

Data Centers in Montana: A toolkit for Local Moratoriums and Other Actions

Northern Plains Resource Council

What is in this Organizing Toolkit?

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What the Heck are These Things: Background Info on Hyperscale Data Centers

What is a Hyperscale Data Center?

Hyperscale data centers are huge warehouses that are full of computer servers and other computer equipment that powers artificial intelligence and other technologies. In the case of Montana, the proposals we are seeing are not just one warehouse, but multi-hundred or multi-thousand acre campuses with many warehouses and other infrastructure sprawling across it (I.e., Quantica's proposed data center project in Yellowstone County would cover 5,000-acres).

These massive facilities are meant to store and process huge amounts of digital data for some of the largest corporations in the world. The centers run 24/7 and require consistent and stable power to operate. The computer servers themselves also create a lot of heat as they run, leading to the need for powerful cooling systems to be used. These cooling systems either significantly increase the amount of energy needed to power the data center or require the developer to tap into the local water supply to use a liquid cooling system.

Why the Sudden Boom?

The United States is going through a rapid expansion of artificial intelligence (AI) technology right now. Four of the biggest AI companies - Nvidia, Microsoft, Alphabet, and Meta - have poured hundreds of billions of dollars into the AI world.

Nvidia, considered an industry-leader in making the computer chip necessary for AI, recently made a \$100 billion deal with OpenAI (ChapGPT's maker) in 2025. Microsoft announced plans to invest around \$80 billion in data center development in 2025. Meta (the parent company of FaceBook) and Alphabet (the parent company of Google) have announced plans to invest a combined \$157 billion in AI technology as well.

Accompanying these mind boggling investments are actions from the Trump Administration focused on AI deregulation and accelerated permitting for large-scale AI data centers. These government actions, coupled with the world's largest corporations putting enormous amounts of money into AI, has led to an industry that is prioritizing higher profits for Wall Street and leaves everyday people to deal with the financial, environmental, and social harm.

What can local people do about it?

Across the country, communities that organized together proved to us that contrary to what is often said by big tech and others, these data centers are not inevitable. But this can only be true if everyday people push their governments to act in their best interests - instead of out of state, private equity funded corporations.

Montana has no laws in place that protect its residents or our resources from data center development. In fact, the only laws regarding data centers on the books give developers tax incentives to set up shop here. This means that our state legislature will be making the decision about whether or not Montana becomes a no-rules playground for big tech in the next Legislative Session starting in January 2027.

Until those decisions are made, local governments (E.g. County Commissioners, City Councils, Mayors, etc.) need to act and make sure that hyperscale data centers aren't built before we have the chance to write the rulebook. This is what local communities can be organizing for up until the Legislative Session in 2027.

Organizing Towards Local Moratoriums: Strategies to Get Started

Goals of the local campaign:

- Build a base of people in your community who are organizing together
- Get your county government to pass a one-year moratorium on hyperscale data center development within your county
- Bring the power built locally to the state legislature when the legislative session starts to win significant data center legislation

What is our demand?

- A moratorium on the construction of any hyperscale data centers (20 megawatts and above) until the State Legislature has the opportunity to pass legislation that protects Montanans, our communities, and our resources from the harmful effects of data centers.

Timeline:

- Right now to January 2027!

Potential Strategies:

- **Host a house party with your friends and neighbors to write letters to your local legislators and county commissioners**
- **Craft a letter to the county and/or city council outlining the demand, work to get signatures and backing from the community, and deliver the letter directly to your county commissioners and ask for a public response.**
- **Go meet with your local elected officials and/or other visible stakeholders in your community and ask them to publicly come out for a data center moratorium until the state acts.**

Public Comment Guide

This example comes from a Yellowstone County Commission meeting in March 2026.

Tone to strike:

- Respectful to the Commission.
- Practical. Focus on impacts that the community and the county will face: increased use of roads, strain on communities' resources and public infrastructure, extreme lack of transparency and public participation opportunities.
- Concise. Aim for three to four minutes and hit a couple points in a clear way.

Structure of your comment:

1. Introduce yourself: "My name is...and I live here in Yellowstone County.
2. State shared goals: "I want my community and Yellowstone County at large to be a thriving place."
3. Share with the Commissioners how you are feeling about this project.
4. Ask for action: "I ask you to please schedule a dedicated public hearing to hear from the residents of Yellowstone County and get their thoughts about this project." Another example: "I ask that you follow the example of the commissioners in Butte and send a letter as a commission to the MT Public Service Commission urging them to enact robust safeguards for existing ratepayers."
5. Thank the commission and end on a courteous note.

Potential asks of the County Commissioners:

- Ask the County Commissioners to send a public letter as a Commission to the Montana Public Service Commission urging them to enact proactive data center regulation to protect existing ratepayers.
- Have a public hearing dedicated to getting the thoughts of Yellowstone County residents on the data center project.

Core message:

Quantica Infrastructure is proposing a project that would significantly alter, not only the landscape of Yellowstone County, but the future of our state. Across the country, we are seeing many examples of data centers inflicting harms on the communities they are placed in. From rising energy bills to water access being diminished, people are facing head-on the impacts data centers in their communities can inflict. We have an opportunity to learn from others' experiences and be proactive in protecting our communities.

Letters to the Editor

Letters to the editor in your local paper are a great way to let people know what is going on.

Steps to follow:

1. Find your local newspapers Letter to the Editor submission information on their website
2. Be sure to check the paper's max word limit (I.e., *Billings Gazette* has a 250 word limit)
3. Write your letter!
4. Submit your letter to your local paper.

Tips:

- Focus on one topic
- Be clear and concise - you don't have many words to make your point. Try to capture the reader early on in your letter. Your first sentence should summarize your position.
- Be yourself! No need to be an industry expert or especially wonky. Focus on why your perspective is valuable.
- Explain why the issue is important.
- Be sure to state your opinion on what should be done.

Local paper letter submission info:

- [Billings Gazette](#)
- [Big Horn County News](#)
- [Big Timber Pioneer](#)
- [Carbon County News](#)
- [Dillon Tribune](#)
- [Forsyth Independent Press](#)
- [Glendive Ranger Review](#)
- [Judith Basin Press](#)
- [Laurel Outlook](#)
- [Lewistown News-Argus](#)
- [Livingston Enterprise](#)
- [Miles City Star](#)
- [Stillwater County News](#)
- [Terry Tribune](#)
- [Bozeman Daily Chronicle](#)
- [The Montana Standard](#)

(For full list of MT papers, [click here](#))

“It is the most invincible army known to mankind - the people on the march. To the people ultimate triumph may be delayed but it cannot be denied.” - Saul D. Alinsky

Across the country, groups of ordinary people are coming together and taking on (AND WINNING) some of the world's largest and wealthiest corporations. **Montanans can do the same.**

If you want to organize in your communities, but are not sure on how to start, that's okay - we would love to help! Reach out to Jack at jack@northernplains.org or at (406) 248-1154.

- Become part of the organizing effort by joining Northern Plains Resource Council. Being a member is the best way to support the organizing happening all over the state, stay updated on developments, and receive clear ways to take action and get involved.

[Join Northern Plains by clicking here](#)

- Tell your friends and neighbors about what is going on and do some actions together (I.e., letter writing party to local elected officials, go to the next county commission meeting and give public comment, put up yard signs, etc.). There are so many actions - big and small - that we can do to protect this place we love.

[Click here to let us know you want to get involved!](#)