



It's Our Nature

Fox Valley Group of the Sierra Club - Wisconsin Chapter Vol. 25 Issue 3

Fox Valley Group Meetings

January 8, 2026 - 7:00 pm

Threats to Door County Waterways

Zoom Meeting - Link to the Zoom on our webpage or facebook page
www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley
www.facebook.com/foxvalleysierra

The Door County Environmental Council, Inc., or DCEC, was founded in 1969 and incorporated as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization in 1971 to address looming threats to the county's waters, bays, ever-changing shorelines, karst bluffs, sand dunes, woodlands, wetlands, farms, orchards and fields. As unrestrained commercial development and suburbanization would be disastrous for this beautiful section of the Niagara Escarpment, the group became an active force for preservation and protection. On our Zoom meeting, the DCEC will address continued threats to Door County water ways.

February 12, 2026 - 7:00 pm

Citizens Utility Board Wisconsin's Consumer Advocate

Appleton Public Library
200 N. Appleton Street, Appleton

Tom Content from CUB, will talk to us about his organization: utility updates, clean energy, costs and the latest about the Data Centers. How we can get data centers to use renewables. Do we need new state laws mandating renewables?

March 12, 2026 - 7:00 pm

Ecological Silviculture in Wisconsin Forests

Girl Scout Building (next to Bubolz Nature Preserve)
4693 N. Lynndale Drive, Appleton

Brad Hutnik from the WI DNR will explain what this is and how this can maintain healthy and sustainable forests in Wisconsin.

April 9, 2026 - 6:30 pm

Fox Valley Group Environmental Town Hall

Appleton Public Library
200 N. Appleton Street, Appleton

We are holding a listening session and sharing our environmental concerns with others and state representatives. Bring you friends and neighbors for a conservation with your legislators.

Details and subject can change
Follow us at www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley
www.facebook.com/foxvalleysierra

*The Environment and Earth needs You! And We Need You Too!
Help us as a group move forward. Become involved!
Join the Fox Valley Sierra Group board. It's fun, rewarding and necessary. Contact one of our board members.*

From the Chair

December 2025

Hello Fox Valley Sierrans

Welcome to another incredibly informative newsletter. I hope you'll take some time to snuggle up with a cup of hot cocoa and read every word. You won't be disappointed! Thank you, Karen Van Offeren, for all the time and research you put into gathering so much information that keeps all of us knowledgeable about the environmental goings on around Wisconsin and especially in the Fox Valley.

I want to take a moment to highlight a few key announcements from the pages you hold. Pinot's Palette in Appleton once again is hosting a Paint it Forward fundraiser for us on Wednesday, March 4. This very popular event is always an excellent way for us to raise much needed funds so please spread the word. You do not need to be a Sierra club member to attend. Be sure to register early. If we sell out soon enough, they hire a second instructor and open up a second room for even more fun (and FUNd raising) .

Also of note, we have rescheduled our listening session that was supposed to be this past September for Thursday, April 9 with Senator Dassler-Alfheim. I am currently reaching out to other legislators representing us at the state level, asking them to join us. Please take a moment to contact your elected representatives and encourage them to say yes to my invitation. The more of our elected representatives that are there to listen, both Republican and Democrat, the better for all of us.

Finally, as the days grow shorter, the nights get longer, the temperatures drop lower, and the snow piles deeper, I have spent a great deal of time reflecting on all the lessons that nature teaches us. We live in a world that wants us to add more lights to the darkness, more activities to the stillness, more food to an already bountiful buffet and more perfectly wrapped presents under an already crowded tree. While all of those are wonderful things that we can enjoy about this time of year, I hope you'll take a moment to embrace the rhythms that mother nature is creating for us. This is a time of slowing down in our natural world, a time to let go, a time to wisely use what we have harvested from this past year, a time for seeds from the year to rest beneath a blanket of snow, ready to grow again when conditions are right. I hope you'll take a moment to listen to the crunch of fresh snow beneath your feet on a moonlit walk, to savor the sounds of the crackles and pops of wood burning in a fireplace, to spend slow and gentle time reading, creating, listen and just being.

