

Groundwater Withdrawal: Google and Southern Environmental Law Center Enter into Agreement Addressing South Carolina Aquifer



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The Southern Environmental Law Center ("SELC") announced in a December 16th article an agreement addressing a Google server farm's future withdrawals from a South Carolina aquifer.

Google is stated to have previously requested permission from the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control ("SDHEC") to withdraw up to 1.5 million gallons of water a day from the aquifer.

SELC, along with the Coastal Conservation League, had asked SDHEC to reconsider a permit that would have authorized the withdrawal. Concern is stated to have been expressed that the Google permit would authorize three times the amount that the Google facility was currently allowed to withdraw.

The aquifer that is the focus of the permit is known as the Middendorf Aquifer.

Google stated it needed additional aquifer water to cool computers because of an expansion at the server farm. SELC expressed concern that a local water utility ("Mount Pleasant"), which also utilizes the aquifer, had been asked by SDHEC officials to reduce their use.

SELC states in the December 16th news release that it entered into an agreement with Google that includes conditions in the groundwater withdrawal permit. The conditions are stated to exceed what is required by law and include:

- The company can withdraw groundwater only as a last resort when all other water supplies are exhausted. That can happen during peak demand, which typically occurs on hot summer days, or in the event of an emergency impacting the potable water supply. The only other scenario in which Google may withdrawal groundwater is when it needs to conduct maintenance on its well.
- It must develop alternative sources of water.
- To ensure Google is complying with the above commitments, the company must also report its groundwater use every quarter, instead of annually as required by law. The reports will be available to the public.

SELC personnel acknowledge in the article Google's commitment to protecting the environment.

A link to the SELC news releases can be found [here](#).