

2026 DATA CENTER SUB-SERIES

The rapid development of data centers to support AI and cloud computing is one of the most consequential climate challenges of this decade.

Last year,
50%
of all new electricity demand in the U.S.
came from data centers, and the pace of growth is accelerating rapidly.

Without strong policy direction and coordinated planning, the status quo has utilities locking in decades of additional emissions by building new fossil fuel power plants and extending the life of aging coal and gas facilities – while passing enormous costs on to

consumers. With thoughtful planning and prudent guardrails, this rapid, new demand for electricity could instead spur the largest capital investment in renewable energy in our nation's history.

In response to this urgent threat and opportunity, 1.5°C Climate launched a Data Center Sub-Series in late 2025. The sub-series consisted of several project pitch events to raise awareness around the serious risks data centers pose to climate progress and solutions to influence how states and municipalities can respond. Following an educational briefing for our membership, we highlighted **three organizations** in states experiencing explosive data center growth. In partnership with Energy Action Fund, which generously matched our members' contributions to these organizations, **we raised a total of \$474,820** to support their work leading early advocacy work for pragmatic policy solutions to enact guardrails on data center development, protect climate targets, and accelerate the transition to clean energy. Read on, and interact with the pitch cards below, to learn about each of these campaigns – and what they accomplished – in more detail.

EDUCATIONAL BRIEFING

Educational: Data Center's Climate & Energy Impacts ^o

1.5°C Climate hosted an educational briefing on the fastest-growing driver of U.S. electricity demand: data centers. The session examined how rapid AI and cloud-computing expansion is straining the grid, increasing electricity costs, and threatening state climate targets. Speakers outlined emerging risks, the key decisions facing regulators and utilities, and the strategic interventions needed to ensure this surge accelerates—rather than obstructs—the clean energy transition. While the event did not include fundraising, it set the stage for our upcoming quick-pitch sessions spotlighting state and regional data center campaign opportunities.

Geography: National

Presenter(s): [Jackson Morris](#), NRDC, State Power Sector Director | [Michael Thomas](#), Cleanview, Founder | [Kelly Nordini](#), Conservation Colorado, CEO

Presentation Date: 12/02/2025

[EDUCATIONAL PRESENTATION](#)



NRDC
NATURAL RESOURCES
DEFENSE COUNCIL



Presentation



Pitch Deck



Meeting Notes

This educational briefing with the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) and Cleanview provided a comprehensive look at the enormous challenges created by the unprecedented surge in electricity from data centers and outlined strategies to protect

climate goals, maintain grid stability, and ensure energy affordability. This event outlined various legislative, regulatory and political levers available to shape how states and municipalities respond to data center growth.

VIRGINIA

Chesapeake Climate Action Fund

\$156,100 Raised | Fundraising Goal Achieved!

Rampant data center expansion is projected to triple electricity demand in Virginia, a state in which just one county, Loudoun, is the data center capital of the world. This rapid demand curve has made lawmakers sympathetic to proposals for new fossil fuel infrastructure and allowed utilities to maintain coal plants previously slated for retirement. Big Tech must be forced to acquire clean energy and operate efficiently in order to keep Virginia on track to meet the state's climate goals. CCAN Action Fund proposes a high visibility communications campaign to urge leadership to take action.

Geography: Virginia

Funding Type: c4, c3

Presenter(s): [Mike Tidwell](#), Executive Director | [Victoria Higgins](#), Virginia Director

Presentation Date: 12/16/2025

[POWERING UP THE DEPLOYMENT DECADE](#) | [FIELD PROGRAMS](#) | [LOBBYING](#) | [MESSAGING & PAID MEDIA](#) | [STATE CLIMATE ACTION](#)



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Funding from 1.5°C Climate has turbo-charged our work to bring sanity to the data center debate in Virginia.

MIKE TIDWELL,
Chesapeake Climate
Action Fund

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Virginia is the epicenter of the data center boom, hosting 35% of the world's hyperscale centers. The facilities directly threaten the state's commitment to 100% clean electricity by 2045 and communities – especially low-income and communities of color – are greatly impacted by rising utility rates, water stress, land-use conflicts, and worsening air quality.

With support from 1.5°C Climate, Chesapeake Climate Action Fund launched a robust communications and advocacy campaign to ensure data center development aligns with community needs and accelerates, rather than undermines, the clean energy transition. Their work – which included high-quality targeted digital ads, contacts between constituents and lawmakers, and a Data Center Lobby Day – shifted lawmaker sentiment on the industry and ensured that data centers took center stage in the 2026 legislative session. While the fight is far from over, the Senate passed two significant legislative reforms with bipartisan support, and the House passed a bill on clean energy standards for the industry. Throughout the session, lawmakers considered 61 bills related to data centers, 15 of which were sent to the Governor's desk.

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Western Resource Advocates

\$152,700 Raised | Fundraising Goal Achieved!

