

# DIRTY SECRETS:

## Data Centers Drive Demand for Gas in Oregon, Washington

The rapid proliferation of data centers is behind a new push for gas in the Pacific Northwest, encouraging plans for new power plants and the pipelines that fuel them.

*Report by Julia Stone & Zane Gustafson, in collaboration with Audrey Leonard, Staff Attorney for Columbia Riverkeeper.*

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# Executive Summary

Rapid data center growth is leading to unprecedented new demand for electricity in Washington and Oregon. Due to landmark climate legislation passed in Washington and Oregon committing both states to an electricity supply free of greenhouse gas emissions, utilities have been developing plans to phase out fossil fuels and integrate new non-hydro renewables into the grid. But power-hungry data centers are devouring new renewables and accelerating demand growth so quickly, it threatens to tip the region into an electricity crisis.

The fossil fuel industry, regional utilities, and data center developers are pushing an expansion of gas-fired power plants and pipelines as the best, and in some cases, the only solution to satisfy surging demand. Building new gas-fired power plants and pipelines not only threatens Washington and Oregon's ability to meet decarbonization targets mandated by law, it risks locking in the region's dependence on fossil generation for decades to come.

This report examines how unrestrained data center development in Washington and Oregon is catalyzing plans for a new wave of methane gas<sup>1</sup> infrastructure projects that threaten our climate, air quality, and progress towards 100% clean energy.

## ***Key takeaways:***

1. **Washington and Oregon are experiencing unprecedented demand growth from data centers, concentrated along the Columbia River.** There are more than 5 gigawatts (GW) worth of proposed new data centers in counties bordering the Columbia. Load growth of this magnitude exceeds what the region's utilities are able to meet with current capacity.
2. **Data centers' skyrocketing energy demand tips the region's decarbonization challenge into crisis.** Analysis shows that Washington and Oregon will need to increase generation from renewable sources like solar and wind by at least 65 million megawatt hours (MWh) to replace existing gas and coal generation, and power necessary vehicle electrification by 2050. Unrestrained data center expansion could add an additional 65 million MWh of demand on an even faster timeline.
3. **Gas companies and Pacific Northwest utilities plan to develop new methane gas-fired power generation—and the pipelines to fuel them—to meet data centers' skyrocketing energy demand.** Multiple proposals for on- and off-site generation are being considered in Washington while Williams, a major gas pipeline company, is pursuing two major expansion projects of the Northwest Pipeline to serve the growing data center hubs along the Columbia River.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the EPA, pipeline quality natural gas is 95-98% methane. Methane is a powerful greenhouse gas that is 28-times more efficient at trapping radiation than carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), over a 100-year period. See EPA, *About Methane and the Oil and Gas Sector*, <https://www.epa.gov/natural-gas-star-program/about-methane-and-oil-and-gas-sector>.

# I. Unrestrained data center expansion is exacerbating the Pacific Northwest's electricity crisis

Washington and Oregon have long been key locations for data center development

Washington and Oregon have a longstanding role as major data center hubs, due to the abundance of cheap, round-the-clock hydroelectric power and a long history of generous tax subsidies.<sup>2</sup>

Microsoft, Amazon, and Google were among the companies that built data centers along the Columbia River in the late 2000s and early 2010s. Since then, the power-hungry industry has generally been met with support from local and state officials. Counties across Washington and Oregon have long welcomed tech companies, offering access to cheap hydropower, tax abatement, and subsidies in return for assurances that the facilities would bring jobs and economic benefits.<sup>3</sup> Today, Oregon and Washington rank eighth and ninth, respectively, among states with the highest number of active data center facilities, according to industry analysis.<sup>4</sup>

Driven by technological breakthroughs in artificial intelligence (AI), data center development in Washington and Oregon is moving forward at a breakneck pace, placing stress on the region's power planning. A 2025 study completed by the consultancy Energy and Environmental Economics (E3) commissioned by the regional utilities and generation owners estimated that accelerated load growth from data centers combined with continued retirements of coal and gas generating units could create a resource gap beginning in 2026 and growing to 9 GW by 2030.<sup>5</sup> In other words, in just four years, the region could see as much *new* energy demand as the entire current load of the state of Oregon, roughly 9 GW.

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<sup>2</sup> Lulu Ramadan and Sydney Brownstone, "Power Hungry: How a Washington Tax Break for Data Centers Snowballed Into One of the State's Biggest Corporate Giveaways, ProPublica, August 4, 2024, <https://www.propublica.org/article/washington-data-centers-tech-jobs-tax-break>

<sup>3</sup> Big Tech hyperscalers have been operating data centers in Washington and Oregon since the mid-2000s: Microsoft began operating a large data center in Quincy, Washington in 2007; Google opened its first data center in The Dalles, Oregon in 2006; Meta opened its first data center in Prineville, Oregon in 2011; and, Amazon established its data center presence in Morrow and Umatilla counties in 2011.

<sup>4</sup> American Edge Project, "America's AI Surge: Powering Investment, Jobs, and Growth in Every State," 2025, <https://americanedgeproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Americas-AI-Surge-Powering-Growth-in-Every-State.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Energy and Environmental Economics, Inc., "Resource Adequacy and the Energy Transition in the Pacific Northwest: Phase 1 Results," 22 Sept. 2025, Washington Resource Adequacy Meeting, Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission, <https://www.utc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-10/Revised%20V3%20E3%20Presentation%20RA%20Study%20September%2022%20WA%20RA%20Meeting.pdf>

## What is a data center?

- A data center is a facility designed to house large numbers of computing systems along with the supporting infrastructure they require, including servers, data storage drives, network equipment, and cooling systems that keep everything from overheating.
- Because the term “data center” can refer to facilities of varying size and power use, it is helpful to quantify the power capacity of the facility: how much electricity the facility can use at a given time.
- Hyperscale data centers or campuses are facilities with a power capacity greater than 100 MW. Hyperscale data centers are designed to support large workloads and AI development, and increasingly account for most of the newly proposed data centers.
- Unlike other energy users, data centers operate 24/7, adding round-the-clock demand that must be met by local utilities or an independent, on-site power source.

Just six of the more than 100 utilities in Oregon and Washington absorbed nearly all new data center loads in the past decade: Douglas County PUD, Grant County PUD, Northern Wasco County PUD, Pacific Corp, Portland General Electric, and Umatilla Electric Cooperative, all with service areas bordering the Columbia River.<sup>6</sup>

These service areas are at risk for further data center development, with more than 5 GW worth of new data centers proposed along the Columbia River.<sup>7</sup>

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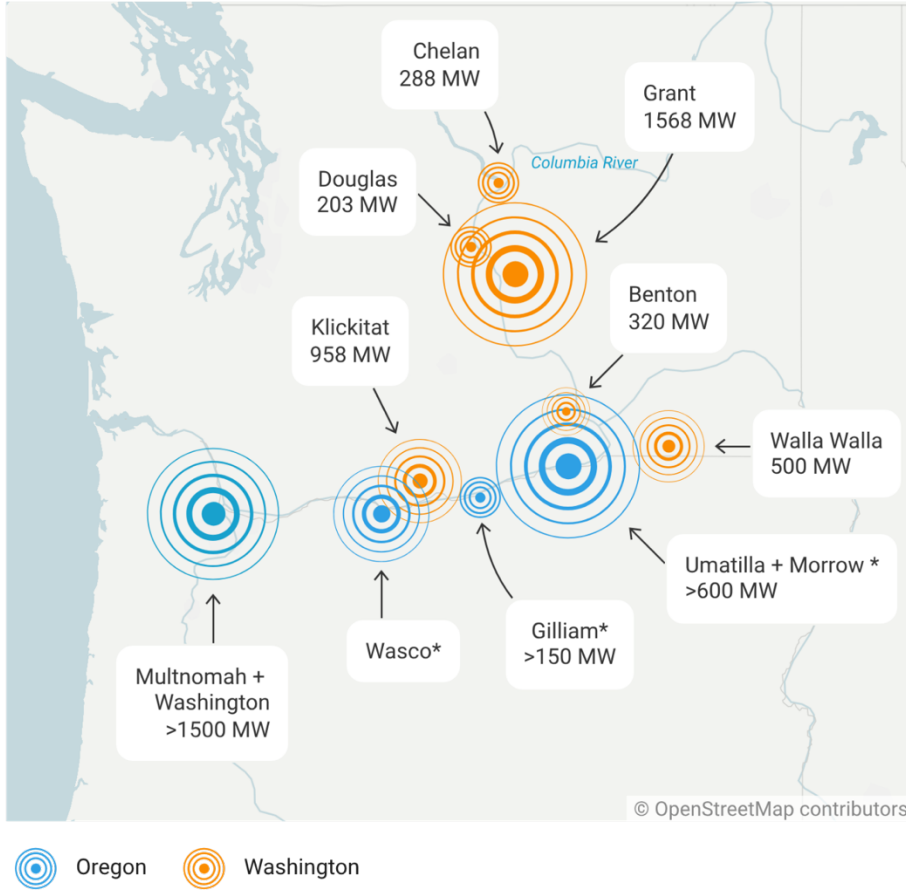
<sup>6</sup> Emily Moore, *A Climate Hawk's Guide to Northwest Data Centers*, Sightline Institute, May 2025, <https://www.sightline.org/release/report-data-centers-climate-impacts-in-the-northwest/>

<sup>7</sup> Quantifying the data center industry's existing footprint and energy use, plus forecasting its growth, remains a challenge. Data center developers, and especially Big Tech, are notoriously secretive about the energy consumption of their facilities as well as plans for expansion. There is still no state or federal agency collecting data on existing and/or proposed data center projects, and private consulting companies strictly forbid the scraping of their data. Instead, Columbia Riverkeeper developed a working database for tracking data center development in Washington and Oregon that incorporates multiple datasets with information obtained from publicly available project proposals, state air permits, and news outlets. For more information see Columbia Riverkeeper's report *A Closer Look: Columbia River Data Centers*, released February 2026, <https://www.columbiariverkeeper.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/2026.02.26-Data-Center-Closer-Look-Report.pdf>

Figure 1:

## Proposed Data Centers along the Columbia River Could Add 5 GW of Demand

Data center hubs along the Columbia River plan for further expansion, with Big Tech proposing to build more than 5 GW of new data center capacity across just 10 counties.



