposed race dates, the active race meet in the southern zone during these dates will be deemed to be operating in the northern zone for the purpose of simulcasting and related wagering. Bus. & Prof. Code § 19531(d)(3).

BACKGROUND:

Authority:

Bus. & Prof. Code § 19440 (in part): (a) The board shall have all powers necessary and proper to enable it to carry out fully and effectually the purposes of this chapter. Responsibilities of the board shall include, but not be limited to, all of the following:

(6) Allocation of racing dates to qualified associations in accordance with law.

CHRB Rule 1430 (Board Allocation of Racing Dates): The Board shall allocate racing weeks and dates for the conduct of horse racing in this State for such time periods and at such racing facilities as the Board determines will best subserve the purposes of the Horse Racing Law and which will be in the best interests of the people of California in accord with the intent of the Horse Racing Law. Upon a finding by the Board that the allocation of racing weeks and dates for any racing year is completed, the racing weeks and dates so allocated shall be subject to reconsideration or amendment only for conditions unforeseen at the time of the allocations. The allocation of racing weeks and dates does not commit the Board to the granting of a license to conduct a horseracing meeting to any specific racing association nor for the allotted time period nor at the racing facility scheduled for such racing weeks and dates.

Bus. & Prof. Code § 19414.5 (Racing Days, Weeks, and Fractional Weeks): (a) “Racing days” are days on which a licensed racing association or fair is authorized by the board to conduct horse racing.

(b) “Racing weeks” are seven consecutive days during which a licensed racing association or fair is authorized by the board to conduct horse racing for a minimum of five racing days. The board, however, upon joint petition of the association or fair and the organization representing horsemen participating in the meeting of that association or fair, may authorize the conduct of horse racing for less than five racing days. Fractional racing weeks of four days or less may be authorized by the board at the beginning and end of any horse racing meeting. Fractional weeks may also be authorized during weeks containing holidays and during periods of overlap with thoroughbred meetings and fairs if the total number of weeks authorized by the board in any calendar year for each breed does not exceed the maximum annual allocation of racing weeks provided for in Article 6 (commencing with Section 19530). If a licensed racing association holds a split meeting, each part of the split meeting shall be deemed a horse racing meeting solely for the purposes of authorizing fractional racing weeks.

Bus. & Prof. Code § 19530: (a) The board shall have the authority to allocate racing weeks to an applicant or applicants pursuant to the provisions of this article and Article 6.5 (commencing with Section 19540) and to specify such racing days, dates, and hours for horse racing meetings as will be in the public interest, and will subserve the purposes of this chapter. The decision of the board as to those racing days, dates, and hours shall be subject to change, limitation, restriction, or reallocation only by the board. No municipality or county shall adopt or enforce any ordinance or regulation that has or may have the effect of directly or indirectly regulating, limiting, restricting, or reallocating the racing days and dates of horse racing meetings.

(b) The board may, at any time, change, limit, restrict, or reallocate racing weeks, days, or dates that are allocated pursuant to this section regardless of whether a condition giving rise to that action is foreseen at the time of allocation or whether a license is issued to conduct a horse racing meeting during an allocated week, day, or date. The board's exercise of authority pursuant to this subdivision is not a revocation subject to the proceedings required by Section 19461, regardless of any effect on a license issued under this chapter.

Bus. & Prof. Code § 19531 (in part): (d) (1) Notwithstanding any other law, if the board does not license a thoroughbred race meet to be conducted by a racing association at a racetrack located in the cities of Berkeley and Albany after July 1, 2024, a thoroughbred racing

association, or racing fair, in the southern or central zone licensed by the board to conduct a thoroughbred race meet or fair meet shall, during racing weeks not allocated by the board for a race meet in the northern zone, be deemed to be operating in the northern zone for the purpose of conducting all permissible forms of wagering in the northern zone pursuant to this chapter and making and receiving required distributions from those wagers in accordance with this chapter.

(2) Required distributions described in paragraph (1) shall be made in accordance with the requirements applicable to a racing association in the northern zone and any consent or approval rights shall be exercised by the appropriate racing association or racing fair in the central or southern zone conducting racing.

(3) The amounts generated for purses and commissions pursuant to this subdivision shall be used to pay simulcast funding requirements and board support that the thoroughbred racing associations and racing fair in the central or southern zones are required to make under Section 19616.51. Any remaining funds after those payments are made shall be distributed to each thoroughbred racing association and racing fair in the central and southern zone proportionally based on their respective handle in the central and southern zone during the previous fiscal year and that money shall be divided between purses and commissions in the same relative proportion as was generated in the central and southern zone during the previous fiscal year.

RECOMMENDATION:

This item is presented for Board discussion and action.



