

DOCKETED	
Docket Number:	24-OPT-02
Project Title:	Compass Energy Storage Project
TN #:	263755
Document Title:	Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation Comments - Opposition to BESS Project
Description:	N/A
Filer:	System
Organization:	Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation
Submitter Role:	Other Interested Person
Submission Date:	6/3/2025 10:01:15 AM
Docketed Date:	6/3/2025

Comment Received From: Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation
Submitted On: 6/3/2025
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Juaneño Band of Mission Indians Opposition to BESS Project

Additional submitted attachment is included below.



Juaneño Band of Mission Indians

Acjachemen Nation

Tribal Council

Nathan K. Banda • Chairman

Andrew C. Lara • Vice Chair

Shannon Wingfield • Secretary

Frank Barraza • Member at Large

Georgia “Chena” Edmundson • Member at Large

June 3, 2025

David Hochschild, Chair
California Energy Commission
715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Formal Opposition to the Compass Battery Energy Storage Project in San Juan Capistrano

Dear Chair Hochschild:

The Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation—the first people of the lands now called San Juan Capistrano—writes to express strong and formal opposition to the proposed Compass Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Project by Engie North America. The proposed siting of this facility poses a significant and unacceptable threat to cultural resources, tribal cultural resources, public safety, environmental health, and the economic well-being of one of California’s most historically significant cities.

Cultural, Tribal Cultural, and Historical Incompatibility

The Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation represents 1,941 tribal citizens who are formally and lineally connected to pre-first sustained contact villages, with genealogical ties traced through the Mission San Juan Capistrano registers—a record that serves as historical proof of our continued presence and relationship to this land for thousands of years. Today, we are not only the original stewards of this region, but we are an integral part of the modern fabric of San Juan Capistrano, serving as its cultural foundation. Thus, pursuant to Public Resources Code, Section 21080.3, the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation, is a tribe that is traditionally and culturally affiliated with the geographic area and has expertise concerning its tribal cultural resources in the area. The Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation, respectfully requests to consult with the CEC on the BESS project in accordance with the procedures outlined in Public Resources Code, section 21080.3.1.

The Project site sits in close proximity to Putuidem, the ancient mother village of our people. This sacred location remains irreplaceable to the Acjachemen Nation and is recognized in the historical and ethnographic record. Scholars such as Harrington (1933:219–220), Boscana (1933:57, 60), and Kroeber (1925:636) identify the site—described as a spring-fed area about a quarter-league from the Mission—as the home of Chief Oyaisson and his daughter Coronne, or “Putuidem.” The area corresponds to site CA-Ora-855, a large and late village site, further affirming its sacred cultural value (Drover and Koerper 1980:1–2).

Placing a hazardous industrial facility so close to a site of this magnitude would be a devastating erasure of cultural respect and a violation of Indigenous heritage.

Severe Economic Impact to a Historic Landmark City

San Juan Capistrano is home to Mission San Juan Capistrano, California's "Jewel of the Missions" and a cornerstone of statewide tourism, education, and cultural programming. This living monument is central to the city's identity and economic sustainability of the city and the surrounding region.

The risks posed by the Project threaten to undermine this historic setting. A facility malfunction, fire, or emergency would prompt evacuations, road closures, environmental damage, and negative media coverage—each of which could sabotage local tourism, reduce historic site visitation, and diminish the city's character and value.

San Juan Capistrano's cultural tourism economy is uniquely vulnerable to this type of industrial intrusion. The consequences would ripple across small businesses, the hospitality industry, education programs, and public trust in the safety and serenity of the area.

Public Safety and Environmental Risk

The proposed facility introduces severe and site-specific dangers. Recent BESS fires have proven that these energy storage systems can result in toxic plumes, thermal runaway, explosions, and regional evacuations. These incidents are not theoretical; they are demonstrated threats in similar facilities across California.

The Project area also lies within or adjacent to "High" and "Very High" Fire Hazard Severity Zones, as designated by the State Fire Marshal in 2025, and is immediately surrounded by dense residential neighborhoods, upslope homes in Laguna Niguel, and constrained evacuation routes. Additionally, its proximity to freeways, railroad tracks, and a Kinder Morgan gas pipeline introduces a compounding risk of catastrophic emergency.

Furthermore, the Project is located near Trabuco Creek, Oso Creek, and a degraded waterway cited in a 2021 Orange County Public Works report, which identified it as requiring major rehabilitation. Any fire, malfunction, or release of chemical suppressants or toxic materials could result in runoff contamination, risking massive ecological harm.

Inadequacy of State Oversight and Local Land Use Protections

The current state energy review process allows large-scale BESS developers to bypass local zoning and public engagement, rendering communities like San Juan Capistrano powerless to protect themselves. In response, San Juan Capistrano, as well as several local governments, have enacted temporary moratoria or passed resolutions of opposition.

The attempted siting of the Compass Project—in direct contradiction to the City's moratorium and without

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The attempted siting of the Compass Project—in direct contradiction to the City’s moratorium and without meaningful local control—violates the spirit of California’s environmental justice and cultural preservation laws.

Conclusion and Formal Stance

The Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation respectfully urges all decision-making bodies, including the California Energy Commission, to reject the Compass Battery Energy Storage Project.

We stand with the community of San Juan Capistrano—our ancestral home—and call on state leaders to uphold their duty to protect cultural heritage, environmental safety, and community sovereignty by rejecting this project



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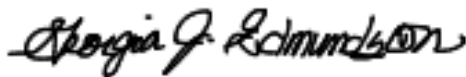
Nathan K. Banda
Chairman
Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation



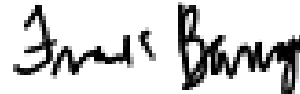
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