*\*Many data center operators do not make public the power use of current and proposed facilities. All figures are estimates based on available data and public reporting. In Oregon, Amazon operates dozens of data centers across Morrow and Umatilla Counties and has plans to expand into Gilliam County. The figure in the map is likely an under count. Likewise, Google does not make public the capacity of its data center campus in Wasco County. Estimates of current and future capacity range from 135 to 400 MW.*

Map: Columbia Riverkeeper • Created with Datawrapper

Load growth of this magnitude exceeds what the region's utilities are able to meet with current capacity. Washington and Oregon utilities have long depended on hydroelectricity from dams along the Columbia River and the Lower Snake River, which produce roughly half the region's electricity.<sup>8</sup> But regional hydropower production has reached its limits<sup>9</sup> and is increasingly unreliable due to climate change and changing water availability.<sup>10</sup>

Overreliance on hydropower presents its own set of challenges. Dams along the Columbia and Snake rivers have decimated salmon populations over the course of the last century.<sup>11</sup> Now, additional data center electricity loads threaten to prolong operation of the Lower Snake River dams and exacerbate hydropower's impacts on salmon and other tribal fishery resources.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, research shows that hydropower is not 100% clean. Dams and the reservoirs behind them emit methane gas and other potent greenhouse gases when artificially trapped organic material decomposes underwater. The four dams on the Lower Snake River in Washington produce about 1.8 million metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent per year, the equivalent of burning 2 billion pounds of coal each year.<sup>13</sup>

Some data center developers are proposing small modular nuclear reactors (SMNR) as a power source for the future, But these data centers would use gas until SMNRs would theoretically come online in years to decades down the road.<sup>14</sup> SMNRs are an unproven, costly, and dirty

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<sup>8</sup> In 2024, hydroelectric power from dams—most of which are located on the Columbia River—accounted for 59% of Washington's total electricity net generation and 41% of Oregon's total electricity generation. See U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Washington State Energy Profile and Analysis*, <https://www.eia.gov/states/wa/analysis> and *Oregon State Energy Profile and Analysis*, <https://www.eia.gov/states/or/analysis>.

<sup>9</sup> According to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, the current U.S. portion of the Columbia River basin's hydropower system has a nameplate capacity of about 34,000 MW. But, the operational flexibility and generating capability of the Columbia River Basin hydropower system has been reduced since 1980 primarily due to efforts to better protect fish and wildlife. There are limited opportunities for large-scale new development consistent with the Council's Protected Areas, essentially capping the growth of the region's hydropower capacity. See Northwest Power and Conservation Council, *Description of Existing Fleet by Generating Source: Hydropower*, [https://www.nwcouncil.org/2021powerplan\\_existing-fleet-generating-resource\\_hydropower/](https://www.nwcouncil.org/2021powerplan_existing-fleet-generating-resource_hydropower/).

<sup>10</sup> According to the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, climate change is reducing snowpack, leading to earlier spring runoff and lower river flows in the summer. This impacts hydroelectric production; for example, due to abnormally dry weather and drought in recent years, hydroelectric power has not supplied more than 50% of Oregon's in-state electricity since 2022, according to the EIA. See EIA, <https://www.eia.gov/states/or/analysis>.

<sup>11</sup> Columbia Riverkeeper, *Fish Facts: Columbia Basin Salmon, Steelhead, and Other Native Fish in Crisis*, <https://www.columbiariverkeeper.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/six-sovereigns-fish-factsv6-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> *The Yakama Nation Data Center Findings and Recommendations to the Washington Governor and Legislature*, November 10, 2025, <https://dor.wa.gov/about/data-center-workgroup>

<sup>13</sup> Gary Wockner, Mark Easter, and Gordon McCurry, *Estimate of Greenhouse Gas Emissions for the Lower Snake River Dams and Reservoirs using the All-Res Modeling Tool*, March 18, 2024, <https://telledamtruth.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/LSR-Dam-Reservoir-Estimated-GHG-Emissions-Final.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> World Nuclear News, *US companies come together for 'gas-plus-nuclear' solution*, May 2026, <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/articles/us-companies-come-together-for-gas-plus-nuclear-solution>; Alexander C. Kaufman, *Nuclear startup Terrestrial Energy inks a deal to use gas as a 'bridge' to SMRs*, June 2025, <https://www.latitudemedia.com/news/nuclear-startup-terrestrial-energy-inks-a-deal-to-use-gas-as-a-bridge-to-smrs/>.

technology, and the “gas as a bridge to SMNRs” scenario may extend methane gas use beyond current projections.<sup>15</sup>

At the same time, the Pacific Northwest is struggling to add new renewables to the grid. The Bonneville Power Administration, which manages over 15,000 miles (about 75%) of the region’s high-voltage transmission lines, has struggled to accommodate a massive backlog of generation interconnection requests.<sup>16</sup> In 2024, the federal agency reformed its study process to prioritize projects further along in development and prevent speculative projects from stalling the queue.<sup>17</sup> Still, as of November 2025, the agency still had a backlog of 167 large requests for generation interconnection totaling 61 GW.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the addition of new non-hydro renewable power generation has not kept pace with demand.

Given the limits and drawbacks of hydropower and nuclear, and the slow deployment of solar and wind, Washington and Oregon utilities have turned to the open market to purchase electricity from elsewhere at high prices during periods of high power demand like extreme weather events. Much of the electricity sourced from the open market is generated from fossil fuels.<sup>19</sup> A 2025 E3 study concluded that “natural gas is the only viable near-term firm capacity option” but acknowledged that adding new gas-fired resources may need policy support to realize.<sup>20</sup> A recent analysis by the Sightline Institute details how Pacific Northwest utilities are rallying support for gas-fired power plants and citing the E3 study as justification for adding new gas pipelines and methane gas plants as a necessary backstop for reliability.<sup>21</sup>

Nationally, the U.S. is already doubling down on gas expansion. The U.S. nearly tripled its gas-fired development in 2025, totaling almost 252 GW, according to new research from Global Energy Monitor (GEM).<sup>22</sup> If built, the nation’s existing gas fleet would grow by nearly 50%. Notably, GEM’s study found that more than one-third of this capacity is slated to directly power data centers on-site (aka “behind-the-meter” generation), suggesting that data centers are increasingly turning directly to gas companies to develop on-site power generation.

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<sup>15</sup> David Schlissel and Dennis Wamsted, *Small Modular Reactors: Still Too Expensive, Too Slow and Too Risky*. Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, May 2024. [https://ieefa.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/SMRs%20Still%20Too%20Expensive%20Too%20Slow%20Too%20Risky\\_May%202024.pdf](https://ieefa.org/sites/default/files/2024-05/SMRs%20Still%20Too%20Expensive%20Too%20Slow%20Too%20Risky_May%202024.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> Bonneville Power Administration, <https://www.bpa.gov/energy-and-services>

<sup>17</sup> In 2024, BPA implemented reforms to its interconnection process by shifting from a “first-come, first-served” serial study approach to a “first-ready, first-served” cluster study model.

<sup>18</sup> Bonneville Power Administration, *2025 Transmission Plan*, [https://www.bpa.gov/-/media/Aep/transmission/attachment-k/2025-BPA-Transmission-Plan\\_Final.pdf](https://www.bpa.gov/-/media/Aep/transmission/attachment-k/2025-BPA-Transmission-Plan_Final.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> Jeanne Currie, “Demystifying Electricity Resources and Emissions in Oregon and Washington,” Clean Energy Transition Institute, <https://www.cleanenergytransition.org/post/demystifying-electricity-resources-and-emissions-in-oregon-and-washington>

<sup>20</sup> Energy and Environmental Economics, Inc., “Resource Adequacy and the Energy Transition in the Pacific Northwest: Phase 1 Results,” 22 Sept. 2025, Washington Resource Adequacy Meeting, Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission, <https://www.utc.wa.gov/sites/default/files/2025-10/Revised%20V3%20E3%20Presentation%20RA%20Study%20September%2022%20WA%20RA%20Meeting.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> Laura Feinstein, *The Northwest Hasn’t Learned the Lessons of WPPSS (“Whoops”)*, March 24, 2026, <https://www.sightline.org/2026/03/24/the-northwest-hasnt-learned-the-lessons-of-wppss-whoops/>

<sup>22</sup> Jenny Martos, “Betting big on data centers, U.S. now leads world for new gas power development,” Global Energy Monitor, January 2026, <https://globalenergymonitor.org/report/betting-big-on-data-centers-u-s-now-leads-world-for-new-gas-power-development/>

Gas-powered, behind-the-meter generation is gaining traction in the Pacific Northwest. In its Minority Report on the Data Center Workgroup Recommendations, the Washington Department of Ecology confirmed that the majority of data centers' fossil fuel projects are behind-the-meter. The report, released December 2025, disclosed that "multiple data center developers have shared proposals with Ecology to use fossil fuels as the main source of their power."<sup>23</sup>

Without intervention, behind-the-meter gas generation can potentially bypass strict state regulations for utility-scale power in both Washington and Oregon. Some state lawmakers are trying to anticipate loopholes created from this regulatory gap through new legislation, but data center operators have consistently objected to proposals for corrective measures.<sup>24</sup> Without intervention, the proliferation of on- and off-site gas projects could entrench the region's reliance on fossil fuels and derail the clean energy transition.