June 3, 2025

Re: Big Fresno Fair Application for Racing Dates in 2025

Dear CHRB Executive Director Chaney, Board Chairman Ferraro and Vice Chairman Gonzales, and Board Members Alfieri, Castellanos, Davis, Hudnut and Stern:

On behalf of The Big Fresno Fair and its Board of Directors, we respectfully request approval of the California Horse Racing Board (CHRB) to host a 2025 live race meet September 17 – October 7, in service to our Central Valley community and to benefit the owners, trainers, breeders, horsemen, and racing fans throughout the Northern California region.

Race Dates:

The specific race dates we request are September 19 – 21, 26 – 28 and October 1. A total of seven (7) days of racing. The timing of our live horse race meet will help attract a large number of horses from Washington and Wyoming, as well as California. These horses are primarily Thoroughbreds that left the State of California due to the closure of Pleasanton as a Training Facility earlier this year, which is between 400 – 500 horses. This meet will be named: *The Big Fresno Fair Race Meet Sponsored by John Harris & Bernal Park Racing, LLC.*

Staffing a Live Race Meet:

In making this request, The Big Fresno Fair has agreed with Bernal Park Racing, LLC to utilize services of Larry Swartzlander as Director of Racing, Tom Doutrich as Racing Secretary and Director of Buildings & Grounds, Safety and Track Maintenance. Stephanie Wedge as a Consultant for Marketing, Sponsorships and other External Affairs. All three are employees of Bernal Park Racing, LLC and report to George Schmitt and John Harris; as well as The Big Fresno Fair team as a collaborative partner.

Please consider the following points when considering the approval of our race meet dates:

Race Dates

- Race dates from September 19 to October 1, strategically follow the closing of Emerald Downs in Washington and the closure of Wyoming Downs. After this requested race meet, horses will ship to Ferndale if their dates are approved and then move on to Southern California or other tracks that operate during the Winter Season.





Financial Viability

- We have prepared a detailed Business Plan in collaboration with Bernal Park Racing, LLC that is enclosed with this letter. Conservative projections on wagering handle, still produce a net profit, which we are confident will come to fruition.
- Bernal Park Racing, LLC – which is managed by George Schmitt & John Harris, large breeders and owners of race horses in Northern California, as well as savvy businessmen, has agreed to take on the financial risk of this meet – although we believe this meet will be a success.
- Last year, The Big Fresno Fair did well financially with the dates that were awarded them – recording \$3.2M in on-track handle.
- We expect purses to be about the same as 2024, and will run both the Bulldog Stakes and The Harris Farms Stakes for Cal Breds. We are investing in upgrades to the stable area as we speak and have allocated significant funds for advertising and already have secured an additional major Sponsor for our meet.

Marketing Strength

- In 2024, The Big Fresno Fair successfully marketed 14 days of live horse racing – seven held prior to the Fair and seven during the Fair – drawing enthusiastic crowds of seasoned wagerers and new fans alike. The event's strong attendance and \$3.2 million in on-track handle demonstrated both the demand for racing in our region and the strength of our promotional reach.
- For 2025, we propose a similarly strategic campaign to support the requested race dates leading up to the Fair, with a final race day on Opening Day to build momentum into Fair season. Our experienced team excels at producing dynamic racing experiences that engage both bettors and families, creating an atmosphere that's both festive and rooted in tradition.
- With direct access to a marketing network of more than 190,000 through our email database and social media platforms, as well as longstanding partnerships with local media – our outreach is immediate, targeted and effective. We also anticipate strong sponsorship and advertising support, building on our past success.
- Horse racing holds a deep and lasting place in the heart of the Central Valley, and this meet represents more than just dates on a calendar – it's a promise to deliver the magic of the sport to a community that treasures horse racing. Marketing this meet won't be a challenge – it will be a celebration.

Conclusion

On February 28, 2025, The Big Fresno Fair Board of Directors made the difficult decision to postpone horse racing for the year, due to the absence of a managing entity following the pivoting of CARF and no viable group to assume operational or financial responsibility. At the same time, a Horse Racing Committee was established to monitor the evolving industry landscape and explore a path forward.





In the months that followed, that path began to take shape. Prominent breeder, owner and Fresno native John Harris – a longtime supporter of live racing at The Big Fresno Fair – approached Fair leadership to express concern and a desire to help restore racing in his hometown. Working alongside fellow industry leader George Schmitt, the two formed Bernal Park Racing, LLC, with a roster of longtime horse racing experts to provide the missing piece of the puzzle – an operational solution to managing all aspects of the race meet – as well as financial backing.

At its May 27 meeting, The Big Fresno Fair Board unanimously voted to support the partnership with Bernal Park Racing, LLC and John Harris to seek 2025 race dates from the CHRB. This partnership provides the structure, expertise and financial commitment needed to fill the void left in the industry – while preserving an institution that has been central to our community since 1883.

