

Heather Shelton

Dear New Mexico Environment Department:

I write to you as a deeply concerned citizen to urge you to reject the air quality construction permit application (10883) submitted by Yucca Growth Infrastructure LLC (YGI) to build a methane-fueled power plant in the Santa Teresa area, west of Sunland Park, along the Mexican border in southern Dona Ana County. YGI's application has not demonstrated that this project adheres to state statute requiring that it prevent air pollution "in quantities and of a duration that may with reasonable probability injure human health or animal or plant life or as may unreasonably interfere with the public welfare, visibility or the reasonable use of property" (NMSA 74-2-2(b)). The projected amount of carbon dioxide production alone is, to me, reason to reject the application. The carbon dioxide expected to be generated by this highly unusual energy production plan is equivalent to the amount generated by all electricity production in the entire state in 2021 (10.31 MMT CO₂e), according to Energy+Environmental Economics ("New Mexico Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory and Forecast," released December 2024). The YGI plant, if the applicant is to be believed, would generate 9.2 million metric tons of CO₂-equivalent per year. The developer has boasted that this amount of greenhouse gases is roughly 40 percent less than its original gas turbine plan; but the overall output is still unacceptable and dangerous. The YGI power plant, by itself, would effectively wipe out the fruits of years of effort on the state and local level – political organizing, policy development, legislative appropriations - to reduce greenhouse gas emissions enough to curb the worst effects of climate change. While the president of the United States may call climate change a "hoax," at the level of state government in New Mexico, the issue is not subject to debate. We have already seen average temperatures in the Southwest increase by 2 degrees Fahrenheit over the last few decades. You know this. We are being asked to sacrifice environmental health and community well-being for private profit. Your decision is clear – the YGI project should not and must not be approved.

The developer, with the blessing of the state, proposes to locate this project on the edge of a largely Hispanic, low-income community. This project's impact should be assessed in the context of plans for at least two other data centers in the region – the Meta data center in northeast El Paso (literally on the state line abutting the low-income community of Chaparral, NM), and another data center proposed by the Department of Defense on Fort Bliss, Tx.

There are other issues that require additional scrutiny and vetting by the state, particularly the ambient heat produced by data centers and the thousands of fuel cells necessary to power it. A temperature increase of just one or two degrees year-round from heated air flowing over the area will result in damaging aridification and impacts to humans and wildlife.

The developers of the data center and its associated microgrid are already racing ahead with construction, before obtaining a crucial air quality permit from your agency. Contractors have already graded land, built parking lots, and are laying the groundwork for the data center and microgrid. It's reasonable to conclude that they are engaging in this risky behavior in a high-stakes effort to pressure regulatory bodies to bend and forfeit your regulatory responsibilities. They are essentially daring you to stand in the way of "progress and economic development," a framework popular with Project Jupiter's backers.

If the permit is not denied, then a public hearing should be held as well as giving the public an additional 60 days to review and comment on the air quality permit so community members can participate equitably. But I urge you to please stand strong, adhere to principles and policy, and do not allow this pressure tactic to affect your decision-making responsibilities. Reject this application for the good of the community and our shared environment.