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RBIDC Request for Full EIR and Complete Review - Docket 26-SPPE-01

Sarah Wersan
Resident of Ridgecrest

September 23, 2026

California Energy Commission
Docket Unit, MS-4
715 P Street
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: RB Inyokern Data Center, Docket No. 26-SPPE-01
Subject: RBIDC Request for Full EIR and Complete Review - Docket 26-SPPE-01

Dear Commissioners and CEC Staff:

My name is Sarah Wersan, and I live in Ridgecrest. I am submitting these comments because this project may affect the water, electricity, health, safety, environment, and public services our community depends on. I live near the proposed project site.

I have lived in Ridgecrest for about 15 years and use public water (Indian Wells Valley Water District) and electricity from SCE. Ridgecrest is a remote, rural town and is currently in water overdraft. It is important to me that the data center project in Inyokern (10 miles from me) gets a thorough review, especially if it is approved before January 1, 2027.

REQUEST FOR A FULL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT

I ask the CEC to prepare a full Environmental Impact Report (EIR), the state's most detailed public environmental review. California law requires an EIR when facts or fact-based expert opinions support a reasonable argument that a project may cause a significant environmental effect, even if the applicant has evidence pointing the other way. Public agencies and service providers have raised fact-based concerns about water, electricity, air quality, schoolchildren, biological resources, aviation, and the China Lake mission. An EIR would allow those disputes, reasonable alternatives, and enforceable protections to be reviewed in public before the CEC decides the exemption. (Public Resources Code section 21080; CEQA Guidelines section 15064; TNs 270501, 270593, 270613, 271008, and 271977.)

COMPLETE AND CONSISTENT PROJECT DESCRIPTION

I am concerned that important parts of the project remain conceptual, incomplete, or spread across many revised filings. The application says that final information is still pending for transmission rights-of-way, electrical and noise calculations, hazardous-material quantities, cooling design, the water balance, and service arrangements. CEC staff also requested missing information about construction water, truck trips, temporary access, staging, generator operation, and sensitive receptors. I ask the CEC to require one updated and internally consistent project description, with clear maps and operating limits, before circulating an environmental document. (TN 269893, section 3; TN 270553; TN 271129.)

ENFORCEABLE MONITORING AND PUBLIC REPORTING

Promises to submit a future plan are not enough unless someone must review the plan, inspect the work, report results, and correct violations. I ask the CEC to adopt a detailed Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program before any exemption. For each requirement, it should identify the standard, deadline, responsible party, reviewing agency, public report, enforcement authority, corrective action, and consequences of noncompliance. Any local agency asked to oversee the program should accept that responsibility in writing, and the CEC should retain an enforcement backstop. (CEQA Guidelines section 15097.)

WATER USE AND COOLING ASSUMPTIONS

The Indian Wells Valley Water District identified a serious inconsistency in the project's claimed water use. The claimed annual use works out to about 0.1 to 0.12 liters per kilowatt-hour, but the applicant's own sustainability table lists 0.1 to 0.3 liters per kilowatt-hour for closed-loop chilled water and 0.5 to 2.0 liters per kilowatt-hour for adiabatic cooling. Because the proposed system is described as a hybrid that includes evaporative or adiabatic features, I ask the CEC to require a complete water balance, explain the difference, and impose enforceable daily and annual water-use limits. (TN 269666, Appendix O, Table B.1; TN 271977.)

ICSD WATER AND WASTEWATER CAPACITY

The project relies on the Inyokern Community Services District (ICSD) for its main water and wastewater service. The Indian Wells Valley Water District states that the proposed annual demand of up to 49.1 acre-feet is almost half of ICSD's stated 102-acre-foot groundwater allotment. It also reports State Water Board concerns about ICSD's ability to provide safe and affordable water, possible consolidation, and litigation concerning replenishment fees. I ask the CEC to require proof of lawful, reliable, long-term water and wastewater capacity and a realistic fallback that does not assume another district will honor ICSD's Will-Serve letter. (TN 271977.)