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<sup>23</sup> Washington State Department of Revenue, *Data Center Workgroup: Preliminary Report*, December 1, 2025, <https://dor.wa.gov/about/data-center-workgroup>

<sup>24</sup> In 2026, industry lobbyists watered down key aspects of a measure introduced in the Washington State House of Representatives that would have imposed new clean energy requirements. In Oregon, lobbyists for Amazon mounted similar opposition to a failed 2023 measure that would have required data centers to use clean energy. See <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/climate-lab/big-tech-took-down-new-data-center-regulations-wa-lawmaker-says/> and <https://www.oregonlive.com/business/2023/03/amazon-fights-oregon-data-center-clean-energy-bill.html>.

## II. Data center expansion undermines Washington and Oregon's climate targets

Washington and Oregon are among the nation's leaders in setting aggressive decarbonization targets. But data center expansion threatens to put those commitments out of reach by increasing electricity demand by too much, too fast.

Washington and Oregon will need to increase generation from renewable sources like solar and wind by at least 65 million MWh to replace existing gas and coal generation, and to power necessary vehicle electrification by 2050. To put that in context, each household uses an average of 10.8 MWh of electricity per year,<sup>25</sup> and total residential electricity consumption in Washington and Oregon totaled 59 million MWh in 2023. Unrestrained data center expansion could add an *additional* 65 million MWh of demand on an even faster timeline.

### A closer look at Washington and Oregon's climate targets

Both Washington and Oregon have committed to reducing emissions by 95% compared to 1990 levels by 2050. In 1990, the two states emitted a combined 150 million metric tons of carbon dioxide (MTCO<sub>2</sub>). Washington and Oregon also have identical intermediate targets of 45% emissions reductions by 2030, and 70% emissions reductions by 2040.

Public data shows that both states have a long way to go to reach these targets. Emissions in Washington and Oregon rose throughout the 1990s and peaked around the year 2000 at 182 million MTCO<sub>2</sub>. Emissions fell during the 2000s and were 158 million MTCO<sub>2</sub> in 2021, the last year with public data from both states (Figure 2).

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<sup>25</sup> Energy Information Administration, *Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)*, <https://www.eia.gov/tools/faqs/faq.php?id=97&t=3>

Figure 2:

### Historic Emissions in Washington and Oregon (millions MTCO<sub>2</sub>)

Emissions peaked in 1999 - 2000 at more than 180 million MTCO<sub>2</sub>. Emissions declined through the 2000s to a low of 151 million MTCO<sub>2</sub> in 2012, before rising through the 2010s to 167 million MTCO<sub>2</sub> in 2019. The first year of the pandemic reduced emissions dramatically but emissions rebounded to 158 million MTCO<sub>2</sub> in 2021, the last year with public data from both Washington and Oregon.

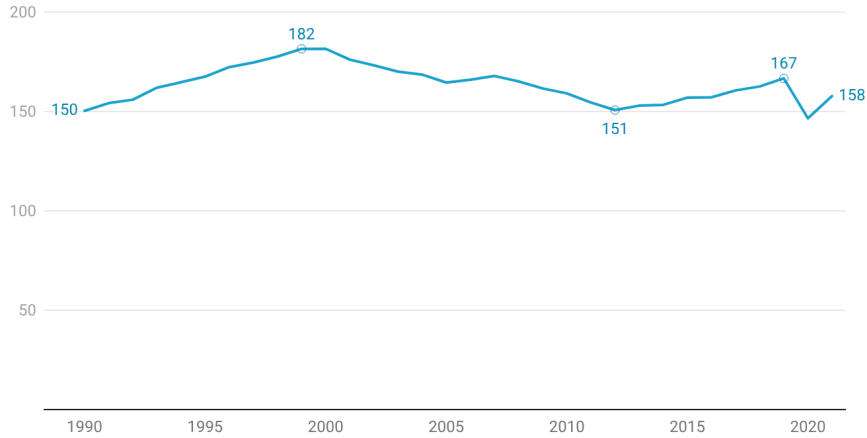


Chart: Zane Gustafson • Source: Washington and Oregon Greenhouse Gas Inventories • Created with Datawrapper

Washington and Oregon will need to drastically reduce emissions across all sectors to meet their 2030, 2040, and 2050 targets (Figure 3). Of the 158 million MTCO<sub>2</sub> emitted in 2021, almost half of the emissions came from two sectors, vehicle transportation and electricity. The other half of emissions came primarily from air and marine transportation, on-site combustion in buildings, industrial processes, and agriculture.

This analysis focuses on what it means to reduce emissions in the electricity sector and vehicle transportation sector. Reducing vehicle transportation emissions requires transitioning the fleet to electric vehicles, thereby increasing electricity consumption. Unrestrained data center expansion will also increase electricity consumption, which compounds the challenge of reducing emissions from the electricity sector.

Figure 3:

## Washington and Oregon emitted 157.7 million tons of greenhouse gas in 2021, and must drastically reduce emissions to meet 2050 targets

Emissions from vehicles and electricity accounted for nearly half of emissions in 2021. To meet state climate goals by 2050, practically all vehicles must be powered by electricity and practically all electricity must be zero-carbon.

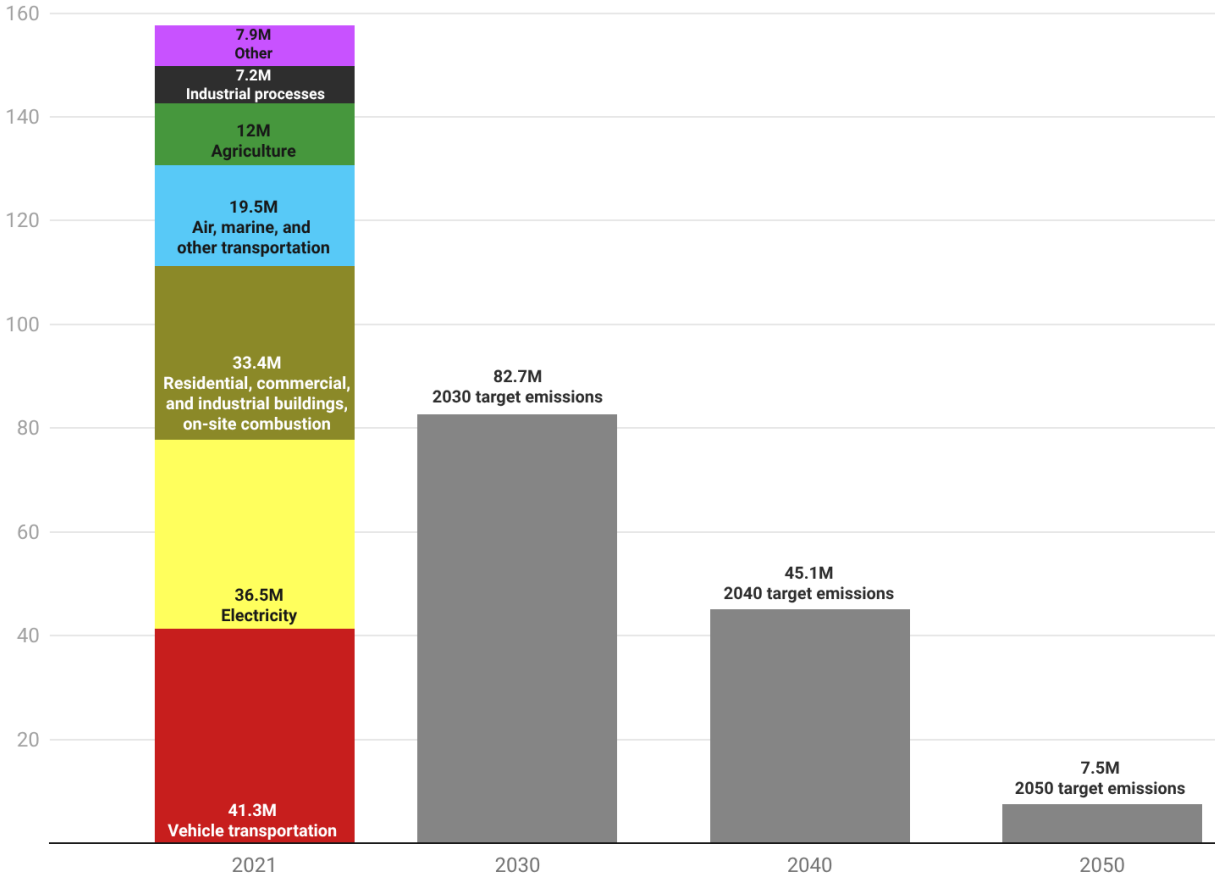


Chart: Zane Gustafson • Source: Washington and Oregon Greenhouse Gas Inventories • Created with Datawrapper

## The relationship between electricity demand and electricity consumption

Over the course of a year, the average household in the U.S. consumes about 10.8 megawatt hours (MWh) of electricity, or 10,800 kilowatt hours. A megawatt hour is the amount of electricity consumed by one megawatt of demand over the course of an hour. The amount of electricity a household needs is not the same throughout the year.

In the Pacific Northwest, there are two “demand peaks” for electricity, one in the winter and one in the summer, closely tracking the electricity demands of home heating and cooling.<sup>[28]</sup> When utilities talk about “peak demand capacity,” they are referring to the need to produce enough electricity to meet demand on the coldest days of winter and the hottest days of summer.