The emerging data center boom is placing significant new demands on energy and water resources, creating substantial financial risk to ratepayers, increasing greenhouse gas emissions from the power sector, and making it nearly impossible to avoid the most catastrophic impacts of climate change. With additional financial support, WRA can develop and advance smart policy strategies in the Colorado state legislature and the public utilities commission to catalyze the adoption of new technologies, conserve water, and protect ratepayers while reducing harmful pollution and accelerating the transition to clean energy .

Geography: Colorado

Funding Type: c4, c3

Presenter(s): Jon Goldin-Dubois, President

Presentation Date: 01/13/2026

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 **Project Narrative**

 **Presentation**

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 **WRA Data Center Report**

 **Org Details**

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Thank you for being with us in this challenging new space of extreme load growth challenges. With 1.5°Climate’s support, WRA mobilized advocates, engaged lawmakers, and pushed for protections for Colorado families, water resources, energy costs, and clean energy progress before large scale expansion accelerates.

ELIZABETH O’CONNELL,
Western Resource Advocates

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Across the Mountain West, data center expansion is driving significant new demands on energy and water, increasing financial risk for ratepayers and sharply raising power sector emissions. Although Colorado has committed to reducing emissions 50% below 2005 levels by 2030, the state is not on track – and data centers development is widening that gap as utilities scramble to meet projected electricity demand and leaders face pressure to extend fossil-fuel-based power production.

1.5°Climate members supported Western Resource Advocate (WRA) as they worked to pass legislation that would ensure data centers do not drive up energy costs for families and small businesses, strain limited water resources, or undermine Colorado’s clean energy progress. While the legislation did not pass in the 2026 session – thanks to powerful opposition from big tech and industry interests – it significantly influenced the conversation around data center growth. WRA also successfully blocked a bill that had been expected to pass at the beginning of the session, which would have offered tax exemptions to data center developers. Before returning to the capitol next session, Western Resource Advocates will continue pushing for guardrails at the public service commission and other spaces.

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Illinois Environmental Council

\$166,020 Raised | Fundraising Goal Achieved!

Thanks to the organizing efforts of LCV affiliate Illinois Environmental Council (IEC) and Illinois Clean Jobs Coalition partners, Illinois has been at the forefront of state-level climate action that has been a model for other states. In 2026, IEC aims to pass legislation addressing data centers' extensive energy and water use, including a requirement to "Bring Your Own New Clean Capacity and Energy" (BYONCCE). As the convener of Illinois' environmental movement, IEC is uniquely situated to bring together the normally siloed clean energy, water, and agriculture stakeholders who will need to speak with one voice to counter deep-pocketed industry influence.

Geography: Illinois

Funding Type: c4, c3

Presenter(s): [Jennifer Walling](#), CEO

Presentation Date: 02/03/2026

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 **Project Narrative**

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We built power for the POWER Act this spring in large part thanks to the support of 1.5°Climate, and we're confident this momentum will help us soon hold data centers accountable here in Illinois and beyond.

JEN WALLING,
Illinois Environmental Council

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Illinois has become a beacon of hope for state climate leadership with the passage of the *Climate and Equitable Jobs Act* in 2021 and the *Clean and Reliable Grid Affordability Act* in 2025. At the same time, the state has become a growing hotspot for data centers, which could account for up to 72% of electricity demand growth by 2030. Without new policies in place, this growth is projected to increase reliance on in-state fossil fuel plants, escalate dependence on out-of-state energy sources, and raise electricity prices.

With support from 1.5°Climate, Illinois Environmental Council (IEC) worked both to confront the climate and cost impacts of data center growth and to create a gold-standard policy for other states to replicate. *The Protecting Our Water, Energy, and Ratepayer (POWER) Act* would establish nation-leading guardrails to protect communities, ratepayers, and the climate – including a requirement for developers to “Build Your Own New Clean Energy” (BYONCE). The legislature adjourned without passing the legislation. However, Governor Pritzker announced a pause on new data center tax incentives and outlined his framework for data center regulations, which closely align with the POWER Act – building optimism that it will be enacted into law with the Governor's support in 2027.



Aerial view of hyperscale data center facility in the Dulles Technology Corridor of Loudoun County, Virginia.

The surge in data center growth poses very serious challenges to our climate and communities across the country, and it is imperative that we proactively confront the risks — while leveraging opportunities to accelerate the transition to clean energy. The four events we hosted in our Data Center Sub-Series made significant inroads, laying the groundwork for legislative and regulatory action that prioritizes the planet and people. There is still a lot of work ahead with data center development accelerating in every state in the union. These policy campaigns in Virginia, Colorado, and Illinois help develop a road map for stakeholder engagement and a menu of policy options to pursue. We are excited to see the lessons learned in these states translating into new campaigns across the country. How states manage surging data center growth will be one of the most important climate outcomes of this decade.

THANK YOU

to all 1.5°C members who invested in this work to build a cleaner, more affordable energy future. We look forward to building on this momentum in 2027.