ELECTRICITY NEEDED FOR COMMUNITY WELLS

Groundwater is the Indian Wells Valley's only local water source, and the Water District reports that approximately 800 electrically powered groundwater wells are near the proposed project. I am concerned that a new 99-megawatt load could compete with power needed to pump community water during extreme heat, a Public Safety Power Shutoff, or another grid emergency. I ask the CEC to analyze whether the local grid can serve the data center without reducing reliability for public water systems, domestic wells, emergency services, homes, and businesses, and to explain what service priority the data center would receive. (TN 271977.)

EMERGENCY WELL REMAINS UNVERIFIED

The applicant's July 28 emergency-well memorandum says no well currently exists on the property and that its yield estimates come from regional information and nearby wells. It says the analysis is preliminary and has not been confirmed by site-specific hydrogeology, drilling, geologic logging, water-quality sampling, well development, or pump testing. The separate geotechnical report found no water in shallow investigations ending at 85 feet, while mapped groundwater nearby was approximately 240.8 to 256.1 feet deep. The well memorandum also uses different demand figures: 42.1 gallons per minute, about 47 gallons per minute, and a planning range of 45 to 50 gallons per minute. At 45 to 50 gallons per minute for three days, pumping could total about 194,400 to 216,000 gallons. I ask the CEC to reconcile the figures; analyze drawdown and effects on nearby domestic, ICSD, and Navy wells; and adopt enforceable limits for rate, daily and event volume, duration, annual use, allowed purposes, monitoring, reporting, and corrective action. (TNs 270501, 271674, and 271675.)

AIR QUALITY AND EMERGENCY GENERATOR USE

I recognize that the applicant's revised air analysis evaluates several generator loads, warm-up emissions, and an assumed 150 hours per year of emergency operation. My concern is whether that emergency assumption covers reasonably foreseeable long outages and whether the final limits will be enforceable. I ask the CEC to explain the basis for 150 hours, evaluate longer or repeated outages and simultaneous emergency operation where appropriate, and require binding permit conditions for testing, hours, loads, emissions, and reporting. The analysis should protect nearby residents, children, older adults, and other sensitive people. (TNs 270553, 271094, 271129, and 271977.)

INYOKERN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

Inyokern Elementary School serves young children and is a sensitive receptor, but the application gives inconsistent distances. Some project materials list approximately 0.23 mile, while others list approximately 0.8 mile, and another agency described the school as less than 0.5 mile away. I ask the CEC to require a verified map showing the distance from the school to each generator yard, construction area, utility route, and project boundary. The review should address air pollution, noise, dust, traffic safety, emergency access, hazardous materials, and effects on school activities. (TNs 269893, 270593, 271008, and 271094.)

CHINA LAKE MISSION COMPATIBILITY

Naval Air Weapons Station China Lake raised concerns about long-term water supply, electromagnetic interference, and thermal plumes. The Navy stated that information was lacking about possible interference with weapons testing, telemetry, and range facilities, and that prevailing winds could carry heat, moisture, and exhaust plumes toward the test range. I ask the CEC to obtain and publicly address formal Navy input on water, electromagnetic interference, cooling and exhaust plumes, and any needed design limits before deciding the exemption. A future consultation should not replace the CEC's environmental analysis. (TN 270501.)

CLOSING REQUEST

For the concerns stated above, I ask the CEC to prepare a full EIR and issue any additional data requests needed to complete the record. At minimum, the CEC should not circulate an environmental document or decide the SPPE until the project description is stable, the important technical conflicts are resolved, and all necessary protections are specific and enforceable. Preparing an EIR does not automatically decide whether the CEC can later grant an SPPE. However, Public Resources Code section 25541 allows an exemption only if the CEC can find that the project will cause no substantial adverse impact on the environment or energy resources. If the completed record cannot support that finding after all feasible mitigation, the CEC should deny the exemption.

Please place this comment and the cited docket materials in the administrative record for Docket 26-SPPE-01.

Respectfully submitted,

Sarah Wersan
Resident of Ridgecrest