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CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION

715 P Street
Sacramento, California 95814

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CEC-70 (Revised 7/22)



*APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATION
FOR THE:*

Willow Rock Energy Storage Center

DOCKET NO. 21-AFC-02

Order Terminating the Suspension of the Willow Rock Energy Storage Center Proceeding 21-AFC-02

Pursuant to its authority under California Code of Regulations, title 20, section 1709(e), the California Energy Commission (CEC) Committee¹ in this proceeding issues this Order to terminate the Suspension Order issued August 9, 2023,² and to resume the prehearing phase of the proceeding based on the original Application for Certification (Original AFC) as revised by the Supplemental AFC (SAFC) for the Willow Rock Energy Storage Center (Willow Rock).³

Background

On December 1, 2021, GEM A-CAES LLC (Applicant) filed an application for certification (Original AFC) with the CEC seeking to construct and operate the Gem Energy Storage Center in Rosamond, California.⁴ On August 5, 2022, Applicant changed the name of the project to the Willow Rock Energy Storage Center (Willow Rock).⁵ Willow Rock was originally proposed as a nominal 500-megawatt (MW) energy storage center, deploying Hydrostor, Inc., Advanced Compressed Air Energy Storage (A-CAES) technology, and designed to charge at up to 500 MW for up to 14 hours

¹ On January 26, 2022, the California Energy Commission (CEC) appointed a committee of two commissioners to conduct proceedings on this matter. ([TN 241291](#).) On March 10, 2023, the CEC amended its assignment of a committee to this proceeding to consist of Andrew McAllister, Commissioner and Presiding Member, and Noemí Gallardo, Commissioner and Associate Member, to preside over any proceedings arising from the Application. ([TN 249087](#).)

² [TN 251599](#).

³ Information about this proceeding, including a link to the electronic docket, may be found on the CEC's [web page](#) at <https://www.energy.ca.gov/powerplant/caes/willow-rock-energy-storage-center>. Documents related to this proceeding may be found in the [online docket](#) at <https://efiling.energy.ca.gov/Lists/DocketLog.aspx?docketnumber=21-AFC-02>.

⁴ The original Application consists of various documents filed in the online docket beginning with [TN 240751-1](#).

⁵ [TN 244331](#).

and deliver up to 4,000 MW-hours (MWhs) of electricity over an 8-hour period. The Original AFC was proposed to be sited on two adjoining parcels totaling 71 acres in an unincorporated area of Kern County with the mailing address of 8684 Sweetser Road, Rosamond, California, 93560.

On July 13, 2022, the CEC found that the original AFC was complete.⁶ On August 11, 2022, the Committee convened a Public Site Visit and Informational Hearing in Rosamond, California.⁷ On August 26, 2022, the Committee adopted a Scheduling Order for the prehearing phase of the AFC to facilitate the parties' exchange of data and other information and the submission of monthly status reports.⁸

After active discovery and information exchanges between the parties and relevant state and local agencies, CEC staff (Staff) filed a motion to suspend the proceeding on the Original AFC,⁹ noting Applicant's active consideration of alternative surface facility configurations, cavern engineering options given the site geotechnical results, and alternate sites that may better support the cavern design. Applicant did not oppose Staff's motion to suspend.¹⁰ On August 9, 2023, the Committee granted Staff's motion to suspend the proceeding.¹¹ The Committee's Suspension Order directed the Applicant to continue filing monthly status reports, stayed all other deadlines, and directed the Applicant to "file a single supplemental AFC when it is prepared to update the project description and all required elements of the application reflecting any and all project modifications to satisfy the information requirements for an application as detailed in Appendix B to Article 6 of Title 20 in the California Code of Regulations."¹² As of the date of the suspension, Staff had not filed a preliminary staff assessment and the Committee had not conducted an evidentiary hearing.

Supplemental Application for Certification

Applicant filed a collection of documents beginning March 1, 2024, and culminating in an amended cover letter and attestation of the completeness of a supplemental application for certification for Willow Rock (SAFC) filed on March 8, 2024.¹³ Pursuant to the Suspension Order, Staff timely filed

⁶ See Order Finding the Application for Certification Complete pursuant to California Code of Regulations, title 20, section 1709(c). [TN 244093](#).

⁷ See Notice of Public Site Visit and Informational Hearing. [TN 244282](#).

⁸ [TN 245754](#).

⁹ [TN 251029](#).

¹⁰ [TN 251186](#).

¹¹ [TN 251599](#).

¹² [TN 251599, p. 3](#).

¹³ [TN 254951](#).

an initial data adequacy recommendation on April 23, 2024, finding the SAFC incomplete.¹⁴ Following further data submissions by Applicant, the CEC Executive Director verified that the SAFC was complete on July 16, 2024.¹⁵

The SAFC proposes a relocated and reconfigured Willow Rock project as a nominal 520 MW gross (500 MW net) and 4,160 MWh gross (4,000 MWh net) compressed air energy storage facility using Hydrostor's A-CAES technology and related accessories, including without limitation, eight electric-motor-driven air compressors configured in four trains, four air-powered turbine generators with 100-foot-tall air vent stacks, thermal storage systems including six 100-foot-tall hot-water spherical storage tanks, a 21.5-acre, 577-acre-foot hydrostatically compensating surface reservoir with liner and interlocking shape floating cover, a 900,000 cubic yard underground compressed air storage cavern, and all associated operational and safety equipment and piping. The new location is an 88.6-acre portion of an approximately 112-acre parcel, north of Dawn Road and between State Route (SR) 14 and Sierra Highway within unincorporated Kern County, California, approximately 4 miles north of Rosamond, California. Energy stored at Willow Rock would be delivered to Southern California Edison's (SCE's) Whirlwind Substation located southwest of the site at the intersection of 170th Street W and Rosamond Boulevard, via a new approximately 19-mile 230-kilovolt (kV) generation-tie (gen-tie) line. Willow Rock would be capable of operating on a 24-hour basis, 365 days a year with an approximately 50-year lifespan.¹⁶