2025 was challenging for many of us, including on the environmental front. There is much work to be done in 2026. But if we take the time to listen to the cues in nature, to rest, to contemplate, to nurture ourselves, we will be more than up to the task.

See you in the new year!
Penny Paiser Wilson

Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) in Wisconsin

By Karen Van Offeren

Until just recently, I lived in prime Wisconsin CAFO territory, and while I was aware of the concerns surrounding large dairy farms, I wasn't aware of what a 'concentrated animal feeding operation' (CAFO) was or the regulations surrounding one. Thanks to following the story of Gilbert Farms in Door County, that's changed!

What is a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation (CAFO)?

In Wisconsin, an animal feeding operation with 1,000 animal units or more is considered a Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) may designate a smaller-scale animal feeding operation as a CAFO if it has pollutant discharges to navigable waters or contaminates a well.

The DNR has the authority to require that CAFOs obtain water quality permits. (This authority was upheld in court as recently as August 2025.) These Wisconsin Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (WPDES) permits must be renewed every five years and require public input. They ensure farms use proper planning, nutrient management, and structure/system construction to protect Wisconsin waters.

In addition to authorizing the WPDES permits, the DNR reviews and approves waste storage structures and regulates manure applications to prevent pollution of lakes, rivers, wetlands and groundwater. The DNR is limited in their CAFO authority to a focus specifically on water quality protection.

Where are Wisconsin's CAFOs located?

Wisconsin's CAFOs are concentrated in the eastern part of the state. Major clusters can be found in Manitowoc, Brown, Kewaunee, Calumet and Fond du Lac counties. Many of the CAFOs are large dairy operations, but there are also swine and poultry operations large enough to fall into this category.



Protecting Private Well Owners' Right to Know about Contamination in Their Drinking Water

By Karen Van Offeren

On November 7, 2025, a bill protecting private well owners' right to know what's in their water (AB 635) was officially introduced in Wisconsin's State Assembly.

This bill requires the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to notify county health departments, county land and water conservation departments, and Tribal health departments if it identifies groundwater contamination.

Importantly, AB 635 has received bipartisan support. It is co-sponsored by 48 legislators – 33 Democrats and 15 Republicans.

Why is this bill so important? Approximately one-third of Wisconsinites use groundwater from private wells for their drinking water. Without regular testing, required notifications, and state support, thousands of families would remain unaware of potential risks.

Some of the dangerous substances potentially contaminating Wisconsin's private wells include:

- Nitrate which is linked to serious health problems including

Why is Gilbert Farms (Door County) making headlines?

Gilbert Farms is in Sevastopol, Wisconsin. It has over 1,100 dairy cows and hopes to double that number.

Brittney Mueller, a DNR agricultural runoff specialist, provided some specifics regarding this case. "Gilbert Farms is over the 1,000 animal unit threshold, and, as a result, was issued a notice of noncompliance. To return to compliance, the department is requiring Gilbert Farms to obtain a permit."

She also added that there's a sinkhole near the farm's production site, so Gilbert Farms' new waste storage facility will need to use a liquid-tight concrete design and groundwater monitoring will be required. The farm's feed storage area will also need to be upgraded.

The DNR held a hearing on granting Gilbert Farms a permit on November 5, 2025. Many local residents spoke out in opposition to granting the permit. Several want an environmental impact study that investigates potential fallout from the farm's expansion.

Crystal Brown, executive director of the Clean Water Action Council of Northeast Wisconsin advocacy group noted that the region of the property immediately around the sinkhole is "highly erodible" and has a "very high runoff potential." She added, "There are over 8,000 private wells in Door County. Tens of thousands of people depend on this drinking water, we have a responsibility to our neighbors to not put that at risk."

The DNR took written feedback on Gilbert Farms' permit through November 12th. A decision on the permit will be made in the coming months.

For more information on Gilbert Farms' permit request, see "Door County CAFO faces backlash at DNR hearing" by Joe Schulz. Published November 7, 2025 on the WPR website (<https://www.wpr.org>).

cancer, birth defects and infant death. It's estimated that 42,000 private wells exceed the health standard for nitrate.

