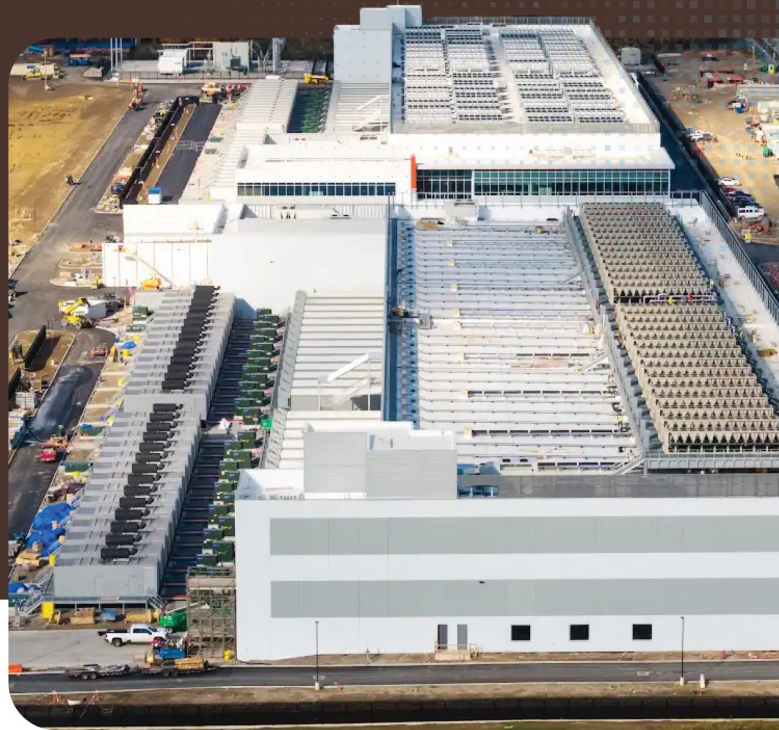


AI, DATA CENTERS, & SOUTHERN FORESTS

A PRIMER ON THE ERA OF DATA CENTERS IN THE US SOUTH

In the US South, there's an incredible build-out of infrastructure for data centers. These data centers are required for the tech industry's big bet on Artificial Intelligence (AI) across all aspects of its business. AI requires massive computational power. These data centers are essentially giant server farms, ready to provide constant computing and data storage.

The rapid expansion of these facilities raises serious issues of democracy, governance, transparency, and regulation. These proposals usually go through backroom negotiations. They've had limited to no public input and are often expedited. This further limits public engagement and any community pushback. Many local and state jurisdictions have little to no policies to regulate these proposed projects. It caught the entire region unprepared.



ISSUES WITH DATA CENTERS



WATER USAGE

Data centers require massive amounts of water, mostly to prevent overheating the servers that run nonstop.



POLLUTION

Elon Musk's xAI center in Memphis showed us the alarming increase in pollutant concentration. We've also seen PFAS emerge as a concerning pollutant from sites operated by tech giant, Google.



LAND USE

Data centers are sprawling facilities that require large swaths of land. This has led to forest clearcutting, competition over arable land, and continuous expansion.



NOISE

Data centers create noise from initial construction to their 24/7 cooling systems. That means nonstop, disruptive noise.



ENERGY

These facilities are demanding on the electrical grid. Many resort to fossil fuel power. Utilities have built new energy infrastructure. This drives costs up that are passed onto residential customers.



RACIAL INJUSTICE

As wealthier and more politically powerful predominantly white communities stop data center construction, they're often built in Environmental Justice communities instead.



PUBLIC HEALTH

Data centers pollute communities making them less healthy. Particulate matter these facilities spew is linked to lung cancer. Noise pollution is linked to cardiovascular risk and cognitive impairment. The disposal of hazardous waste pollutes the groundwater and the soil.

SOUTHERN FORESTS ARE UNDER THREAT

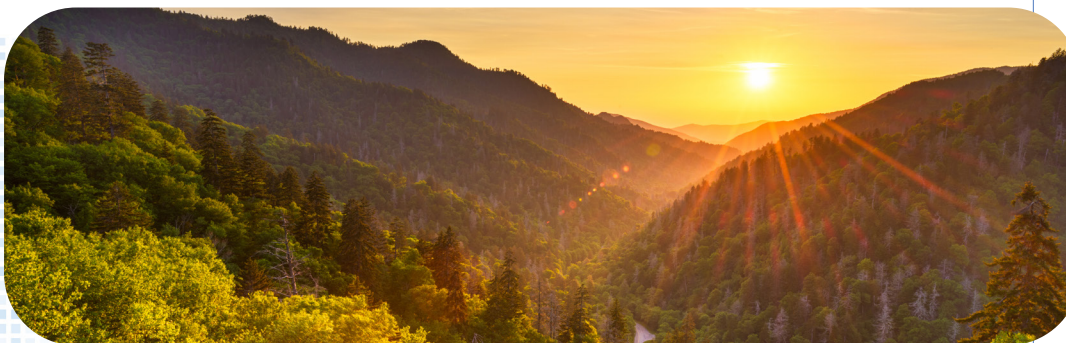
Dogwood Alliance is most concerned with the forest industry and its destructive impacts on Southern forests. With data centers, the main issue for electricity providers will be load use. In the South, there's not enough electricity to supply projected residential and industrial demand. There's a lack of support for solar, wind, and other renewable energy. There's an over-reliance on fossil fuels. No existing infrastructure can be swiftly adapted to serve data center needs.

Some in the utility sector want domestic biomass to fill some of the impending power gap. Biomass uses chipped or pelletized trees as fuel to produce heat and energy. This is inefficient, detrimental to forests, and unsustainable. We are against the inclusion of biomass in any way to fill gaps in electricity production.

We oppose how data centers could displace people, pollute communities, and destroy forests. We oppose their extraction of essential water, energy, and land.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Data center proposals should consider the long-term impacts on nature, communities, health, and the economy, not just profit for Big Tech. Decisions should be made for the public benefit. We can't prioritize these facilities over residences, affordable housing, hospitals, schools, emergency centers, farms, and forestland. As cities force data centers out, we cannot make our rural communities sacrifice zones. Transparency and public discourse must be prioritized and part of decision-making.



Drax wood pellet plant in Gloster, Mississippi



Communities Responding to Data Centers



NEW ORLEANS

City Council banned data center construction for a year



WEST VIRGINIA

residents called for protections against proposed data centers



CANTON, NORTH CAROLINA

passed a one year moratorium on data centers and cryptocurrency mining



VIRGINIA

passed a tax exemption but it's caused turmoil in the state legislature



OUR FORESTS. OUR STRENGTH.

Learn more about
the impact of AI
Data Centers on
Southern Forests at
dogwoodalliance.org/ai

