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## Water shortage: the million dollar question about Invenergy's new power plant

By [Peter Nightingale](#) on May 9, 2016

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Invenergy's Clear River Energy Center (CREC), the new fossil fuel power plant proposed in Burrillville, is likely to cause future water shortages, [according to state documents](#) obtained by Fossil Free Rhode Island. The power plant may cause such shortages unless the communities relying for their water supply on the Clear River basin forfeit future growth. If not, they risk running out of water during future hot and humid summer days when the demand for electricity is high and rivers run low.

According to a presentation at a meeting about CREC attended by several state agencies, 0.18 MGD (million of gallons of water per day) will be left for growth if the power plant is built. June Swallow of the Center for Drinking Water Quality at the Rhode Island Department of Health attended the meeting. Her longhand notes show that Harrisville and Pascoag each are expected to need 0.12 MGD for growth. This suggests a deficit of  $0.24 \text{ MGD} - 0.18 \text{ MGD} = 0.06 \text{ MGD}$ .

Invenergy is one of the largest corporations in the growing "clean energy" business. Of course, the [Clean Power Plan](#), the US implementation of the [Paris Agreement](#), not only [fails to reduce](#) greenhouse gas emissions. It also does irreparable harm to fracked communities and the environment by polluting [air](#) and [groundwater](#).

These may not be issues the people of Burrillville have direct control, but they should be aware of the water supply problems that may come with the megawatt power plant proposed by Invenergy.

Water usage has received [some attention](#), but the question has not been addressed transparently, while public disclosure and discussion have been in short supply.

As [Invenergy's proposal](#) states:

*Water supplied to the Facility will be provided from the Pascoag Utility District (PUD) by re-activation and treatment of a currently inactive PUD groundwater well that became contaminated in 2001 by an off-site contamination source. As a result of this well-documented groundwater contamination event, PUD was forced to terminate its use of its primary well water supply and interconnect its water supply system with the Harrisville Fire District (HFD) to meet the requirements of its customers for potable water.*



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To find out what the Raimondo administration is planning, Fossil Free Rhode Island filed

<http://www.rifuture.org/water-shortage-the-million-dollar-question-about-invenergys-new-power-plant.html>

requests for documents under Rhode Island's Access to Public Records Act. Such requests for information went to the Departments of Environmental Management (RIDEM) and Health, to the Water Resources Board (WRB), and to the Offices of the Governor and of Energy Resources.

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As many have noticed, the Raimondo administration, following the lead of its federal Big Brother, is rather secretive. Indeed, the administration responded for the most part by withholding documents based on an overly broad interpretation of what information is exempt from disclosure.

Although, Fossil Free RI made some progress lifting the veil of secrecy, RIDEM and the WRB must have better and more detailed data than present in the documents obtained so far. Such information is available from their [Streamflow Depletion Methodology](#).

Water resource management is complex and there is ample opportunity for debate. There is, for instance, the problem that water resource projections require somewhat arbitrary choices as to what is the relevant watershed. Rivers have tributaries, which in turn have tributaries, and so on, just as in this nursery rhyme:

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*Big fleas have little fleas,  
Upon their backs to bite 'em,  
And little fleas have lesser fleas,  
and so, ad infinitum.*

---

As one increases the size of the watershed, one decrease the shortage problem, but the number of impacted communities increases.

However this may be, and even without considering the [lingering issue of the MTBE contamination](#) of the Pascoag wells, the water supply raises important questions:

Are the Burrillville Town Council and its planner aware of the implications of the power plant for their future? How about the townspeople and nearby communities? How does a potential water shortage feature [in the tax negotiations](#) of the Burrillville town council with Invenergy?

Can the Burrillville Town Council refuse permission to Invenergy to construct the required water supply pipeline?

Why is this issue not addressed in [this letter from](#) the Burrillville's town solicitor to the town manager.