Unlike residential and commercial consumption, data centers have consistent demand for electricity throughout the year. Adding data center electricity demands during periods of low demand—during spring and fall, for example—is manageable, but adding data center demand during periods of peak demand can put immense strain on the electric grid.

By analyzing total MWh, we can examine total demand and supply over the course of the year, instead of focusing on the fuel composition required to meet peak demand capacity. Utilities and gas companies are using higher peak demand as a rationale for building new gas generation in the Pacific Northwest,<sup>[29]</sup> a buildout which will lock in even more carbon emissions. **Instead, data centers should be flexible and scale down their energy use to accommodate times of peak demand, reducing the need to drastically raise peak demand capacity.** Yet data center developers have long resisted such flexibility requirements.<sup>[30]</sup>

<sup>[28]</sup> Northwest Power and Conservation Council, “Historic Trends in Energy Use,” [https://www.nwcouncil.org/2021powerplan\\_historic-trends-energy-use/](https://www.nwcouncil.org/2021powerplan_historic-trends-energy-use/)

<sup>[29]</sup> Feinstein, The Northwest Hasn’t Learned the Lessons of WPPSS (“Whoops”)

<sup>[30]</sup> Washington State Dept. of Revenue, Data Center Workgroup: Preliminary Report.

Washington and Oregon currently generate more electricity than they consume (Figure 4). In 2023, total electricity demand in the two states was 147.5 million MWh, while generation was 164.7 million MWh. Residential electricity demand was 59.4 million MWh across the two states, while industrial and commercial demand was 75.7 million MWh. Data centers consumed about 12.5 million MWh of electricity in 2023, or 8.5% of total demand.<sup>29</sup>

Hydroelectricity accounted for 88 million MWh electricity generated in 2023, more than half of total electricity. However, 2023 was the least productive year of hydroelectricity since 2001, when just 83 million MWh were generated. Non-hydro renewables (solar and wind) in Washington and Oregon generated 19 million MWh in 2023, about 11.5% of the total, and nuclear generated 8.4 million MWh, about 5%.

Figure 4:

### Washington and Oregon Electricity Supply and Demand, 2023

Washington and Oregon generated more electricity than they consumed in 2023, with hydro, solar, and wind supplying 80% of all non-data center electricity demand. Additional demand from new data centers would cause demand to exceed existing supply.

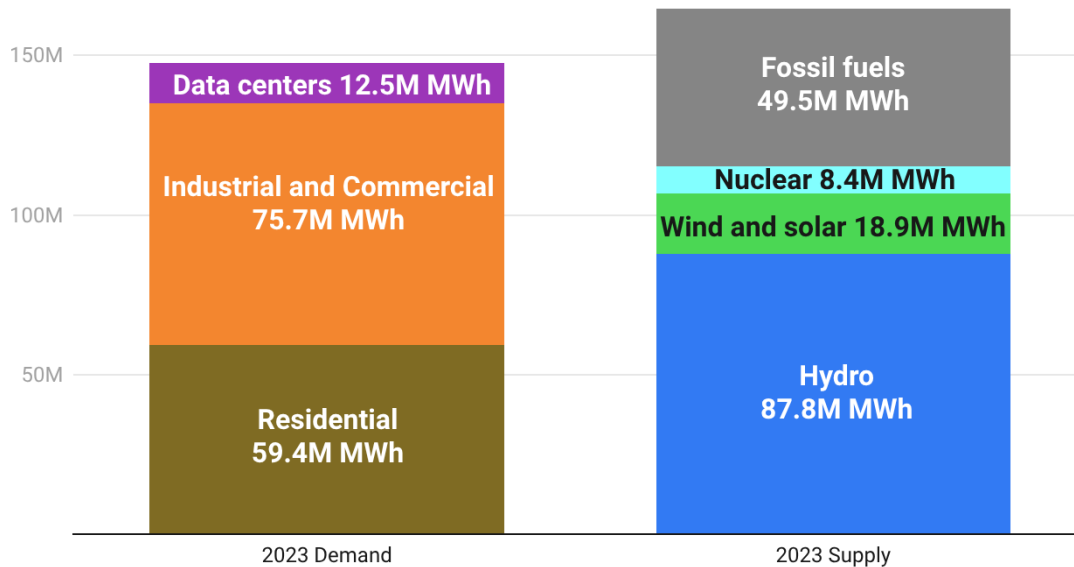


Chart: Zane Gustafson • Source: EIA State Electricity Profiles, Berkeley 2024, EPRI 2024 • Created with Datawrapper

<sup>29</sup> Data center electricity consumption in 2023 is estimated by averaging data from EPRI’s 2024 report, *Powering Intelligence: Analyzing Artificial Intelligence and Data Center Energy Consumption*, and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory’s 2024 *US Data Center Energy Usage Report*.

Burning fossil fuels generated nearly 50 million MWh of electricity in 2023: 30% of all generation. All of that electricity must be replaced by renewable sources in order for Washington and Oregon to meet their 2050 emissions targets.

Electricity demand has been fairly consistent in recent years: between 2011 and 2021 annual consumption ranged from 136 million MWh to 142 million MWh.<sup>30</sup> Yet meeting climate targets will create new electricity demand, especially from vehicles. Vehicles were the largest source of emissions in 2021, accounting for 26% of emissions in Washington and Oregon. Transitioning vehicles to electricity is imperative to reduce vehicle emissions, but will only be truly transformational if the electricity comes from renewable sources.

Figure 5:

## New demand could exceed all current residential electricity consumption

Electric vehicles accounted for about 2.5% of the 96.6 billion miles driven in Washington and Oregon in 2023. Converting the rest of the fleet to electric and powering the remaining 94 billion miles with electricity would add 33 million MWh demand, the same amount of electricity demanded by 5.3 GW of new data centers.

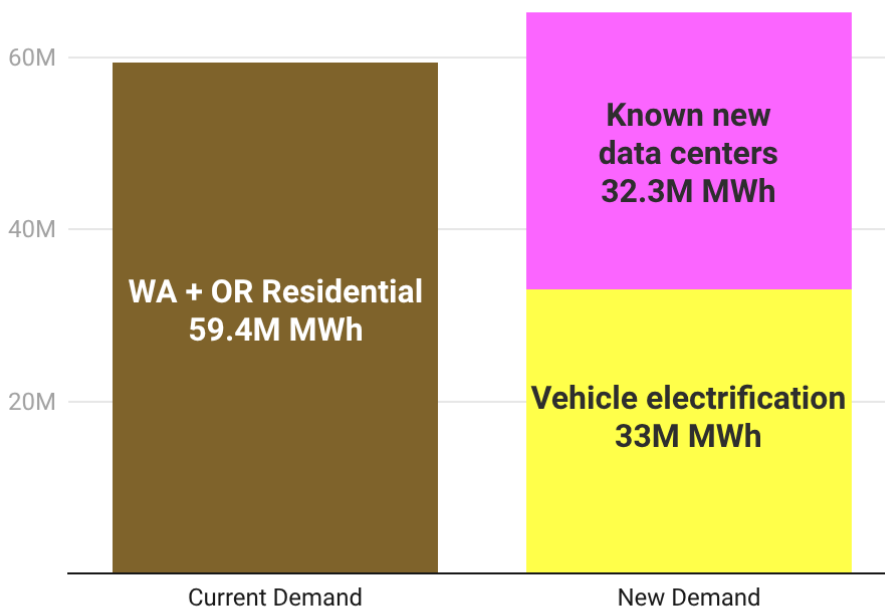


Chart: Zane Gustafson • Source: US EIA, US Dept. of Energy Alternative Fuels Data Center • Created with Datawrapper

<sup>30</sup> Energy Information Administration, *Total energy production and consumption by state, 2023*, <https://www.eia.gov/states/overview>

**Vehicle electrification is a necessary step towards decarbonization in the Pacific Northwest. Expanding data centers, on the other hand, may not be worth their cost in electricity.**

Currently, about 2.5% of vehicles in the two states are electric. Converting the remaining 97.5% of vehicles to electricity by 2050 would add about 33 million MWh of demand to the grid (Figure 5). Importantly, vehicle electrification is less likely to impact peak load compared to data centers because vehicles can charge during off-peak hours and could even act as batteries to mitigate peak demand, via bidirectional charging.<sup>31</sup>

Columbia Riverkeeper has identified 5.3 GW worth of new data centers being planned, proposed, or under construction as of March 2026.<sup>32</sup> If all those data centers are built to their full capacity, they will consume 32.3 million MWh electricity, almost the same amount as electrifying all vehicles in the states of Washington and Oregon (see Appendix for methodology).

**Data centers' skyrocketing energy demand tips the region's decarbonization challenge into crisis**

Looking ahead to 2050, regardless of data center expansion, Washington and Oregon need to dramatically increase the amount of electricity generated from renewable sources like solar and wind to meet their climate targets. To replace existing fossil fuel electricity (49.5 million MWh) and meet demand for vehicle electrification, Washington and Oregon will need to increase wind and solar generation by 65 million MWh, more than triple the 19 million MWh generated in 2023.

Whereas vehicle electrification will increase demand gradually over the course of 25 years, data center expansion is increasing demand right now. And that demand is being met by expanding gas generation—the exact opposite of what must happen for Washington and Oregon to meet their climate targets.