- PFAS which are the dangerous, man-made chemicals known as "forever chemicals." They are tied to increased cholesterol levels, thyroid disease, certain cancers and pregnancy complications. A recent study of Wisconsin's private wells showed 71% of samples detected at least one PFAS chemical.
- Lead pipes and faucets is still found in many Wisconsin homes. Elevated levels of lead in children's blood are associated with hearing loss, lower IQs, developmental delays, behavioral challenges and emotional impacts including anxiety and depression.

In supporting this bill, Government Affairs Manager Peter Burress said, "Wisconsinites have a right to know about pollution that may be impacting the health of their families. This legislation is a common sense solution that will protect Wisconsin families. It's unacceptable that so many Wisconsin families could be drinking water contaminated with PFAS, lead, and nitrates – chemicals tied to cancer and birth defects – without ever being told."

For more information on AB 635, visit the Wisconsin Conservation Voters website at <https://www.conservationvoters.org>

The Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program – Status Update: Still Not Funded

by Karen Van Offeren

When I last shared a status update on the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Program, it had just been cut from the 2025 Wisconsin state budget. The Joint Finance Committee chose not to include the program's budget within the Department of Natural Resources' budget as it had in the past.

In response, two bills have been proposed that would reauthorize Knowles-Nelson.

The first bill, AB 315, is the Republican proposal introduced by Representative Tony Kurtz and Senator Patrick Testin. It was actually introduced back in June. The bill had received a hearing in the Assembly, but the Senate failed to act on it during the budget process.

This bill represents a more conservative approach that reduces spending, proposing only \$28.25 million for four years, and builds in strong legislative oversight. The funding is broken down between land acquisition, property development, local park and recreation, and recreational boating facilities.

The DNR would continue to run the program, but they would be instructed to prioritize land management over land acquisition. Additionally, the legislature would have to approve any land purchase grants over \$1 million (recently reduced to only \$250,000 – see below) through a separate "Major Land Acquisitions Program."

The second bill, AB 435, is the Democratic proposal introduced by Senator Jodi Habush Sinykin and Representative Vinnie Miresse.

This bill would boost funding levels to \$72 million for six years and create a new oversight board to guide the program. Funding is broken down between land acquisition, property development, local parks and recreation, recreational boat facilities, and motorized recreation.

Key to this proposal is the creation of separate funding streams for land acquisition and land management grants. This ensures both types of projects receive appropriate support and separate administration.

Another key aspect is that decisions would be made by a 17-member Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Board. Members would come from legislators of both parties, stakeholders, agency experts and citizens. It would advise on all projects and approve/deny purchases over \$2.5 million.

Tribal co-management and habitat management programs would also be created.

(For an "at a glance" graphic comparing of the two bills, please go to <https://knowlesnelson.org/toolkit/>. This webpage contains several other helpful resources as well.)

After months of no action, the Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation met on November 4th. They took up Assembly Bill 612, which was created after splitting AB 315 into two bills. AB 612 covers funding, and AB 315 covers the policy framework.

(Why the split? It impacts Governor Ever's partial veto power. He could use a partial veto on AB 612 because it applies to spending, but he'd have to approve or reject AB 315 in full.)

There is good news. AB 612 creates two separate funding tracks: one for land acquisition and one for habitat management.

Unfortunately, AB 315 still requires the DNR to prioritize management grants, so the language of AB 615 is currently out of alignment with AB 315.

The committee did not address the issue of legislative review.

On November 12th, the Assembly Committee on Forestry, Parks and Outdoor Recreation met again.

The most significant action taken at this meeting was to lower the threshold for when DNR land acquisitions must receive full legislative approval. Instead of the original \$1 million threshold, it was reduced to only \$250,000.

As a result, every project over \$250,000 would have to move through the Legislature as its own bill (even though each project completes the DNR's internal review and receives approval by the Natural Resources Board). It's not realistic to assume the Legislature can take up these conservation projects at the speed and consistency required for real estate transactions.

