

DEFEND THE ACE BASIN

from a massive data center complex proposed on 850 rural acres

THE PROPOSAL

- Thomas & Hutton and Eagle Rock Partners are requesting a “special exception” from the Colleton County Board of Zoning Appeals (ZBA) to allow a data center on 850 acres of rural timberland currently owned by Weyerhaeuser.
- The property is located on Cooks Hill Road, south of Walterboro in the ACE Basin.
- The site plan shows nine large industrial buildings on the property surrounded by wetlands.
- There are over 200 acres of wetlands on the property. The site plan suggests the complex would require the filling of 1.5 acres of wetlands.
- The property is part of a larger 2,600-acre tract owned by Weyerhaeuser, meaning there would be potential for expansion of the data center complex in the future.
- The property is in close proximity to multiple properties permanently protected by conservation easement, including: Bonnie Doone, Ravenwood Plantation, Remley Point, Prospect Hill Farm, and Horseshoe Tract.

DATA CENTER CONCERNS

- **Data centers use massive amounts of energy. One large data center can use 100 MW of power, which is roughly equivalent to the annual energy used by nearly 80,000 homes.ⁱ**
- The computer systems inside a data center need to be cooled to function properly. Many data centers use an approach called evaporative cooling, which requires a significant amount of clean, potable water. **A large 50 MW data center can use more than 530 million gallons of water a year, enough to fill 804 Olympic-size swimming pools.ⁱⁱ**
 - In comparison, the entire City of Walterboro water system serves 11,000 people and uses approximately 657 million gallons of water a year.ⁱⁱⁱ
- Data center cooling systems may also generate significant quantities of wastewater that can strain local wastewater infrastructure and generate downstream pollution.
- Data centers that draw their primary power from the grid often also install dozens or even hundreds of large backup generators to ensure their servers are always running. These diesel and/or gas fired generators emit a host of harmful pollutants — especially during power outages when they all operate at once.
- Some data centers do not connect to the grid and set up their own generation onsite. The County recently passed an ordinance which explicitly allows approved data centers to have onsite gas generation. This creates pollution on the site and can be noisy.
- Data center complexes require large warehouse-style buildings and large areas of pavement. This can push more pollution from stormwater runoff into local waterways, disrupting the local hydrology and degrading water quality.
- When data centers are located near residential areas, they can change the landscape of neighborhoods, industrialize rural communities, and alter historic and scenic viewsheds.
- Data centers can disrupt nearby residents and wildlife because they generate noise pollution from the constant humming of fans used to cool the servers.

ZONING CONSIDERATIONS

- According to the Public Notice, the property is currently zoned as a [Rural Development area](#).
- Colleton County zoning code describes this zoning district as “very rural in nature” and states: “It allows for agricultural uses, rural residential development, and low intensity supporting uses.”
- **An 850-acre data center complex is by no means “very rural in nature” or a “low intensity” land use.**
- Additionally, the Colleton County zoning code requires that the ZBA determine whether the project is “consistent with” the Colleton County Comprehensive Plan, which is a document required by state law that serves as a blueprint to guide all future growth in Colleton County. The Comprehensive Plan designates this project area as “Countryside” and defines this land use category as one that seeks to: “Promote residential uses at low densities to protect areas adjacent to farmland/cropland/agricultural uses.”
- According to the Comprehensive Plan, the “Preferred Character” of this area is:
 - Active farmland/cropland
 - Large tracts for forestry operations
 - Low density residential
 - Limited commercial at crossroads
 - Churches and civic uses
- Colleton County zoning code requires the ZBA to evaluate whether the data center campus is “[c]ompatibl[e] with existing uses in the vicinity and will not adversely affect the general welfare or character of the immediate community.” An almost 850-acre data center campus is clearly incompatible with and will adversely affect the natural areas that currently surround and cover the proposed site area.

UNANSWERED QUESTIONS

- **Electricity**
 - How much electricity will this data center complex require?
 - Where will that electricity come from?
 - Will it require new infrastructure?
 - Where will transmission be located?
 - Who pays for that infrastructure?
- **Water**
 - How much water will this data center use daily and at peak?
 - Where will that water come from?
 - Will it strain residential water supply, impact private wells, or impact other customers’ water bills in Walterboro?
 - What is the wastewater treatment plan?
- **Air Quality**
 - What source of backup power would be used on the site?
 - If generators are being used, how often and at what times would they be run for maintenance?
 - What will the data center do to limit the noise pollution created by any onsite generators and fans?

THE BIGGER PICTURE

- Across the Southeast, utilities are using projected data center power demand to justify building new fossil fuel power plants that emit harmful air pollutants, including fine particulate matter.
- Santee Cooper and Dominion SC are proposing to build a massive new gas plant on the banks of the Edisto River in Canadys.
- **Santee Cooper has stated that approximately 70% of its anticipated load growth is coming from data centers.**
- [A recent study completed by data scientists at Harvard University](#) predicts the proposed Canadys plant would expose over two million people to increased levels of fine particulate matter, which can increase the risk of hospitalizations due to heart attack, pneumonia, cardiovascular issues, or, in some cases, stroke or cancer. It's anticipated this would create \$28 million in increased healthcare costs.
- These utilities also want to build a new major 70+ mile gas pipeline known as the "Elba Bridge Pipeline" from Georgia to Canadys. The pipeline would serve the Canadys plant, but it would also provide more gas capacity for additional power plants and industrial uses.
- **If the Canadys power plant and Elba Bridge Pipeline are allowed to move forward, it would likely lead to more proposals for new data centers, new power plants, and other new industrial uses in the ACE Basin and along the entire pipeline route.**

HELP DEFEND THE ACE BASIN

Attend the Board of Zoning Appeals Public Hearing on December 18th. Sign up to speak, share your concern with the proposed data center, and encourage the Board of Zoning Appeals to DENY this request for a special exception.

Public Hearing
Colleton County Board of Zoning Appeals
December 18th at 5:00P.M.
3rd Floor County Council Chambers
Old Jail Building at 109 Benson Street, Walterboro

ⁱ NESCOE, "Data Centers and the Power System."

ⁱⁱ Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, "2024 United States Data Center Energy Usage Report." p. 47

ⁱⁱⁱ Colleton County Comprehensive Plan, pg. 84 – estimate based on 1.8 million gallons per day average use.