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*Comment Received From: Kathy Cooney
Submitted On: 6/16/2026
Docket Number: 26-OPT-02*

Concerns over Minto Road Project in Watsonville CA

Dear Energy Commission,

I am writing to oppose New Leaf Energy's proposed lithium BESS located at 90 Minto Road and I oppose lithium battery chemistry being allowed in our county at all.

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.

Our largely Latino, hardworking community does not deserve to be asked to live with the highly risky New Leaf BESS project. According to ArcGIS mapping using SC County open data, within two miles of 90 Minto Road are:

2,948 monolingual Spanish speakers who have been nearly entirely left out of any public notice or meetings (since there have 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)

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

College Lake is home to threatened and endangered species, has Ohlone and prehistoric cultural evidence, is a flood zone and earthquake zone. Traffic at Minto Road and Green Valley are already at peak burden; evacuation routes are not secure, and the obstructions to neighbors for building out, much less evacuating, make for an impossible situation.

EMFs are already higher than health levels at the Minto substation, and a BESS would expose people to health hazards, increasing the likelihood of cancer. Chronic noise from inverters and cooling systems also aggravate health conditions, cause sleep issues, disturb pollinators vital for our main industry, agriculture.

There are dozens of serious reasons why this project is not appropriate, but it is also socially unjust and exhibits racism and socioeconomic predatory siting by our county and New Leaf Energy.

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Please do the right thing and do not allow New Leaf Energy's application, as it comes your way. Take the lead to make a BESS Ordinance that does not allow flammable lithium chemistry for any future BESS in our area. Thank you for your profound consideration and care towards the people of unincorporated Watsonville.

Take care,

Kathy Cooney
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Watsonville, CA 95076