At the day's end, the bill itself was deadlocked at 6-6. However, this tied committee vote didn't prevent the bill from advancing to the Assembly. Chairman Mursau sent the bill on "without recommendation."

As of this writing, the bill is not on the Assembly's current agenda. If it doesn't move, the next opportunity for a vote will come in January.

NOTE: No committee has taken up the Democrats' proposal, AB 435.

What can you do?

- Contact your legislators. Let them know Knowles-Nelson is important. Ask them to work for bipartisan compromise and support that keeps the program strong. Every call, letter and email they receive is recognized! Also visit their social media pages.
- Share your thoughts locally. Write letters to the editor (visit <https://knowlesnelson.org/toolkit/> for a Letter to the Editor Resource Guide). Talk with friends and neighbors. Invite your legislators to visit Knowles-Nelson sites in your district.
- Stay informed! Visit <https://knowlesnelson.org> and sign up to receive their newsletter (sponsored by Gathering Waters).



Winter Outings



January 3 • Saturday • 9:30 - 11:30am
Postcards & Downtown walk

Appleton Public Library

The Fox Valley Sierra group will be joining an established group of citizens, People Powered Postcards, who meet monthly at the Appleton Library to write postcards to elected officials. Please join us @ 9:30 AM to share your thoughts about conservation, fair maps, democracy, minimum wage &/or etc, as we write to our representatives in Madison and Washington D.C. Afterwards we will clear our heads with a short loop walk from the library through Jones Park to Telulah Trail to Meade St. and back to library.

Sign up for the event at sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley
(Click on the Meetings Outings link)
For more information contact Marjie Fendt
marjiefendt@gmail.com 920-921-8501 (leave a message)

January 15 • Thursday • 6:30 - 8:30 pm
Evening Cross Country Ski Outing

Reid Golf Course, 1100 E. Fremont St. Appleton
Join other skiers for an evening of gentle rolling ski trails at a city golf course in Appleton. Use city lights and the moon and stars to ski the trails. Bring a head lamp if you want. Trails may or may not be groomed depending on the amount of snow on the ground. Reid Park phone is 920-832-5926

Sign up for the event at sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley
(Click on the Meetings Outings link)
Or contact Penny Bernard Schaber
pennybernardschaber@athenet.net



January 24, 2026 • Saturday • 12:30 pm
High Cliff Snowshoe

High Cliff State Park
Meet on top of the hill near the tower. We will decide on the route to snowshoe. Approx. 2 miles. Park Sticker required. Dress for the weather, of course we live in Wisconsin.

Sign up for the event at sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley
(Click on the meetings Outings link)
Or contact Monny Hjerstedt
mhjerstedt17@gmail.com 920-558-0013

February 7 • Saturday • 10:00 am - mid afternoon
X Country Ski Standing Rocks

Ski Standing Rocks County Park just west of Amherst. This is an awesome ski area about an hour and 15 minutes west of Appleton. Ski trails for all levels, very well groomed, warming shelter and food are available at this Portage County Park. There is a fee for skiing. Contact the park for trail condition and cost of the fee; 715-346-1433.

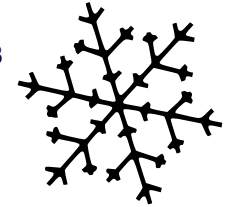
Sign up for the event at sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley
(Click on the Meetings Outings link)
Or contact Penny Bernard Schaber
pennybernardschaber@athenet.net

February 21 • Saturday • 10:00 am
Snowshoe Hike at Skunk Foster

Skunk Foster Natural Area, N 5257 Foley Dr, Scandinavia, WI

This is a beautiful trail to snowshoe with rolling hills and lakes along sections of the Ice Age Trail. 2-3 miles, intermediate. No facilities available. Bring your own snowshoes. Optional lunch at a local cafe.