**For solar and wind to meet 10.6 GW of new data center demand, Washington and Oregon would need to increase annual renewable electricity generation by an additional 77 million MWh.**

To meet all this new demand, solar and wind generation would need to increase nearly 8-fold, from 19 million MWh in 2023 to 149 million MWh in 2050. **Simply put, this scale of data center expansion will overwhelm renewable electricity supply.**

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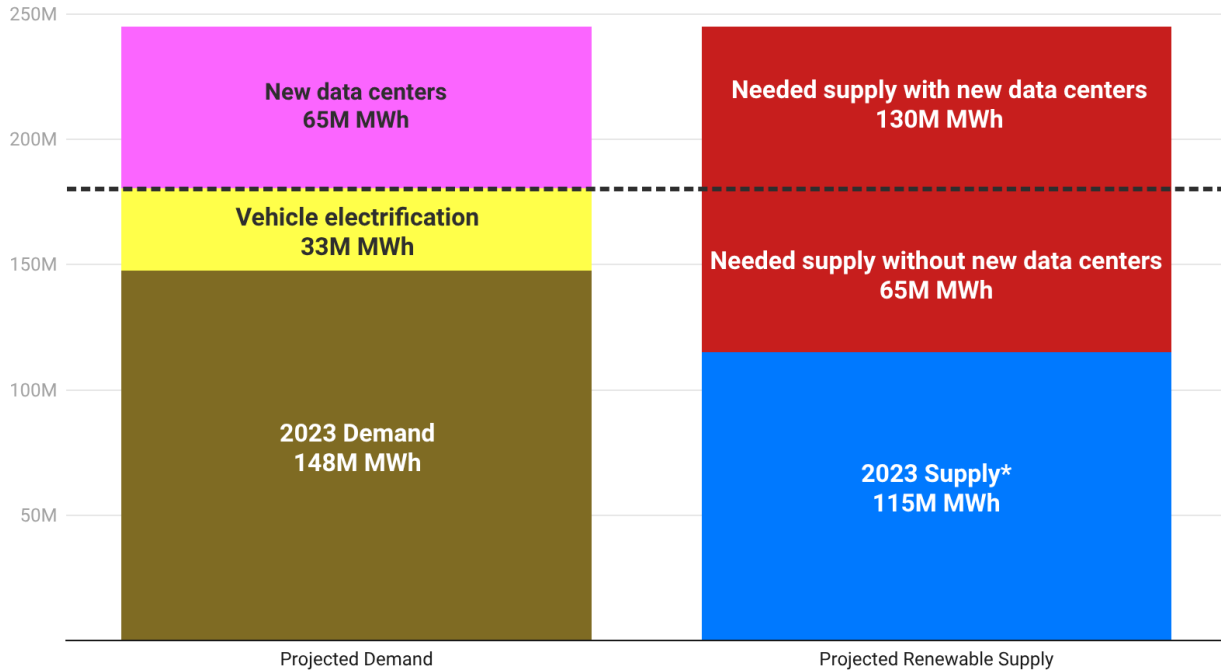
<sup>31</sup> Department of Energy, “Bidirectional Charging and Electric Vehicles for Mobile Storage,” <https://www.energy.gov/cmei/femp/bidirectional-charging-and-electric-vehicles-mobile-storage>

<sup>32</sup> Columbia Riverkeeper, *A Closer Look: Columbia River Data Centers* (Feb. 2026).

Figure 6:

### Projected 2050 Renewable Electricity Supply Gap

Meeting climate goals means electricity demand will rise from vehicle electrification. Additional electricity demand from data centers could double the amount of new renewable electricity that must be built to eliminate electricity emissions by 2050.



\* Existing non-fossil fuel supply generated in 2023 (hydro, wind, solar, nuclear, geothermal, battery)

Chart: Zane Gustafson • Source: Calculations by Earthseed Consulting • Created with Datawrapper

## Projecting 2050 Electricity Demand and Supply

By 2050, there will be at least 180 million MWh of electricity demand in Washington and Oregon (Figure 5). Most of that demand, about 135 million MWh, will be for residential, industrial, and commercial purposes, which is the same demand as 2023. This assumes that increased demand from population growth is mitigated by increased efficiency, similar to the consistent electricity demand during the 2010s noted above. Vehicle electrification will increase demand by at least 33 million MWh by 2050. Vehicle electrification demand could be higher if there are more people and more cars, or lower if mass transit becomes more accessible.

The growth in data center demand is the wild card. From a baseline of 12.5 million MWh consumed in 2023, the 5.3 GW of new data centers with known capacity will add at least 32.3 million MWh of electricity demand by 2035.<sup>[35]</sup> Given that there are many data center proposals with unknown capacity, and the fact that the industry may continue to expand in the years to come, adding another 5.3 GW of capacity consuming another 32.3 million MWh of electricity is a conservative projection.

**If 10.6 GW of data center capacity is built, data centers would consume 77 million MWh of electricity, equivalent to all other industrial and commercial electricity consumption in 2023, and accounting for more than 30% of all electricity demand in Washington and Oregon.**

Powering 10.6 GW of new data centers from non-hydro renewable sources would double the amount of new solar and wind generation needed from 65 million MWh to 130 million MWh. **In just 25 years, Washington and Oregon would need to increase annual non-hydro renewable electricity generation nearly 8-fold from 19 million MWh to 149 million MWh.**

<sup>[35]</sup> While some of the proposed data centers are slated to begin operation by 2030, others do not have a known target operation date. It is reasonable, and conservative, to assume that proposed data centers with known capacity will be operational within 10 years.

### III. Gas companies and Pacific Northwest utilities want to deploy methane gas to meet data centers' skyrocketing energy demand

As power providers in the Pacific Northwest reckon with projections for new electricity demand, the fossil fuel industry sees a new opportunity. A region that was solidly moving away from reliance on gas is now a potential new market.

Grant County, Washington, is ground zero for gas expansion

Grant County is a perfect case study of how unrestrained data center expansion, fossil fuel interests, and an impending electricity crisis are paving the way for renewed investment in gas infrastructure in the region.

Quincy, Washington, is one of the largest data center markets in the region. There are at least 27 data centers, including four large, multi-building campuses owned by Microsoft, Sabey, and H5. Other major hyperscalers like Vantage and CyrusOne also have plans to expand their footprint in Quincy.

Because most companies do not publicly release the size or capacity of their facilities—including Microsoft, the state's largest operator—it is difficult to estimate the power use of the county's data centers. However, research shows that the county's existing data centers have a capacity of at least 1 GW, and at least 1.5 GW worth of data centers are in development.<sup>34</sup> **Total residential electricity consumption in Grant County is about 1.2 million MWh; powering 2.5 GW worth of data centers would consume more than 15 million MWh.** Despite the striking figures, this is likely a conservative estimate.<sup>35</sup>

The rapid proliferation of data centers in the area has raised concerns about water and energy consumption. Grant County Public Utility District (PUD), which provides electricity to Quincy data centers, made headlines in 2025 when it imposed temporary growth limits on data centers as the PUD and its partners raced to upgrade substations and develop new sources of energy.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Estimates for existing and planned data center capacity in Grant County vary widely. The National Renewable Energy Laboratory estimates existing capacity of 750 MW, however, according to an assessment of company statements, utility records, and third-party databases, data center capacity appears closer to 1,000 MW. Meanwhile, Grant PUD reported in August 2024 that it had at least 75 applications for interconnection, with data centers asking for the equivalent of 1,568 total peak demand megawatts of power load. See Grant PUD, *Commission Recap*, 8/27/2024, <https://www.grantpud.org/blog/commission-recap-8-27-2024>.

<sup>35</sup> Grant County Public Utility District, *Commission Recap*, 3/25/2025—*Growth Limits Placed on Data Centers*. March 27, 2025, <https://www.columbiariverkeeper.org/2026/new-report-highlights-data-center-impacts-along-the-columbia/>

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

At that time, the 79 pending applications for interconnection with Grant PUD (mostly from data center projects) would have added power demand roughly double the demand of Seattle.<sup>37</sup>

Desperate for new generation to feed the growing data center industry, Grant PUD is actively exploring the feasibility of constructing additional gas-fired power plants near Moses Lake or Quincy.<sup>38</sup> At a January 2026 Commission Workshop, commissioners heard updates on multiple proposals for new generation, including a 40-120 MW gas-fired power plant in Grant County, the installation of 10-20 MW of Natural Gas Fuel Cell Generators, and the installation of 25-50 MW of Mainspring Linear Generators combined with battery storage.<sup>39</sup> All three options would run on methane gas. According to Grant PUD, siting gas projects close to data center clusters would minimize the need for new transmission lines to deliver the power.<sup>40</sup>

Grant PUD commissioners are also considering whether to invest in a methane gas plant in Idaho, a state without emission reduction targets.<sup>41</sup> **This would mean exporting Washington’s energy needs to states with weaker climate protections.**

Separately, the Port of Quincy is pursuing plans to build a new gas-fired power plant in collaboration with Colusa Indian Energy, a for-profit Tribal corporation based in California. The “Columbia Basin Power Project” aims to deliver 3.5 GW by 2029, the majority of which will power data center expansion.<sup>42</sup> The Port of Quincy held a town hall meeting on February 12, 2026, where Port commissioners indicated that technical studies are underway. Port commissioner Brian Kuest told reporters that the “natural gas for the facility would come from regional pipeline infrastructure that would be built into Quincy from the east,” presumably Williams’ proposed Valley Trail pipeline.<sup>43</sup>

Earlier this year, Grant PUD greenlit plans for a new 12 MW methane gas power plant built by VoltaGrid, the company that supplied the generators that power Elon Musk’s controversial xAI megacampus in Memphis.<sup>44</sup> The new gas power plant will exclusively serve Vantage’s Quincy

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<sup>37</sup> Monica Nickelsburg, “Washington’s hydropower has created a data center boom. Some are concerned about its future,” *OPB*, August 20, 2025, <https://www.opb.org/article/2025/08/20/some-are-concerned-about-the-future-of-washington-s-data-center-boom/>

<sup>38</sup> Grant Public Utility District, *Commission workshop, 1/13/2026*, January 15, 2026, <https://www.grantpud.org/blog/commission-workshop-1-13-2026-public-input-reviewed-on-rates-natural-gas-gathers-momentum-more>

<sup>39</sup> Grant Public Utility District, *Strategy: Energy Resource Development*, Grant PUD Commission Subject-Matter Expert Presentation, January 13, 2026, <https://www.grantpud.org/commission-meetings>

<sup>40</sup> Grant Public Utility District, *Commission workshop, 1/13/2026*, January 15, 2026, <https://www.grantpud.org/blog/commission-workshop-1-13-2026-public-input-reviewed-on-rates-natural-gas-gathers-momentum-more>

<sup>41</sup> Grant PUD Commission Subject-Matter Expert Presentation, January 13, 2026.