Horse racing at The Big Fresno Fair is more than a sport – it’s a legacy. Our track has long been one of the busiest and most vibrant in the state, thanks to strategic investments in facilities, creative promotions and a strong connection to our audience. From longtime bettors to young families, the community has shown time and time again how deeply it values this tradition – and it is calling for its return.

On behalf of the Board of Directors, our Fair team, and the many horsemen, businesses and fans who depend on this meet, we respectfully and urgently request your support in assigning the dates we’ve proposed. With your approval, we will bring racing back to Fresno—and deliver a successful, high-quality meet that honors the past and builds toward a stronger future.

Sincerely,

Christina Estrada, CEO
The Big Fresno Fair
O: (559) 650-3212 | C: (559) 349-8578
Email: cestrada@fresnofair.com





The Big Fresno Fair In Partnership with John Harris & Bernal Park Racing, LLC Horse Race Meet – Business Plan

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- **Event Name:** The Big Fresno Fair Race Meet sponsor by John Harris & Bernal Park Racing, LLC
- **Dates:** Sept 19, 20, 21 & 26, 27, 28 & Oct 1, 2025
- **Location:** Fresno Fairgrounds
- **Organizer:** John Harris & Bernal Park Racing, LLC
- **Expected Attendance:** 2,500 a day during racing days
- **Event Type:** Thoroughbred Racing

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of The Big Fresno Fair and partners John Harris and Bernal Park Racing is to host a premier horse racing event that showcases Thoroughbred Racing, provides an engaging entertainment experience for attendees, and contributes to the local economy through tourism, sponsorship, and betting revenues.

EVENT OVERVIEW

The Big Fresno Fair Race Meet is a 3-day weekend horse racing meet that will feature 8-10 races a day for Thoroughbreds while creating family-friendly activities in the Brian I. Tatarian Grandstand.

- **Dates:** Sept 19, 20, 21 & 26, 27, 28 & Oct 1, 2025
- **Venue:** Fresno Fairgrounds
- **Races:** 3 Thoroughbred Race Days weekly
- **Purse Funds:** \$110,000 x 7 = \$770,000 total, with individual race winnings \$13,500 on average

Key Attractions:

- Two Stakes Races with notable jockeys and horses.
- A VIP Experience offering exclusive access to racehorses and behind-the-scenes tours.
- Live music performances from local artists.
- Full-service concession stand that brings in profit

MARKET RESEARCH & ANALYSIS

Industry Overview:

Horse racing is a prominent global sport with an estimated \$176B industry. In the U.S. alone, horse racing generates approximately \$116B, in betting revenue annually. The target audience for this event will primarily be sports enthusiasts, gamblers, residents, and tourists.

- **Key Trends:**
 - Increased interest in betting, both in-person and online.
 - Rise in family-oriented entertainment at track in conjunction with Opening Day of the Fair.
 - Growing adoption of tech-driven fan experiences (e.g., mobile betting apps, live streaming).



Target Audience:

- **Demographics:**
 - Age: 18-90
 - Income: Middle to upper-income earners, with a particular focus on those who enjoy high-stakes betting or luxury experiences.
 - Interests: Sports fans, gambling enthusiasts, families, eventgoers.
- **Psychographics:**
 - Attendees who appreciate the excitement and tradition of horse racing.
 - Corporate groups and businesses looking for networking opportunities.
 - Families seeking entertainment and outdoor activities.

Competition:

- **Local Competitors:**
 - Tribal Gaming Casinos
 - Card Rooms
 - Online Sports Betting
 - Illegal Book Making
- **Competitive Advantage:**
 - The Big Fresno Fair stands out by combining both thrilling races and a comprehensive family experience, alongside top-tier hospitality and exclusive betting experiences.
 - Strategic partnership with renowned brands and sponsors in the horse racing industry.

MARKETING STRATEGY

Promotion Channels:

- **Branding & Positioning:**
 - Establish a brand identity with a tagline that reinforces the quality race meet it provides.
 - Design a professional logo and consistent visual themes for use across all event materials, including posters, social media and event merchandise.
- **Direct Marketing Channels:**
 - **Social Media:**
 - Establish social media profiles for Bernal Parking Racing, LLC (Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X).
 - Utilize partner posts with The Big Fresno Fair to cross-promote to their large audience.
 - Create a consistent flow of content from interactive posts, live updates, giveaways, and behind-the-scenes content.
 - Utilize paid ads on Facebook and Instagram for targeted advertising to racing fans, sports enthusiasts and residents.



- **Email Marketing:**

- Build opt-in email database to communicate with racing fans and wagerers to build excitement.
- Utilize partner databases to promote race meet and attract attendees; offer giveaways and ticket discount incentives.