Sign up for the event at sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley
(Click on the Meetings Outings link)
Or contact Monny Hjerstedt
mhjerstedt17@gmail.com 920-558-0013



March 4 • Wednesday • 7:00 pm

Painting Fund Raiser

See info next page

March 7 • Saturday • 1:00 pm

End of Winter? Lunch Get Together

Stone Arch Brewpub, 1004 South Olde Onieda St, Appleton

Just a time to have a lunch and socialize. Sign up by March 4th so we can reserve a space.

Sign up for the event at sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley
(Click on the meetings Outings link)
Or contact Monny Hjerstedt
mhjerstedt17@gmail.com 920-558-0013

March 22 • Sunday • 12:30 pm

World Water Day on Lake Winnebago

Lakeside Park, Harbor View Dr., Fond du Lac
We will appreciate the water around us by a hike through the paths of beautiful Lakeside Park. 2-4 miles. Bring a short anecdote, poem, or quote about water to share. Warm up later at a local coffee shop.

Sign up for the event at sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley
(Click on the Meetings Outings link)
Or contact Marjie Fendt
marjiefendt@gmail.com 920-921-8501 (leave a message)

Wisconsin weather is unpredictable.
We also may have other outings if the weather is favorable.

For more information or additional outings,
check out our facebook page
or our website -
sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley
(Click on the Meeting and Outings Link)

If you would like to be notified of new
or changed future outings
email - fvsg.outings@gmail.com
with your contact information.

PAINTING FUNDRAISER

We all experience cabin fever during Wisconsin's cold, snowy winter. Why not get out with friends and help your Fox Valley Sierra Group raise some badly needed funds on Wednesday, March 4th at 7:00pm at Pinot's Palette in Appleton. We've had a painting party the last couple of years and it was fun and successful. Arrive 15-20 minutes early for setup. We will be painting "Ocean Trance."

Cost per painter is approximately \$40 which covers your canvas and supplies.



Please pass the word to friends and family. Even if they aren't a Sierra member, they can join the fun and be a part of Pinot's Paint it Forward program. Each chair filled is another \$10 donation to our group.

A Sign Up Link will be posted on
www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin/fox-valley or
www.facebook.com/foxvalleysierra

Guests are welcome to bring snacks and appetizers into the studio to enjoy during class. Beer, wine, and an assortment of non-alcoholic beverages are available for purchase from the studio's full-service bar. BYOB not allowed..

New! Free recycling of alkaline (single use) batteries in Outagamie County.

Outagamie County has resumed accepting alkaline (single use) batteries for recycling, and at no cost. People can bring their batteries (ex: AA, AAA, C, D) to the County recycling and solid waste site at 1419 Holland Road, during normal business hours. Stop at the drive-up window, tell staff you have single use/household batteries and you'll be directed to where you can drop them off for recycling – and for free. <https://www.recyclemoreoutagamie.org/material-search/>

Brown County has been already accepting alkaline/single use batteries for recycling. Batteries Plus in Green Bay (not in Appleton) accepts them for recycling (for free if weight is 3 lbs or less, then there's a nominal charge), and the Staples office supply store in Beaver Dam also accepts these single use batteries for recycling (from people who have a membership card, which is free to sign up for).

For more information, contact Jordan Hiller, Recycling and Solid Waste Program Coordinator
Outagamie County Recycling and Solid Waste, 1419 Holland Road, Appleton, WI
920-832-2010 | Jordan.Hiller@outagamie.org

What you can do:

- 1 Please help spread the word to your friends and family – Outagamie County accepts single use/ alkaline batteries for free recycling!
- 2 Contact your county elected officials, and recycling and solid waste staffers and thank them for protecting our environment!

The Trump Administration and the EPA Approves Its Second PFAS Pesticide in Two Weeks

Extracted from the November 20, 2025 Press Release from the Center for Biological Diversity

Approval Ignores Health Risks to Children, Extreme Toxicity to Bees

The Environmental Protection Agency approved the highly persistent pesticide isocycloseram. The pesticide is a “forever chemical” — one of a group called PFAS, or perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances.

[This] announcement marks the second approval of a PFAS pesticide since Trump took office, with the first approval coming just two weeks before. The administration plans to approve three more PFAS pesticides in the coming year.