<sup>42</sup> Cheryl Schweizer, “Standalone energy project eyed for Quincy,” *Columbia Basin Herald*, February 16, 2026, <https://columbiabasinherald.com/news/2026/feb/16/standalone-energy-project-eyed-for-quincy/>

<sup>43</sup> Ayla Burnett, “Grant PUD Approves New Gas Plant to Serve Data Center,” *NewsData*, February 13, 2026, [https://www.newsdata.com/clearing\\_up/supply\\_and\\_demand/grant-pud-approves-new-gas-plant-to-serve-data-center/article\\_61a187aa-4df9-40f4-a104-f3d57ec8d906.html](https://www.newsdata.com/clearing_up/supply_and_demand/grant-pud-approves-new-gas-plant-to-serve-data-center/article_61a187aa-4df9-40f4-a104-f3d57ec8d906.html)

<sup>44</sup> Chris Newman, “Data Centers Going Off-Grid With Natural Gas to ‘Find Any Way to Get Power,’” *Natural Gas Intelligence*, June 16, 2025, <https://naturalgasintel.com/news/data-centers-going-off-grid-with-natural-gas-to-find-any-way-to-get-power/>

data center campus and will feature 14 mobile gas engines that will be enclosed in a semi-tractor trailer.<sup>45</sup> To fuel the plant, VoltaGrid will truck methane gas from Moses Lake to Quincy. According to project plans, operating the plant will require 16 semi tractor trailer trips per day.<sup>46</sup>

Vantage’s deal with Grant PUD is one of the first notable “behind-the-meter” agreements in the region, a trend that is becoming increasingly popular across the country. Though the project has been billed as a “temporary stop-gap,” the deal signals the utility is open to other data centers’ behind-the-meter solutions.

The Vantage deal also highlights a concerning trend: data center developers are increasingly turning to quickly deployable, nontraditional gas engines to power new facilities. As wait times for combined-cycle gas turbines top seven years, announcements from manufacturers of smaller reciprocating gas-fired engines are making headlines, including a surge in demand for modular turbine designs with rapid start capability.<sup>47</sup> Other data center developers are turning to jet-engine or “aeroderivative” turbines.<sup>48</sup> Experts warn that gas engines are often less efficient and produce more emissions than traditional power plants, which use more efficient combined-cycle turbines that employ both gas and steam.<sup>49</sup>

The bottom line? Methane gas is at the forefront of behind-the-meter data center growth.

## New pipeline development proposals would facilitate regional gas expansion

In order for data center developers and regional utilities to meaningfully expand both on- and off-site gas-fired power generation in Washington and Oregon, they will need access to more gas. Average utilization of the region’s interstate pipeline system has exceeded 95% since 2020, limiting supply for new generation.<sup>50</sup> It’s not surprising, then, that midstream companies are eyeing pipeline expansions that would pump even more gas into Washington and Oregon.

Just two years ago, Canadian-owned TC Energy expanded the Gas Transmission Northwest (GTN) pipeline, which runs from Kingsgate, British Columbia, through Idaho, Washington, and Oregon, despite overwhelming opposition by regional lawmakers, the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission and over 50 grassroots organizations.<sup>51</sup> The 2024 expansion—known as GTN Xpress—increased the pipeline’s capacity by 150 million cubic feet

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<sup>45</sup> Grant Public Utility District, *Commission recap*, 1/27/2026, January 30, 2026,

<https://www.grantpud.org/blog/commission-recap-1-27-2026-rate-increase-approved>

<sup>46</sup> SEPA Environmental Checklist: SEPA 2025-016, Washington Department of Ecology at 6, 20 (Sept. 2023).

<sup>47</sup> Aaron Larson, “Engine Power Plants Surge as Data Centers Drive Unprecedented Demand,” *Power*, March 2, 2026, <https://www.powermag.com/engine-power-plants-surge-as-data-centers-drive-unprecedented-demand/>

<sup>48</sup> Naveena Sadasivam & Jake Bittle, “Data centers are scrambling to power the AI boom with natural gas,” *Grist*, February 10, 2026, <https://grist.org/energy/data-centers-natural-gas-methane-behind-the-meter/>

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*; Nils Rokke, “We Thought Gas Turbines Were Done. Then AI Came Along,” *Forbes*, February 10, 2026, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nilsrokke/2026/02/10/we-thought-gas-turbines-were-done-then-ai-came-along/>

<sup>50</sup> Northwest Gas Association, *Pacific Northwest Gas Market Outlook (2024)*

<sup>51</sup> Columbia Riverkeeper, “GTN Xpress Fracked Gas Expansion,” <https://www.columbiariverkeeper.org/campaigns/gtn-xpress-fracked-gas-pipeline/>

per day (MMcf/d), the equivalent of adding 754,000 cars to the road every year for 30 years.<sup>52</sup>

Now Williams, the owner of the largest gas pipeline system in Washington, is actively exploring two major pipeline expansions: the Rockies Columbia Connector Project, and the Valley Trail Project. Combined, these projects would build hundreds of miles of new pipeline in Washington, and bring between 627 million and 965 million cubic feet of new methane gas to Washington and Oregon each day.<sup>53</sup> Burning this much methane gas would emit between 12.5 million and 19.3 million metric tons of carbon dioxide per year.

Figure 7:

### New Gas Pipelines Dwarf Recent Expansions, MMcf/d

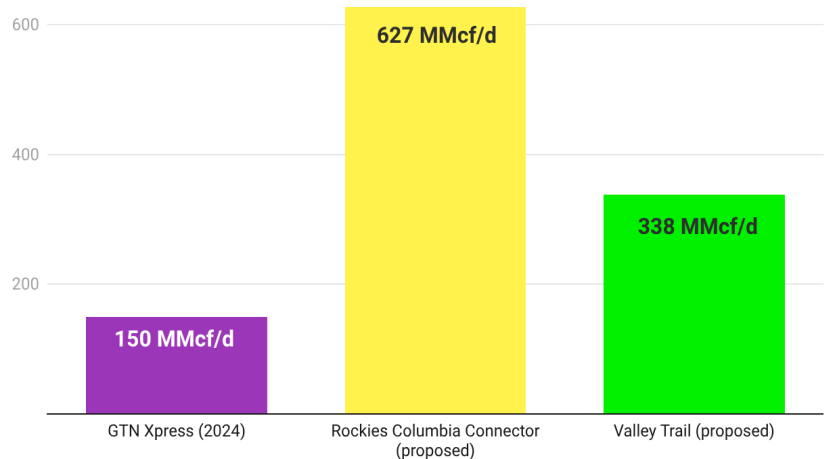


Chart: Zane Gustafson · Created with Datawrapper

In summer 2025, Williams quietly solicited interest for new gas capacity along the “Rockies Columbia Connector,” a massive expansion of the Northwest Pipeline which runs from Opal, Wyoming to Sumas, Washington. The project would increase gas flow along the entire length of the Northwest Pipeline by 627 MMcf/d, over *four times* the size of the GTN Xpress.<sup>54</sup> Though exact details have not been made public, documents indicate that 338 MMcf/d of the new capacity would target the Columbia River Gorge between Umatilla, Oregon and Washougal, Washington. As part of the expansion, Williams is considering adding 158 miles of new pipeline in Washington along the Columbia River Gorge, and installing new equipment at air-polluting compressor stations to support greater gas flows throughout Washington and Oregon.

<sup>52</sup>Washington State Office of the Attorney General, “AG Ferguson Seeks to Halt Expansion of Methane Gas Pipeline by Company Behind Keystone XL,” August 22, 2022, <https://www.atg.wa.gov/news/news-releases/ag-ferguson-seeks-halt-expansion-methane-gas-pipeline-company-behind-keystone-xl>

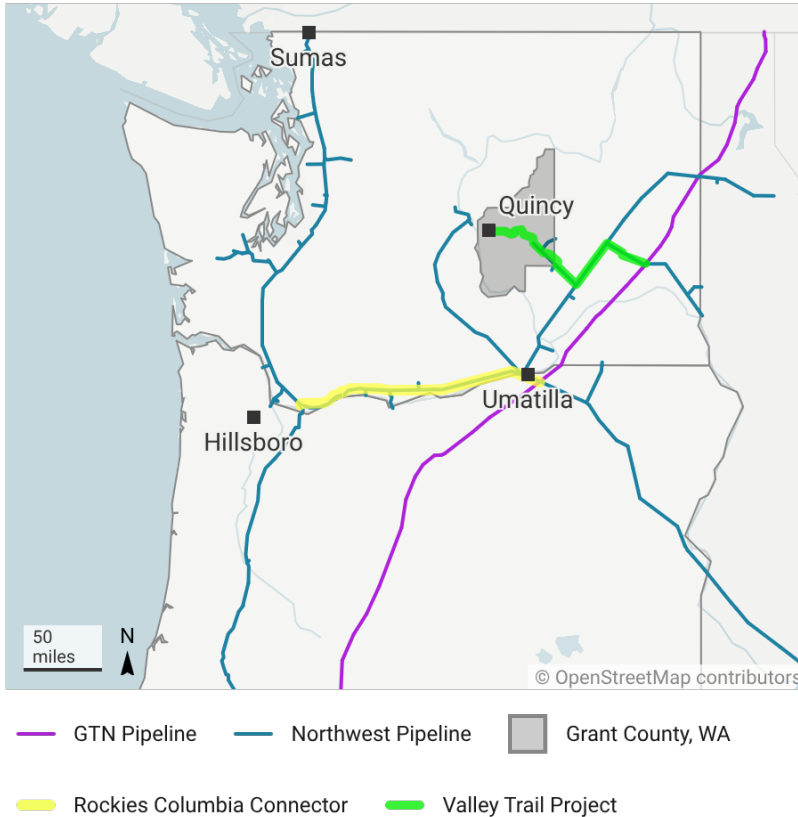
<sup>53</sup> The Columbia Rockies Connector and the Valley Trail Project are in early stages of proposal and the exact routes and incremental volumes are still unknown. If both projects are built, we estimate the resulting incremental gas volume to be between 650,000 Dth/day to 1 million Dth/day (between 627 MMcf/d and 965 MMcf/d).