- **Website:**

- Establish a dedicated website that features race schedule, entry information, ticket details and information on vendors / amenities at the track.
- Provide an online ticket purchase option for convenience and to drive early ticket sales.

- **Advertising:**

- Establish comprehensive advertising-buy that spans multiple mediums (Radio, TV, Billboard, Digital Ads, etc.) that drives awareness of race meet and drives traffic to the website to get details and purchase tickets.
- Consideration will be given to horse racing industry outlets for advertising such as Daily Racing Forum, etc.

- **Media Relations:**

- Create a media kit for news outlets to cover the race meet, et information on owners, trainers, jockeys, horses to create excitement.
- Sent out proactive press release to local, national and industry media outlets leading up to the race meet.
- Organize a press conference to announce the Bernal Park Racing meet with all parties involved, local officials and community members.

- **Sponsorships:**

- **Tiered Sponsorships** - Offer a range of sponsorship packages (e.g., Title Sponsorship, Race Sponsorships, VIP Experience Sponsor).
- **Sponsor Party Packages** - Create unique racing experiences that businesses can purchase as part of the Sponsor Party Packages that would give their business/organization exposure.

Ticketing Strategy:

- **Ticket Types:**

- **General Admission:** \$10 for a reserves seat
- **VIP Experience:** \$50.00 with access to exclusive areas, private lounges, and meet-and-greets with jockeys and horses. (No Projected Revenue)
- **Group Packages:** Discounts for corporate groups, family packages, and student tickets.
- **Early Bird Sales:** Offer discounts or exclusive gifts for early ticket buyers (e.g., free merchandise or VIP access).



OPERATIONS PLAN

Venue Setup:

- **Infrastructure:**
 - **Racecourse:** Ensure the track meets all safety and operational standards.
 - **Stables:** Prepare stables for horses and ensure proper grooming and veterinary services.
 - **Grandstands:** Setup seating areas for VIP and general admission guests.
 - **Hospitality:** Establish restaurants, bars, and food courts for concessions.

Staffing:

- **Event Coordinators:** A team to manage event logistics and vendor coordination.
- **Security:** Staff to ensure safety for both horses and guests, including crowd control and emergency medical services.
- **Race Officials:** Ensure races run smoothly with licensed referees, timekeepers, and stewards.
- **Customer Service:** Staff for guest relations, ticketing, and answering inquiries.

Permits & Insurance:

- Obtain permits for live betting, alcohol consumption, and animal welfare.
- Secure event insurance covering potential liabilities (weather disruptions, accidents, etc.).

FINANCIAL PLAN

Revenue Streams:

- **Ticket Sales:** \$375,000
- **Sponsorships:** Net Revenue from corporate sponsors. \$200,000.
- **Betting Revenue:** Commissions from onsite betting. \$750,000.
- **Concessions:** Net Income from food, beverage \$176,000.
- **Parking:** \$105,000.

Projected Profit & Loss:

- **Revenue Projections:** Projections are based off 2,000 cars per day and 2,000 in attendance per day for 7 days of racing.
 - Ticket Sales: \$375,000
 - Sponsorships Net: \$200,000
 - Betting: \$750,000
 - Concessions \$176,000
 - Parking \$105,000
 - **Total Revenue Projections: \$1,606,000**
- **Expenditure Projections**
 - Marketing: \$150,000
 - Leasing of Equipment: \$80,000
 - Labor \$750,000



- HISA/CHRB \$100,000
- Insurance \$100,000
- Professional Services \$200,000
- Misc: \$100,000
- Total Expenditure Projections: \$1,480, 000

- **Projected Profit:** \$126,000

RISK MANAGEMENT

Potential Risks:

- **Weather Disruptions:** High Heat could affect attendance or race scheduling.
 - **Mitigation:** N/A.
 - **Low Ticket Sales:** N/A.
 - **Mitigation:** Implement aggressive early marketing campaigns, offer group discounts, and boost last-minute sales with promotions.
- **Security and Safety:** Issues with crowd control, accidents, or betting fraud.
 - **Mitigation:** Ensure professional security staff, and employ technology to track betting activities and crowd behavior.

CONCLUSION

The Big Fresno Fair Racing meet will be a high-profile event with the potential to become an annual attraction. By delivering top-tier entertainment, excellent horse racing cards, and a memorable experience for all attendees, the event will generate substantial revenue through ADW wagering, sponsorships, and partnerships, while also contributing positively to the local economy.

2025 Bernal Racing LLC Proposed Dates

2024 6.3.25

December						
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31						

RACE DAYS	
Alameda County Fair	0
California State Fair	0
Sonoma County Fair	0
Dark Days	23
Humboldt County Fair	6
Big Fresno Fair	7
Simulcast Days	6
Bernal Racing LLC	13

Fresno Sep 17 - Oct 7; HCF Oct 8 - Oct 28

2025

January						
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