“To approve more PFAS pesticides amid the growing awareness of the serious, long-term dangers from these forever chemicals is absurdly shortsighted,” said Nathan Donley, environmental health science director at the Center for Biological Diversity. “The undeniable reality is that the Trump administration is knowingly putting the nation’s children at greater risk of developing serious reproductive and liver harms for generations to come.”

Isocycloseram is classified as moderately persistent to persistent and is known to transform into 40 smaller PFAS chemicals, some of which are much more highly persistent.

Isocycloseram is also highly toxic to bees and other pollinators, with the EPA finding that vital pollinators could be exposed to 1,500 times the lethal level of the pesticide just by collecting nectar and pollen near treated fields. One out of every 3 bites of food we eat — and nearly all nutrient-dense foods like fruits and vegetables — come from plants that need to be pollinated by bees and other pollinating animals.

While some PFAS differ in their toxicities, potential to bioaccumulate, and potential to pollute water, all are highly persistent and have chemical bonds that essentially never break down.

To see the full press release, go to <https://biologicaldiversity.org/> > Newsroom > Press Releases. You'll find this press release under November 20, 2025.

Congratulation to Peter, Monny and Jo!

The Fox Valley Sierra Group has some wonderful news to share and celebrate!

The Sierra Club – Wisconsin Chapter has announced that three of our executive committee members were included with those receiving the 2025 Chapter Awards!

Please congratulate Peter Jobe! He was one of two recipients of the New Activist Award. This award recognizes those willing to leap into new roles and champion environmental issues. Peter serves not only on the Fox Valley Sierra Group Executive Committee; he's also our delegate to the state Executive Committee. In addition, he plans and leads outings for our group.

Also congratulate Monny and Jo Hjerstedt! They both received the JJ and Pat Werner Award. This award is named after two of the founding leaders of the Sierra Club in Wisconsin. It is the chapter's highest honor and is given to those who have shown commitment to the goals and mission of the Sierra Club through the years. Monny and Jo have been leaders in the Fox Valley Sierra Group since 1982. They have held multiple roles throughout that time. Monny is currently the Newsletter Editor and Outings Chair. Jo is our Hospitality Chair and serves as Secretary for the Executive Committee. You'll find Monny and Jo at, and often leading, many of our outings. They're also available to participate however needed at our monthly meetings.

The Fox Valley Sierra Group Executive Committee congratulates Peter, Monny and Jo and thanks them for all of their service! They are integral members of our group!

Peter, Monny and Jo ... you are so appreciated!

What's the Big Deal About Data Centers?

By Karen Van Offeren

Data center development is big news. Our growing digital economy and the ever-increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) has dramatically increased the need for data centers that house, manage and process data.

But this development has also raised a number of red flags, especially from an environmental standpoint!

So, let's break down this huge topic. We'll start with some basic knowledge about data centers, look at where they're making news in Wisconsin, investigate the environmental issues and see what's being done to address those issues.

What's a data center?

Simply put, a data center is a physical facility that houses huge numbers of computers and networking equipment. They contain servers, data storage devices and other equipment needed to collect, store, process and output data.

Major companies like Microsoft, Google, Meta, Open AI and Oracle build and operate these large-scale data centers.

How many data centers are in Wisconsin and where are they?

Answers vary as to how many data centers are in Wisconsin, but the number currently ranges between 40 and 50. And that number will continue to grow. (The United States currently hosts over 4,000 data centers.)

The Great Lakes region is especially attractive due to the abundance of freshwater. Water is vital to cooling down the servers and other high-tech equipment running in the data centers. (Some believe that data centers will be the next phase in the evolving controversy over Great Lakes water rights.)

The three Wisconsin data centers making news right now are being constructed in Mount Pleasant (Racine County), Port Washington and Beaver Dam.

The Mount Pleasant data center is being built by Microsoft. Its projected cost is about \$3.3 billion and is scheduled to go online in 2026. Microsoft is building a second data center nearby with its cost projected to be around \$4 billion. They are also looking for another Racine County location to house a backup data center.