<sup>54</sup> Northwest Pipeline LLC. *Rockies Columbia Connector Project Non-Binding Open Season and Reverse Open Season (Notice No. 25-087)*, The Williams companies, June 25, 2025, [https://www.northwest.williams.com/NWP\\_Portal/northwest\\_notice\\_detail.action?format=&notice\\_num=32274](https://www.northwest.williams.com/NWP_Portal/northwest_notice_detail.action?format=&notice_num=32274)

Figure 8:

## Two new pipeline proposals would pave the way for Northwest gas expansion

Williams is considering two major expansions along the Northwest Pipeline, which together could bring up to a billion cubic feet of new methane gas to the Northwest each day. New pipelines could fuel the buildout of new gas-fired power generation in Grant County, Washington.



*The Rockies Columbia Connector and the Valley Trail Project are in early planning stages. The routes displayed on the map are approximate.*

Map: Columbia Riverkeeper • Source: Department of Energy • Created with Datawrapper

Separately, Williams is pursuing the “Valley Trail Project,” which proposes to add 137 miles of new pipeline in Adams and Grant counties. Roughly half of the project would be constructed alongside the existing Northwest Pipeline, while 63 miles of new greenfield pipeline would extend the pipeline through Grant County and into Quincy, straight to the heart of data center growth in central Washington. Early plans show the pipeline adding around 338 MMcf/d of new capacity to the Quincy area, enough gas to power 2.7 GW worth of data centers.

For both projects, Williams cites the region’s growing data center industry as the principal drivers of demand, boasting to investors that natural gas is expected to be critical to support the industry’s growth in the Pacific Northwest.

The fossil fuel industry is emboldened by the Trump administration’s energy agenda and the promise of data centers’ insatiable energy needs. At the same time, some local and state decision-makers in Washington and Oregon are signaling a shift in favor of gas, despite state mandates to phase out fossil fuels.

Williams is actively working to influence Washington policymakers’ opinions on methane gas. And it could be working: Williams recently boasted to investors that Washington leaders’ opinions on gas are “softening.”<sup>55</sup>

At a March 2025 Northwest Pipeline Customer Meeting, an executive noted that the pipeline developer has “been really surprised with the amount of continued demand for capacity expansions” in the Pacific Northwest and that they’ve seen “consistent strong political support” from local officials in the project areas along the Northwest Pipeline footprint.<sup>56</sup>

Even more troubling, regional utility representatives are pushing state regulators to ease restrictions on methane gas. During a December 2025 Washington Department of Ecology public meeting regarding rulemaking for Air Quality in Overburdened Communities, Washington Public Utility Districts Association Policy Director, Nicolas Garcia, advocated for the need for gas plant buildout near pipelines, despite impacts to overburdened communities.<sup>57</sup> Garcia asked about potential “exemptions” or “special treatment” for gas combustion turbines—claiming that without accommodations, areas could see power outages on peak temperature days. Garcia referenced presentations before policymakers that indicate a 6-9 GW shortage from peak needs by 2030—a figure that necessarily includes data center demand.<sup>58</sup>

## How Washington and Oregon fit into the wider gas buildout across the West

More than two-thirds of the methane gas consumed in the Pacific Northwest is sourced from Canada. Fracked Canadian gas enters the U.S. through two major pipeline systems: TC Energy’s GTN Pipeline and Williams’ Northwest Pipeline, which connects to a number of regional Canadian pipelines in Sumas, Washington.<sup>59</sup> The remaining gas consumed in the Pacific

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<sup>55</sup> MountainWest Pipeline, LLC, *2025 MWP & NWP Customer Meeting*, March 2025, The Williams Companies, [https://www.mwpipe.com/mwpipe/pdf/2025\\_MWP\\_NWP\\_Customer\\_Meeting.pdf](https://www.mwpipe.com/mwpipe/pdf/2025_MWP_NWP_Customer_Meeting.pdf)

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Washington Dep’t of Ecology, *Meeting About Rulemaking for Air Quality in Overburdened Communities*, Chap 173-448 WAC (Dec. 10, 2025). Meeting recording obtained by Columbia Riverkeeper via public records request.

<sup>58</sup> Washington Public Utility Districts Association, *New Legislator Briefing: Energy for 2025*, <https://www.wpuda.org/assets/New%20legislator%20briefing%20energy%20for%202025.pdf>

<sup>59</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Washington State Energy Profile and Analysis*, <https://www.eia.gov/states/wa/analysis>

Northwest comes primarily from the Rocky Mountain basins spanning Utah, Wyoming, Colorado along with the San Juan Basin in northwest New Mexico and southwest Colorado.<sup>60</sup>

A number of LNG export terminals are under development in British Columbia, which will shift gas supply away from Washington and Oregon. LNG Canada shipped its first cargo in July 2025, and is expected to reach its full capacity (1.84 Bcf/d) later this year. An expansion of the terminal to 3.68 Bcf/d is already in development.<sup>61</sup> Two other LNG export projects with a combined capacity of 0.7 Bcf/d are under construction in British Columbia, and will further divert regional gas supply.

The shift of Canadian gas to new LNG export hubs in British Columbia is prompting Williams to pursue a suite of major infrastructure projects along the Mountain West pipeline system in the Rockies basin. Coupled with expansions along the Northwest Pipeline in Oregon and Washington, Williams has the potential to significantly increase the flow of gas from the Rockies to the Pacific Northwest and make up for displaced Canadian supply.

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<sup>60</sup> Northwest Gas Association, *Pacific Northwest Gas Market Outlook (2024)*

<sup>61</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, "North America's LNG export capacity could more than double by 2029," *Today in Energy*, October 16, 2025, <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=66384>

## IV. Data centers' resistance to regulation

The data center industry has become increasingly powerful across the country and in Washington and Oregon, benefiting from closed-door deals and limited oversight. Now, Big Tech and the data center lobby have shown that they will fight against even the smallest regulatory clawbacks.

The data center lobby has consistently fought against—and has successfully squashed—numerous attempts by lawmakers to regulate the industry

During the 2026 legislative session, Washington lawmakers introduced HB 2515, a wide-ranging data center reform bill to address affordability, reliability, transparency, and clean energy use.<sup>62</sup>

The legislation stemmed in part from the recommendations of the Data Center Workgroup. Among the most important recommendations were that data centers adhere to Washington's climate laws and requirements that Washington utilities strengthen ratepayer protections.<sup>63</sup> The data center lobby, led by the Data Center Coalition, opposed recommendations to increase transparency and accountability,<sup>64</sup> along with efforts to tie clean energy development to tax incentives.<sup>65</sup>

HB 2515 passed the House, but the data center lobby watered down the measure until its Senate sponsor pulled it from a floor vote. The *Seattle Times* reported that lobbyists for companies like Microsoft and Amazon pushed hard against individual regulations in the proposal, showing that the influential data center lobby resisted even the slightest regulatory rollbacks.<sup>66</sup>

In Oregon, legislators failed to pass HB 2816 in 2023, a measure that would have held data centers to the same greenhouse gas reduction levels as the state's large investor-owned utilities. At the time, the bill's sponsor Rep. Pam Marsh revealed that Amazon lobbyists had been campaigning heavily against the bill from the moment it was introduced.<sup>67</sup> Amazon's reaction against the bill is not surprising, considering the majority of Amazon's data centers are clustered in Umatilla and Morrow counties. These data centers are served by Umatilla Electric

<sup>62</sup> Washington State Legislature. (2025) *HB 2515 – Addressing emerging large energy use facilities*. <https://app.leg.wa.gov/billsummary/?BillNumber=2515&Year=2025&Initiative=false>

<sup>63</sup> Washington State Dept. of Revenue, *Data Center Workgroup: Preliminary Report*

<sup>64</sup> As part of the Data Center Workgroup's Preliminary Report, the Data Center Coalition (DCC) submitted a minority report, arguing that requirements for data centers to report water use "imposes a disparate legal requirement" and that the lobby opposes requirements for the industry to publish sustainability reports (p. 26-29).

