

<b>DOCKETED</b>	
<b>Docket Number:</b>	26-OPT-02
<b>Project Title:</b>	Seahawk Battery Energy Storage System
<b>TN #:</b>	270209
<b>Document Title:</b>	Please protect low income people of color, farmland and natural lakes, deny Seahawk
<b>Description:</b>	N/A
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<b>Organization:</b>	Linda Aron
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*Comment Received From: Linda Aron  
Submitted On: 5/22/2026  
Docket Number: 26-OPT-02*

**Please protect low income people of color, farmland and natural lakes, deny Seahawk**

Thank you for the opportunity to present a comprehensive letter detailing the hazards to human and environmental health that would result from a lithium BESS at the densely populated, rural neighborhood at Minto Road in Watsonville. Our community does NOT want to have this happen near our homes, schools, and childcare facilities. New Leaf has not sufficiently met with our community and has shown disregard and contempt for our safety and quality of life in their predatory siting near low-income people of color. Two beautiful, rare natural lakes exist alongside Minto Road, and the proposed site is in an earthquake and flood zone. There are listed endangered and threatened species, and prehistoric and Ohlone cultural resources at College Lake--making this proposal illogical, insensitive and dangerous. Thank you for your time in reviewing my letter, please deny the application docket # 26-OPT-02. Sincerely, Linda Aron

*Additional submitted attachment is included below.*

California Energy Commission  
715 P Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re: Docket 26-OPT-02 Seahawk Project, New Leaf Energy

May 22, 2026

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you so much for a moment of your time, to hear about how we residents feel about what New Leaf Energy and 3CE have proposed for rural Watsonville. Some of us have been fighting the plan for a lithium BESS at 90 Minto Road for over a year and a half, and a greatly growing movement of community resistance is emerging.

New Leaf Energy has gone away from working with Santa Cruz County towards seeking State approval for a lithium BESS to be situated on 14 acres next to College Lake, less than 300 feet from the nearest of over 2000 neighbors, who are largely Latino and who are low-income - including many elders, children, disabled. There is a migrant farmworker housing complex with over 300 residents, closest to the substations' highest recorded EMFs, which are already higher than the limits for people to live near. A BESS would add more EMF to this corner of the neighborhood, as well as chronic buzzing noise of 70-90 decibels, which has health impacts - affecting sleep, people with migraines, those who are immune-compromised, and the neurological development of young children, as well as the mental health and quality of life of those who have to live with this frustrating sound next to their homes.

There are 11 daycares and two eldercare facilities within 2 miles of Minto Road. The eldercare facilities and 4 of those childcare facilities are only 0.25 miles within the Minto neighborhood.

College Lake, whose shores would be the site of the proposed BESS, is in an earthquake zone right on a fault line, and is a flood zone. The main throughfare road adjacent to Green Valley and Minto is Paulsen Road, which gets closed 3 months a year due to flooding. Even if Paulsen road gets fixed as it recently received grant monies to accomplish this, traffic obstruction during a BESS buildout..and any Godforsaken evacuation due to a fire - are sheerly impossible. Lack of traffic ingress and egress and lack of a viable number of ways to evacuate is life-threatening for people.

Shelter-in-place is not possible in the case of a hydrogen fluoride-emitting plume fire from a lithium iron chemistry BESS. Nanoparticles from hydrogen fluoride gas can seep through and penetrate homes. The longer people would be stuck in traffic, they would suffer more exposure to highly toxic HF gas. There is no way for the 2000 residents within one mile of Minto Road to evacuate safely.

We have been articulating our concerns to the County for more than 18 months now; and with New Leaf's recent application to the CEC, they are demonstrating again how they can **weaponize the AB 205 process** in order to hurry and circumvent public input and obfuscate Santa Cruz County's attempt to complete an Ordinance. New Leaf Energy did not like that Supervisor District 1 Justin Cummings wrote into the Ordinance that they would have to replace prime ag land at a 3-to-1 acre. New Leaf Energy did not want Santa Cruz County to be able to approve the operator that they would sell the BESS to. These considerations are the minimal, at the level of conscience and concern for safety, and for community economic and environmental health. New Leaf has over and over shown our community that they intend to bully us, use us, and that we are expendable. Then they sell their BESS and walk away with their money. Why should they care...they will never see our faces, they are from Massachusetts.