The company boasts that once the second data center is complete, it will be the fastest AI supercomputer in the world.

The Port Washington data center project is being built by Vantage Data Centers. The data centers are being built for OpenAI and Oracle. The total projected cost is \$8 billion. The first phase of development is projected to go online in late 2027. Construction would then continue through 2028. The two phases would result in four data centers.

The Beaver Dam data center campus is being built by Meta, the parent company of Facebook and Instagram. The project is expected to cost over \$1 billion and is projected to be completed in 2027.

What are the environmental issues?

Regardless of which data center location you're researching, the same basic environmental issues are raised. The two primary areas of concern are energy use and water consumption.

Energy Use

Data centers require an enormous amount of energy to operate. As the demand for energy increases, consumer prices increase. And the power companies struggle to predict future needs ... needs they may not even be able to meet.



AI companies seek alternative energy sources to meet their needs, but as their needs outpace renewable energy options such as solar and wind power, they continue to rely on fossil fuels. And this only adds to the global emissions of CO₂.

Some AI companies promise to replace the energy they consume from the public grid, but lack of regulations for grid use makes it unlikely that companies will be held to this.

Water Consumption

Most data centers rely on freshwater to cool their servers. One method of cooling is to use a closed-loop system. The system is filled with water during construction. While the system is sealed, there are still possibilities for machine failure due to leaks or overflow. If impure water is added to the system, it can lead to microbiological growth or corrosion. To prevent this, chemicals like nitrates, azole and sulfide may be added to the water. This creates a protective layer from the pipes but contaminates the freshwater with toxic substances.

The other big question regarding water usage is simply just how much water is being drawn from the lakes? How much will be returned? And how will that water be treated? Then take it to the next level. As more power plants are built to meet the needs of the AI data centers, how much water will they need?

What's being done to address the environmental issues?

Obviously, several major questions and concerns surround the construction and use of AI data centers. And while there are many unknowns, projections are also hampered by a lack of transparency.

Local citizens and environmental groups have gone to developers, local governments and utility companies to try to get answers. Often, they come away with nothing.

In an effort to create transparency and to get the information needed to identify and resolve issues surrounding the building and operation of data centers, Wisconsin Senator Jodi Habush Sinykin and Representative Angela Stroud have introduced the Data Center Accountability Bill – LRB 5432.

According to Wisconsin Conservation Voters, the purpose of this bill is "to hold tech and utility companies accountable when building, powering, and operating data centers. It ensures communities and ratepayers aren't left bearing the financial and environmental costs."

The Data Center Accountability Bill (LRB 5432) would:

- Require data centers to contribute to Wisconsin's Focus on Energy Fund, which supports energy efficiency, renewable energy, and low-income energy assistance. Additionally, half of the contributions would go to the Green Innovation Fund, which supports next-generation environmental and clean energy technologies and projects in Wisconsin.
- Require data centers to source at least 70 percent of their annual electricity from renewable sources to qualify for state tax exemptions.
- Mandate that utilities provide transparency on water and energy use.
- Protect workers by paying at least the prevailing wage or, if covered by a collective bargaining agreement, the higher of the two.

Senator Habush Sinykin notes, "Although the decision to build a data center proceeds at the local level, I believe the state also has the responsibility to regulate this emerging industry."

For more in-depth information on this complex and evolving topic, consider viewing these resources:

Milwaukee Journal Sentinel articles:
"Port Washington approves \$8B AI data center, residents voice energy and water concerns" by Claudia Levens. Published August 20, 2025.

"There are 21 data centers in the Milwaukee area and likely more on the way. Here's what you should know about them" by Anna Kleiber. Published September 17, 2025.
"Here are the similarities, differences between data centers from Microsoft, Oracle/OpenAI" by Ricardo Torres and Claudia Levens. Published October 24, 2025.

The Daily Cardinal article:
"Wisconsin's new AI data centers spark transparency, environmental concerns" by Avery Chheda. Published November 6, 2025.

