

DOCKETED

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Concerns About Wildlife, Water, and Need for RB Inyokern Data Center

Additional submitted attachment is included below.

PUBLIC COMMENT

RB Inyokern Data Center (RBIDC) - Docket No. 26-SPPE-01

September 3, 2026

California Energy Commission

Dear Commissioners and Staff:

As a California resident, I am asking the California Energy Commission not to grant the requested Small Power Plant Exemption for the RB Inyokern Data Center unless the project's environmental consequences have been fully and independently examined.

I am not opposed to new technology or artificial intelligence. I am concerned, however, that in the rush to build AI infrastructure we may make permanent decisions about California's water, wildlife habitat and energy resources before we know how many of these enormous facilities will actually be needed.

Desert habitat is not empty land.

The Indian Wells Valley is a functioning desert ecosystem. The project area and surrounding landscape support or potentially support sensitive wildlife including the Mojave desert tortoise, Mohave ground squirrel, burrowing owl, golden eagle, American badger and desert kit fox. The Mojave desert tortoise is now endangered under California law.

I am particularly concerned about cumulative habitat fragmentation. A 50-acre project cannot reasonably be considered in isolation from existing and future solar facilities, roads, transmission infrastructure and other development. Wildlife needs connected habitat, not simply small parcels on which an animal happened not to be observed during a survey.

Water should be treated as a limiting resource.

It is difficult to justify substantial new water demand for data-center cooling in an arid basin when much lower-water technologies are already available. Closed-loop and air-cooled systems, including systems already deployed at California data centers, can recirculate cooling fluid and dramatically reduce routine water consumption. The applicant should be required to demonstrate that the least water-intensive feasible technology will be used before this project advances.

California should also ask how much AI infrastructure is actually necessary.

Data-center electricity projections are growing extraordinarily quickly, while utilities and regulators nationally are confronting the problem of speculative or overlapping requests for power - sometimes described as "ghost demand." California should distinguish committed, demonstrable need from projections that may never materialize before sacrificing groundwater, habitat or grid capacity to accommodate them.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask the Commission to decline the SPPE unless it can determine, after comprehensive CEQA review, that the project will not create significant individual or cumulative environmental impacts. At a minimum, that review should fully address wildlife connectivity, groundwater and cumulative water demand, lower-water cooling alternatives, and whether the project's enormous resource demands are justified by demonstrated need.

California can support innovation without treating its deserts, wildlife and scarce water as expendable. I hope the Commission will insist on that standard here.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Ellen Segal
California

Selected sources: California Energy Commission, RB Inyokern Data Center, Docket 26-SPPE-01; CEC data-center program materials; California Department of Fish and Wildlife endangered-species information; commercially deployed California closed-loop/air-cooled data-center cooling systems; recent reporting on speculative data-center electricity demand.