Does the Pascoag Utility District need approval of an amended and extended water management plan in accordance with the Water Resources Board's [Rules and Procedures for Water Supply System Management Planning](#)?

If so, will there be an opportunity for public comment and if so when?

There is another serious concern about good government. [Rhode Island state law](#) provides the WRB with the authority to allocate water among all users, one of which is the environment. Fossil Free RI's request for public documents has made it painfully clear that this pivotal agency has been reduced to a shadow of its former self. It is no secret that this is due to underfunding.

Indeed, an email with a request for documents to the WRB's chief of staff, Ken Burke, resulted in an automatic reply with the message that he no longer works for the agency. Also the position of the supervising engineer seems to be vacant. Obviously, the funding situation is so bad that the WRB even lacks staff to update its web page.

The people of northwest Rhode Island are entitled to a public process with full disclosure. They have to the right to be informed on how much water is available to their community and how developments such as CREC will impact their future. The WRB is a vital, yet clearly dysfunctional element of this process.

5/9/2016

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In response to Fossil Free RI's request for information, the Division of Legal Services of the Department of Administration, which now seems to represent the WRB, sent a handful of irrelevant documents. In contrast, RIDEM responded with a past-deadline request for a twenty-days extension because of the "voluminous nature" of the material requested.

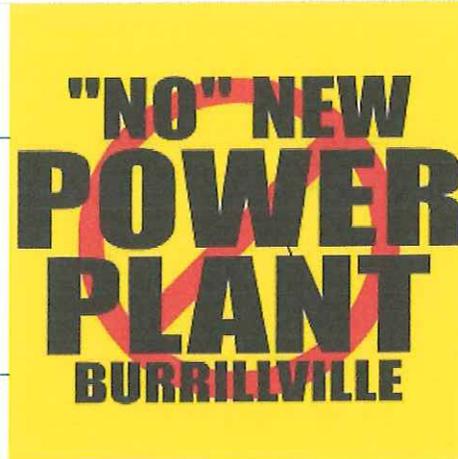


WRB staff web page on May 5, 2016.

The inconsistency of these responses all by itself speaks volumes, but the most "entertaining" response came from the Office of the Governor:

*Thank you for emailing Governor Raimondo!*

*Governor Raimondo is committed to open, accessible and accountable government.*



The Governor's Office made good on this commitment by sending Fossil Free RI a mountain of documents completely unrelated to the request.

Rating: 10.0/10 (2 votes cast)

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 **Peter Nightingale**  
 Peter Nightingale is a theoretical physicist and teaches at the University of Rhode Island. He strives to leave behind a more just and peaceful, sustainable post-capitalist world for future generations, and his children and grandchildren in particular.

One response to "Water shortage: the million dollar question about Invenergy's new power plant"

 **Greg Gerritt** May 9, 2016 at 5:01 pm | [Permalink](#) | [Log in to reply](#).

The political class in Rhode Island seems to be oblivious to the growing resistance. It may cost some of them their jobs.

Between quality of life issues, the fact that it will not save us any money once the gas starts being exported, and climate change, it is only the political and business classes who wish to maintain the old order and their power who support such a retrograde project. It is going backwards to build any additional fossil fuel infrastructure and it will be useless, dangerous, and obsolete before it is finished being paid for. This will leave the people of RI on the hook for stranded costs for a

plant that should never be built.

The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund have openly recognized that everyone else on the planet has already opted for a clean energy future right now, with the only exceptions being the rich and the powerful.

In Rhode Island the elite has regularly tried to push on us some high priced or mega project for the supposed jobs that it would bring. When the public has been involved in the discussion we have stopped a bunch of stupid stuff like the Quonset megaport. When the public is kept out we get 38 Studios. It is clear the public has more wisdom about these things than the political class. Do not let the politicians drown the state No power plant in Burrillville and no more fossil fuel infrastructure anywhere. Clean energy and clean energy jobs are the future.

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