WISN articles:
"Wisconsin state lawmakers propose bill regulating data centers" by Emily Pofahl. Published November 6, 2025.
"Meta plans \$1 billion data center in Beaver Dam." Published November 12, 2025.

Clean Wisconsin website – Press release:
"AI data centers in Wisconsin will use more energy than all homes in state combined."
Published September 16, 2025.

Wisconsin Conservation Voters website – News:
"Lawmakers introduce first bill to hold data centers accountable in Wisconsin." Published November 6, 2025.



EPA Proposes Gutting Wetland Protections – Risking Our Water Quality!

By Karen Van Offeren

On November 17, 2025, the Environmental Protection Agency announced that it's redefining the scope of the clean water law. It will now significantly limit the wetlands covered by the law.

The new "Waters of the United States" (WOTUS) rule ensures that federal jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act is focused only on relatively permanent, standing or continuously flowing bodies of water. According to the EPA, this would include streams, oceans, rivers, lakes, and wetlands that are directly connected to such bodies of water.

This proposal continues the work of the Trump administration's rollback of environmental regulations. Lee Zeldin, EPA Administrator, says his agency is accelerating economic prosperity while putting "a dagger through the heart of climate change religion."

The EPA's stance is that WOTUS will fully implement the direction provided by the Supreme Court ruling on Sackett v. EPA. That 2023 ruling sharply limited federal authority to police water pollution in certain wetlands.

WOTUS faces at least 45 days of public comment. Zeldin believes it will cut red tape and provide clarity for farmers, ranchers, industry and other private landowners.

Not surprisingly, environmental organizations do not agree!

The proposed rule sharply narrows which wetlands and streams are protected under the Clean Water Act. It would limit federal safeguards only to wetlands that hold surface water during the "wet season" and directly touch a body of water that has continuous water flowing or standing during that "wet season." As a result, it excludes many critical wetlands and seasonal streams – waters that are essential for drinking water supplies, flood control and ecosystem health.

"The Trump EPA's shortsighted push to encourage industries to plow over wetlands and streams will destroy thousands of miles of waterways critical to wildlife across the United States," said J. W. Glass, a policy specialist at the Center of Biological Diversity. "This political gift from Trump to the polluters that support him will wipeout life-sustaining waterways in every corner of the nation, and it will destroy countless natural areas that protect us from

increasingly destructive surges driven by the climate crisis."

"By gutting protections for wetlands and streams, EPA is trying to disown its legal obligation to protect our drinking water and our communities," noted Andrew Wetzler, senior vice president, Nature, at the Natural Resources Defense Council. "Wetlands are nature's safeguard against flooding, and stripping away protections for them puts millions of people in harm's way. At a time when climate change is fueling stronger storms and worsening floods, taking away these protections is not just shortsighted – it's dangerous."

Jon Devine, director of freshwater ecosystems at NRDC, adds, "The EPA's proposal is an extreme and unscientific exploitation of an already extreme and unscientific Supreme Court ruling. Erasing protections for wetlands and streams that clearly affect downstream water quality and community safety ignores decades of hydrological science and will create regulatory chaos, leaving businesses, farmers, and communities with less certainty while exposing waters to more pollution."

Dr. Stacy Woods of the Union of Concerned Scientists states, "Water moves in ways we can't always see, and wetlands that look isolated can still be connected to other bodies of water. The revised definition will leave these wetlands at risk of further degradation, which could harm the rivers and streams that the people in the United States depend on daily for clean water."

This is just a sampling of the voices speaking out against the proposed WOTUS rule. For more details, refer to the sources used to write this article.

Associated Press News article:
"EPA moves to limit scope of clean water law to reduce amount of wetlands it covers" by Matthew Daly. Published November 17, 2025.

Natural Resources Defense Council – Press Release:
"Trump Administration Plans to Gut Water Protections Nationwide." Published November 17, 2025.

Union of Concerned Scientists – News:
"EPA Proposes Striking Wetlands Protections, Risking Water Quality Across US" by Ashley Siefert Nunes, Media Director. Published November 17, 2025.

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