We urge you to help the people and natural resources of Watsonville to be free of this disastrous plan to have a flammable lithium BESS here.

North Santa Cruz County Supervisors clearly do not want the BESS near their residents. The Chair of the Santa Cruz Board of Supervisors, Monica Martinez, District 5, is on the Board of Central Coast Community Energy, which will financially benefit from a partnership involving distributing electricity generated by a BESS in Watsonville. That is a grave conflict of interest. Supervisor Martinez does not want to face her constituents discontent with any BESS where they live, and refuses to consider a potential site in Bonny Doon at a substation where there are no people. Westside Santa Cruz and North County demand much of the electricity from the grid. Why should those areas then not host their own BESS?

Simply and plainly put, Latino people who are lower income are 85% of the majority in Watsonville, and the next tier majority are people of color from other regions— and they have historically had to put up with unwanted developments in our County. In the political climate of the current federal government, it is even more possible to disregard public process. The reality of persecution exists for Latino people at a nightmare level that no one imagined. Some people are afraid to come out and publicly gather, but they will write letters and sign and share our petition. We are begging you to be truly humane and consider the voices from our area who do not want this BESS. Help reverse the trend of predatory siting by denying New Leaf's application.

The people of Watsonville are not the largely white residents of north County Santa Cruz, not a community of tech people, UCSC professors, or the economic elite and privileged, who can solicit an attorney at the drop of a hat and intimidate any unwanted project away in a matter of days. My neighbors are however the most helpful, generous, fun, kind and hardworking people in Santa Cruz County. Many have worked their whole lives to own a home, which is of lesser value than in north Santa Cruz County - or are working four jobs to simply pay the rent. To put hardworking homeowners' property values down on a BESS stigma, to raise or make homeowner insurance impossible to get - that is a stark injustice. It is impossible to not point this out, and I do not intend to be rude by saying that racism and lack of respect for lower-income

people in infrastructure planning and development is very alive and well in communities across California, we all know this fact.

We in Watsonville have been a dumping ground for the County's unwanted projects for decades, due to the fact that our land has been compromised by big industrial Agriculture practices that are extremely negatively impactful to the soil, air, and health of residents and wildlife with endless fumigation, pesticides, fertilizers, and plastics. The County calls us "unincorporated Santa Cruz" to take away the sting of looking at the faces of the people this will happen to. Not outliers on some dusty fields in the middle of nowhere - we have thriving healthy, active neighborhoods with joyful families, elderly, dogwalkers and more who enjoy being outside in their yards and at the two nearby lakes together.

Clearly, the siting at 90 Minto Road was brought upon us by the property owner, Steven Dobler, who partnered with New Leaf in order to sell his unwanted land. New Leaf was then eagerly supported by the current and extremely negligent District 4 Supervisor Felipe Hernandez, who helped them to have minimal public contact with his lack of making any meetings with the public and completely refusing to answer our emails and calls -- and did not attend any of our public meetings until our last one, where he absurdly said he was going to fight the BESS with us - the BESS for which he proudly introduced New Leaf Energy upon us initially. Now that he is up for re-election, he is telling people he has changed his mind about the BESS due to the enormous unpopularity of this project which he ushered in on us in December 2024.

For some reason, despite the success of the United Farmworkers' Movement, people seem to see Watsonville as poorly organized, politically helpless and easy to take advantage of. The language barrier prevents some of our people from engaging in the local and state-level political process. Financial means for legal action may be harder to come by across the board here in lower-income South County, but we are already amassing quite a bit of monetary resource for our legal fund from people throughout Santa Cruz County at large who are passionate about stopping the BESS on environmental and social justice grounds.

Hundreds of neighbors have attended our 6 meetings over the course of the last 18 months, and there is a sharply escalating resistance to the Seahawk Minto Road project as many media entities have picked up the issue. It has become a defining matter in the upcoming County Supervisor election in our area. The resounding NO from our community can be heard in many languages that are spoken here: Spanish, Mixtec, Filipino, Japanese and English. The disapproval and appall that our community should be put upon for an out-of-state company to build a lithium BESS only 14 miles from the disaster at Moss Landing, is seen and felt in many ways.