Discussion of the Management of the Proceeding

The Committee finds as follows:

1. Based on the Executive Director's verification that the SAFC is complete pursuant to the Suspension Order, the Committee finds it is appropriate to terminate the Suspension Order and issue additional orders to revive the proceeding and complete the pre-hearing and evidentiary phases.
2. The first informational hearing and site visit for this proceeding required by California Code of Regulations, title 20, section 1709.7 was timely conducted. Additionally, the regulations permit the Committee to convene subsequent informational hearings and site visits as appropriate.¹⁷
3. Due to the changed circumstances of this project including the suspension of the original AFC and the relocation and reconfiguration of the project in the SAFC, the Committee finds

¹⁴ [TN 255890](#).

¹⁵ [TN 257763](#).

¹⁶ See Willow Rock Energy Storage Center SAFC, Volume 1, Part A at [TN 254806](#).

¹⁷ See Cal. Code Regs., tit. 20, § 1709.7(a).

it is appropriate to convene a subsequent informational hearing and site visit, based on input from the parties as to the optimum timing for that event.¹⁸

4. For the same reasons, the Committee finds that each party should file a written statement: summarizing the major issues that will be presented in the SAFC; and proposing a schedule for the informational hearing and site visit and for completing the pre-hearing and evidentiary process for the SAFC. The Committee finds that, for purposes of efficiency, the parties should meet and confer on the proposed schedule, including shortened time for discovery if reasonable and feasible.¹⁹
5. The Committee finds it is appropriate for all parties to resume the preparation of monthly status reports, due on the 26th day of every month.
6. The Committee finds that it is appropriate to issue a revised scheduling order establishing the schedule for the prehearing and evidentiary phases of the SAFC proceeding following the receipt of the parties' issues identification statements and proposed schedule(s).

Order Terminating the Suspension and Other Orders to Revive the Proceeding

1. The Committee hereby terminates the Suspension Order issued August 9, 2023.
2. Each party shall file an Issues Identification Statement summarizing the major issues presented by the SAFC for the reconfigured and relocated Willow Rock project, no later than August 9, 2024. Each party's Issues Identification Statement shall also include a proposed schedule for the following pre-hearing and evidentiary events and include a certification that the parties met and conferred regarding the proposed schedule:
 - a. Supplemental Discovery Closes
 - b. Staff files Preliminary Staff Assessment
 - c. Staff files Final Staff Assessment
 - d. Last Day to File Petition to Intervene²⁰
 - e. Prehearing Conference

¹⁸ Since the first informational hearing and site visit was held within 45 days after the original AFC was found complete, that regulatory timeline is not applicable here.

¹⁹ Compare to the 180-day minimum provided for the original AFC pursuant to Cal. Code Regs., tit. 20, § 1716(e).

²⁰ The deadline to file a petition for intervention shall be established by the presiding member, or if no deadline is established, at least 30 days prior to the first day of the evidentiary hearing. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 20, § 1211.7(b).)

- f. Evidentiary Hearing²¹
- g. Commission Hearing on the Final Decision

3. The parties are hereby ordered to resume submitting monthly status reports beginning August 26, 2024, and no later than the 26th day of every month thereafter. Status reports shall inform the Committee whether or not the case is progressing satisfactorily and bring potential delays and other relevant matters to the Committee's attention.

PUBLIC ADVISOR AND OTHER CEC CONTACTS

The CEC's Public Advisor assists members of the public with participating in CEC proceedings. For information on how to participate in this proceeding, please contact the Public Advisor at publicadvisor@energy.ca.gov, or (916) 957-7910. Requests for interpreting services, reasonable accommodations, and other modifications should be made at least five days in advance. The CEC will work diligently to accommodate all requests based on the availability of the service or resource needed.

Direct questions of a procedural nature to the assigned Hearing Officers:

Reneé Webster-Hawkins, at renee.webster-hawkins@energy.ca.gov or (916) 237-2507.

Ralph Lee, at ralph.lee@energy.ca.gov or (916) 776-3408.

Direct technical subject inquiries concerning the proceeding to the Project Manager:

Leonidas Payne at leonidas.payne@energy.ca.gov or (916) 838-2124.

Direct media inquiries to mediaoffice@energy.ca.gov or (916) 654-4989.

AVAILABILITY OF DOCUMENTS

Information about this proceeding including notices and other relevant documents may be viewed on the [Willow Rock Energy Storage Center webpage](#) at: <https://www.energy.ca.gov/powerplant/caes/willow-rock-energy-storage-center> or scan the following QR code:

²¹ The final staff assessment shall be filed at least 14 days before the first evidentiary hearing. (Cal. Code Regs., tit. 20, § 1742(c).)



AUTOMATED EMAIL NOTIFICATIONS

Any person may subscribe to receive an automated email when a document is filed in a proceeding. Parties who are on the Proof of Service List will receive these automated emails and do not need to additionally subscribe. The web page for each proceeding listed above provides a link to subscribe for automated email notifications, or you may [manage automated email subscriptions](https://www.energy.ca.gov/subscriptions) at <https://www.energy.ca.gov/subscriptions> or scan the following QR code:



IT IS SO ORDERED.

Dated: July 24, 2024

APPROVED BY:

Andrew McAllister
Commissioner and Presiding Member
Willow Rock Energy Storage Center
SAFC Committee

Mailed to List Number: 7544