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Comment Received From: Tyler Scott Grissom

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Wildly poor judgement in submitting this proposal

California Energy Commission:

I am writing as a resident of the Indian Wells Valley to express my strong opposition to the Small Power Plant Exemption requested for the RB Inyokern Data Center, Docket No. 26-SPPE-01. I respectfully request that the Commission reject this proposal.

The Indian Wells Valley is one of the hottest and driest inhabited regions in California, and our groundwater basin is already critically overdrafted. Local residents are being asked to accept higher costs, pumping restrictions, uncertain water rights, and the construction of an extremely expensive imported-water pipeline because decades of groundwater withdrawals have exceeded the basin's sustainable supply. The Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority has stated that the proposed pipeline is necessary to bring the basin into sustainable management by 2040.

Against that background, approving another large industrial water user would represent extraordinarily poor planning.

Previous land-use decisions allowed water-intensive agriculture to expand in the Mojave Desert, despite the obvious mismatch between large-scale agricultural pumping and the physical limitations of this basin. Local families and businesses are now being expected to bear the financial and practical consequences of those decisions. We should not repeat the same mistake by approving a massive data center that proposes to use evaporative cooling assistance during the hottest periods of the year, precisely when local water and electrical systems are under their greatest stress.

The applicant estimates that its hybrid cooling system would consume approximately 37 to 49 acre-feet of water annually and states that the facility would primarily use dry cooling. Even accepting that estimate, this is not an appropriate place to introduce a new, discretionary industrial demand for groundwater. In a critically overdrafted basin, the relevant question is not whether the project would use less water than some other data centers. The question is whether any additional consumptive groundwater use is responsible when the existing community is already being told that its present supply is unsustainable.

Furthermore, projected annual averages do not adequately address peak water demand, cooling requirements during prolonged extreme heat, future expansion, equipment changes, operational deviations, or the possibility that water-use estimates will prove inaccurate after the project is built. Any evaluation must examine enforceable maximum consumption, not merely estimates or representations offered during the approval process.

The Commission should also consider the cumulative impact of this project alongside existing agricultural, industrial, residential, military, and commercial groundwater demands. Each project may attempt to portray its individual consumption as a small percentage of total pumping, but the basin's current crisis is the cumulative result of many individual withdrawals being approved without sufficient regard for the basin's long-term limits.

Countless local residents, businesses, water users, and public agencies have raised serious concerns or expressed opposition to this project. The CEC docket itself contains numerous public comments addressing water supply, land use, infrastructure, public health, air quality, noise, and the adequacy of the proposed review. That opposition should not be treated as uninformed resistance to development. It reflects the lived experience of a community that understands how scarce, expensive, and politically contentious water has become in the Indian Wells Valley.

There is also a legitimate concern that the applicant selected this location because of available land and comparatively inexpensive power, while expecting a small desert community to absorb the project's water, infrastructure, environmental, and quality-of-life impacts. Whether or not that was the applicant's intent, the result would be the same. The economic benefits would largely accrue to the developer and data-center operator, while local residents would assume a substantial share of the long-term risk.

A project of this scale should not be permitted to move forward through a streamlined exemption based on narrow representations concerning its backup generators. The data center, cooling system, electrical demand, diesel generation, water consumption, infrastructure requirements, and reasonably foreseeable future expansion are interconnected parts of one project and should be evaluated together.

I respectfully request that the California Energy Commission:

- Reject the proposed RB Inyokern Data Center and deny the requested Small Power Plant Exemption;
- Require a full and comprehensive environmental review of the entire data-center project;
- Require an independent analysis of annual and peak-day water demand under worst-case summer conditions;
- Require disclosure of all anticipated phases and reasonably foreseeable expansion;
- Evaluate cumulative groundwater impacts alongside existing agricultural, industrial, residential, and military demands;
- Require enforceable water-use limits, independent monitoring, public reporting, and meaningful penalties for exceeding those limits; and
- Require any future data-center proposal in the Indian Wells Valley to use genuinely water-neutral or fully dry cooling rather than evaporative cooling supplied by the Indian Wells Valley groundwater basin.

The Indian Wells Valley should not be forced to finance an imported-water pipeline

while new discretionary industrial groundwater demands continue to be approved. That is not sustainability. It is a continuation of the same short-sighted decision-making that created this crisis.

This project is incompatible with the water limitations of the Indian Wells Valley. Inyokern is not the right location for a water-consuming industrial data center. The Commission should reject the proposal and deny Docket No. 26-SPPE-01.

Respectfully submitted,
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7 years