There are safer, non-flammable alternatives to lithium, such as sodium or vanadium, which are already in use globally; and in our nation elsewhere in Watkins, Colorado at a facility that was manufactured by Peak Energy corporation. Peak Energy's website states that their sodium battery systems deliver the same receivables as lithium: 4 hours of reserve power during

blackout, EV charge power, supply the grid with backup reserves, and are ready for use NOW, not years from now.

Watsonville residents and wildlife deserve protection. We have many natural lakes, agricultural land, and populations of birds, fish and other natural resources not found anywhere else in the County. The endangered steelhead trout and long-toed salamander live here at College Lake, as well as listed threatened species of birds and plants.

I attach Demographic info sourced from ARC/GIS mapping , US Census Bureau Data and Santa Cruz County Open Data for your review, with some key points here:

Within 2 miles of 90 Minto Road are:

28,450 Latino residents just in the 2 miles around Minto Road;

2,948 monolingual Spanish speakers who have been nearly entirely left out of any public notice or meeting (since there has been only one with New Leaf in December 2024) about their homes and futures.

There are 3,010 people living with disabilities, 4,221 people on food stamps / SNAP;

6,985 children and youth aged 0 - 14 years old and 4,680 people over the age of 65;

12 schools (PVUSD and private elementary, junior high and high schools); 11 licensed daycare facilities, and 2 elder care skilled nursing and assisted living facilities on Behler Road just parallel to Minto.

There are known prehistoric and Ohlone artifacts and a burial site at College Lake, shown in the 2019 EIR for PV Water Management Agency's water storage project at Holohan Road. A map on page 439 of the College Lake EIR shows tremendous presence of shallow, moderate and deep artifact resources, also see site 124 on the map for the indicator of the Ohlone burial presence. This was brought to our attention by the Ohlone Cultural Monitor for the State of California, Patrick Orozco.

From data supplied by Skylar Sacoolas of Green Action Network, Santa Cruz via the CalEnviroScreen 4.0, the continued unjust burden to Watsonville is demonstrated as we are a noted burdened community in California:

[https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/11d2f52282a54ceebcac7428e6184203/page/CalEnviroScreen-4\\_0](https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/11d2f52282a54ceebcac7428e6184203/page/CalEnviroScreen-4_0)

Please see also the Healthy Places Index 3.0: <https://www.healthyplacesindex.org/>

Our people, air, soil, and water are already enormously impacted by pesticides and high rates of respiratory illness and disease due to polluted air from constant toxic soil discing from industrial agricultural practices.

People in Watsonville are 36% as healthy as the general population of the State of California, compared to 91% of people in Santa Cruz being healthy relative to the population of the State of California

**Placing a lithium BESS here is a cruelty to the people of Watsonville and an exhibition of textbook environmental racism.** While New Leaf Energy has declared it is applying to the State for approval under AB205, we want our County to continue to work on its' Ordinance - which they are not. So we must beg you to disallow this proposal to place a BESS near our neighborhood and in a highly sensitive ecological area, on prime farmland – and please do not allow flammable lithium chemistry at all in Santa Cruz County. There is no reason for lithium battery chemistry to be used any longer in BESS... it is outmoded and dangerous, and sodium battery chemistry already exists in Watkins, Colorado and has been used widely in China for years already— Peak Energy of Colorado is ready to build out nonflammable BESS that do not have to be cooled and therefore do not create noise either. Santa Cruz County, and California at large, should LEAD for SAFETY and ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE. Otherwise, this is not “green” at all, it is trading one hazard for another.

Thank you for acting on behalf of the thousands of people near Minto Road, and the tens of thousands of people in Watsonville who are against this project for so many reasons. Please do not support New Leaf Energy's proposal at 90 Minto Road. Show Californians that it is possible to stand up for people and the environment when corporations from out of state try to grab contracts and show utter disregard for those who would have to host their illogical and insensitive green-washed proposals, that would cause more harm than good, and which would change our beautiful and unique area indefinitely and irreversibly.

Respectfully yours,

Linda Aron, a.k.a Phoenix Artemisia, concerned resident, mother and business owner in Watsonville