<sup>65</sup> Conrad Swanson, "Tech companies gain ground in fight against WA data center regulations," February 28, 2026. <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/climate-lab/tech-companies-gain-ground-in-fight-against-wa-data-center-regulations/>

<sup>66</sup> Conrad Swanson, "Big Tech took down new data center regulations, WA lawmaker says," *The Seattle Times*, March 3, 2026, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/climate-lab/big-tech-took-down-new-data-center-regulations-wa-lawmaker-says/>

<sup>67</sup> Mike Rogoway, "Amazon fights Oregon Data Center clean energy bill," *The Oregonian*, March 30, 2023, <https://www.oregonlive.com/business/2023/03/amazon-fights-oregon-data-center-clean-energy-bill.html>

Cooperative, a utility that experienced such a sharp spike in demand that it exhausted its federal hydropower allocation and began buying power produced from fossil fuels on the open market.<sup>68</sup>

There have been steps towards data center regulation. In Oregon, lawmakers successfully passed HB 3546, known as the POWER Act, in 2025. Among other things, the law mandates the Public Utility Commission create a new customer class for data centers within Oregon’s investor-owned utility system, allowing regulators to fairly assign infrastructure and energy costs, rather than passing those costs on to Oregon households and businesses.<sup>69</sup> While the POWER Act is a meaningful step, the measure excludes consumer-owned utilities and does not address environmental impacts like water usage.

### The data center industry is devouring new non-hydro renewables for their own use

For years, data center developers have touted their efforts to “go green” and source clean electricity for their AI factories, claiming the industry can help lead the region’s transition to carbon-free electricity.<sup>70</sup> However, acquisitions of non-hydro renewable generation by the region’s data centers can actually have the opposite impact, detracting from the region’s overall efforts to decarbonize.

In January, Amazon outbid Puget Sound Energy in an auction for the 1.2 GW Sunstone Solar Project, a solar farm in Oregon that, once completed, will have the capacity to power several hundred thousand homes.<sup>71</sup> Instead of helping the utility meet the decarbonization targets set by Washington’s Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA), Amazon will instead use the electricity generated by the solar farm to power some of the dozens of data center campuses it operates in eastern Oregon. Moreover, the \$83 million Amazon spent on the project is a drop in the bucket of the \$200 billion the company plans to spend on AI, cloud services, and data center-related infrastructure.<sup>72</sup> Utilities racing to acquire renewable generation assets can now expect to compete with Big Tech, a trend that is also emerging with transmission assets.<sup>73</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Mike Rogoway, “As Amazon expands in Eastern Oregon, regional carbon emissions soar,” *The Oregonian*, September 7, 2022, <https://www.oregonlive.com/silicon-forest/2022/09/as-amazon-expands-in-eastern-oregon-regional-carbon-emissions-soar.html>

<sup>69</sup> Oregon Citizens’ Utility Board, “Oregon House Passes POWER Act With Strong Bipartisan Support,” June 25, 2025, <https://oregoncub.org/news/press-releases/oregon-house-passes-power-act-with-strong-bipartisan-support/3160/>

<sup>70</sup> On page 27 of the Washington State Department of Revenue’s Data Center Workgroup: Preliminary Report, David Duvall of the Data Center Coalition argues that “data centers are aligned with the state’s clean energy goals” and that data center growth includes “investments in clean energy resources and new technologies that both the state and data centers need to meet their respective clean energy goals.”

<sup>71</sup> Greg Kim, “Amazon outbids WA utility for one of nation’s largest solar project,” *The Seattle Times*, February 5, 2026, <https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/climate-lab/amazon-outbids-wa-utility-for-one-of-nations-largest-solar-projects/>

<sup>72</sup> Karen Weise, “Amazon’s \$200 Billion Spending Plan Raises Stakes in A.I. Race,” *The New York Times*, February 5, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/05/technology/amazon-200-billion-ai.html>

<sup>73</sup> In 2023, the Oregon Public Utility Commission issued a certificate of public utility and convenience for the Boardman to Hemingway (B2H) 500-kV transmission line, because the utility argued it would serve its Portland area customers. In spring 2025 PacificCorp revealed its plans to sell power from the line to a single industrial customer near Boardman, most likely a single data center customer.

As this report details, Washington and Oregon will need to increase non-hydro renewable generation by 65 million MWh to replace existing fossil fuel electricity *and* meet demand for vehicle electrification. This is more than triple the 19 million MWh non-hydro renewable electricity generated in 2023. If Washington and Oregon allow 10.6 GW of new data centers to be built, the two states will need to increase annual non-hydro renewable electricity generation nearly eightfold, by 19 million MWh to 149 million MWh to decarbonize before 2050.

Data centers do not pay their fair share for the resources they consume

Pacific Northwest utilities are investing billions of dollars to build new energy infrastructure.<sup>74</sup> Yet the majority of the data centers that will drive demand for the new generation are not yet built. If actual data center demand does not reach projected growth, utilities—and their ratepayers—could be stranded with expensive, unnecessary energy infrastructure. Higher electricity rates further burden low-income communities in the Pacific Northwest, contributing to a growing affordability crisis across the region.

At the same time, the data center industry benefits from generous tax incentives. In Washington, the industry received over half a billion dollars between 2012 and 2023.<sup>75</sup> Oregon data center operators saved more than \$450 million in 2026 through three separate incentive programs.<sup>76</sup>

## Conclusion

The fossil fuel and data center industries are teaming up to push gas expansion in Washington and Oregon

Laws designed to protect communities, clean water, and our climate have not kept pace with the rapid growth of data centers. Data center developers and utilities that serve them are looking to build a new fleet of methane gas-powered power plants and the pipelines that fuel them. Washington and Oregon leaders must decide whether to uphold and strengthen climate laws to ensure that data centers do not undermine a clean energy transition.

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<sup>74</sup> Ted Sickinger, “Western states need \$60 billion investment in new transmission lines by 2035 to avoid major reliability problems,” *The Oregonian*, February 6, 2026, <https://www.oregonlive.com/business/2026/02/western-states-need-60-billion-investment-in-new-transmission-lines-by-2035-to-avoid-major-reliability-problems.html>

<sup>75</sup> *The Yakama Nation Data Center Findings and Recommendations to the Washington Governor and Legislature*, November 10, 2025, <https://dor.wa.gov/about/data-center-workgroup>

<sup>76</sup> Mike Rogoway, “Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek: Pace of data center growth ‘is not sustainable,’” *The Oregonian*, February 25, 2026, <https://www.oregonlive.com/silicon-forest/2026/02/gov-tina-kotek-pace-of-oregon-data-center-growth-is-not-sustainable.html>

# Appendix: Sources and Methodology

Historic electricity generation and consumption data for Washington and Oregon is sourced from the US EIA state electricity profiles.<sup>77</sup>

Historic emissions data for Washington and Oregon is sourced from each state's greenhouse gas inventories.<sup>78</sup> Emissions reduction targets are sourced from the Washington Department of Commerce<sup>79</sup> and the Oregon Climate Action Commission.<sup>80</sup>

Vehicle miles traveled data for Washington and Oregon is sourced from each state's Department of Transportation.<sup>81</sup> Electric vehicle efficiency was sourced from the US Department of Energy, and estimated to be 35 kWh per 100 miles traveled.<sup>82</sup> Electric vehicle share of the overall fleet was sourced from the US DOE Alternative Fuels Data Center.<sup>83</sup>

Known proposed data center capacity is sourced from Columbia Riverkeeper's February 2026 report.<sup>84</sup> The information was sourced from the Department of Energy's National Renewable Energy Laboratory and an assessment of company statements, media coverage, public records, and private third-party databases.

Estimates of data center electricity consumption assume 70% annual usage.<sup>85</sup> A 1 MW data center is assumed to operate, on average, 70% of the time. There are 8,760 hours in a calendar year, meaning a 1 MW data center is expected to consume  $1 \text{ MW} * 8,760 \text{ hours} * 0.7 = 6,132 \text{ MWh}$  per year.

Data center electricity consumption in 2023 is estimated by averaging figures in 2024 reports by the Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI)<sup>86</sup> and the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

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<sup>77</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Washington State Energy Profile and Analysis*, <https://www.eia.gov/states/wa/analysis>; U.S. Energy Information Administration, *Oregon State Energy Profile and Analysis*, <https://www.eia.gov/states/or/analysis>

<sup>78</sup> Washington State Dept. of Ecology, *Washington's greenhouse gas inventory*, <https://ecology.wa.gov/air-climate/reducing-greenhouse-gas-emissions/tracking-greenhouse-gases/ghg-inventories>

<sup>79</sup> Washington State Dept. of Commerce, *Climate Commitment Act (CCA)*, <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/cca/>

<sup>80</sup> Oregon Climate Action Commission, <https://climate.oregon.gov/>

<sup>81</sup> Oregon Dept. of Transportation, Oregon Statewide VMT Data, <https://www.oregon.gov/odot/data/pages/traffic-counting.aspx>; Washington State Department of Transportation, *Annual mileage and travel information*, <https://wsdot.wa.gov/about/transportation-data/travel-data/annual-mileage-and-travel-information>

<sup>82</sup> US Dept. of Energy, [www.fueleconomy.gov](http://www.fueleconomy.gov)

<sup>83</sup> US Dept. of Energy, *Vehicle Registration Counts by State*, <https://afdc.energy.gov/vehicle-registration>

<sup>84</sup> Columbia Riverkeeper, *A Closer Look: Columbia River Data Centers*, February 2026.

<sup>85</sup> Shehabi, Arman, et al. *2024 United States Data Center Energy Usage Report*, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, 2024, at 20-21.

<sup>86</sup> Electric Power Research Institute (EPRI), *Powering Intelligence: Analyzing Artificial Intelligence and Data Center Energy Consumption*, May 28, 2024, <https://www.epri.com/research/products/3002028905>



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**P.O. Box 950**  
**Hood River, OR 97031**