

# Data Centers & Water In Oregon

March 27, 2026



# Water Justice Principles

- Protects the environment, improves health, and creates economic inclusion
- Puts money and power into the hands of frontline communities
- Does not recreate broken systems
- Invest in projects that match a vision of the future: Multi-generational, multi-benefit, and just

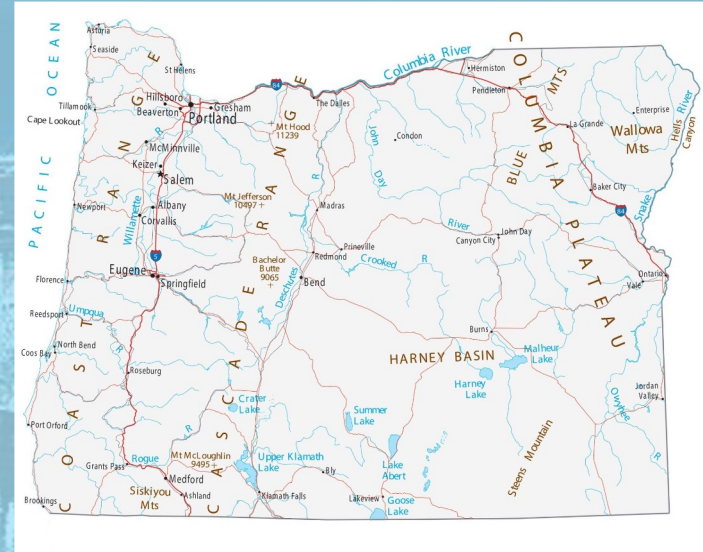


### 3 Key Takeaways - Data Centers and Water

1. The impact of data centers are complex, still being studied, and require a holistic approach.
2. Communities must be centered and involved in decision-making and planning processes.
3. Oregon needs to protect water for current and future generations.

# Where are data centers being built?

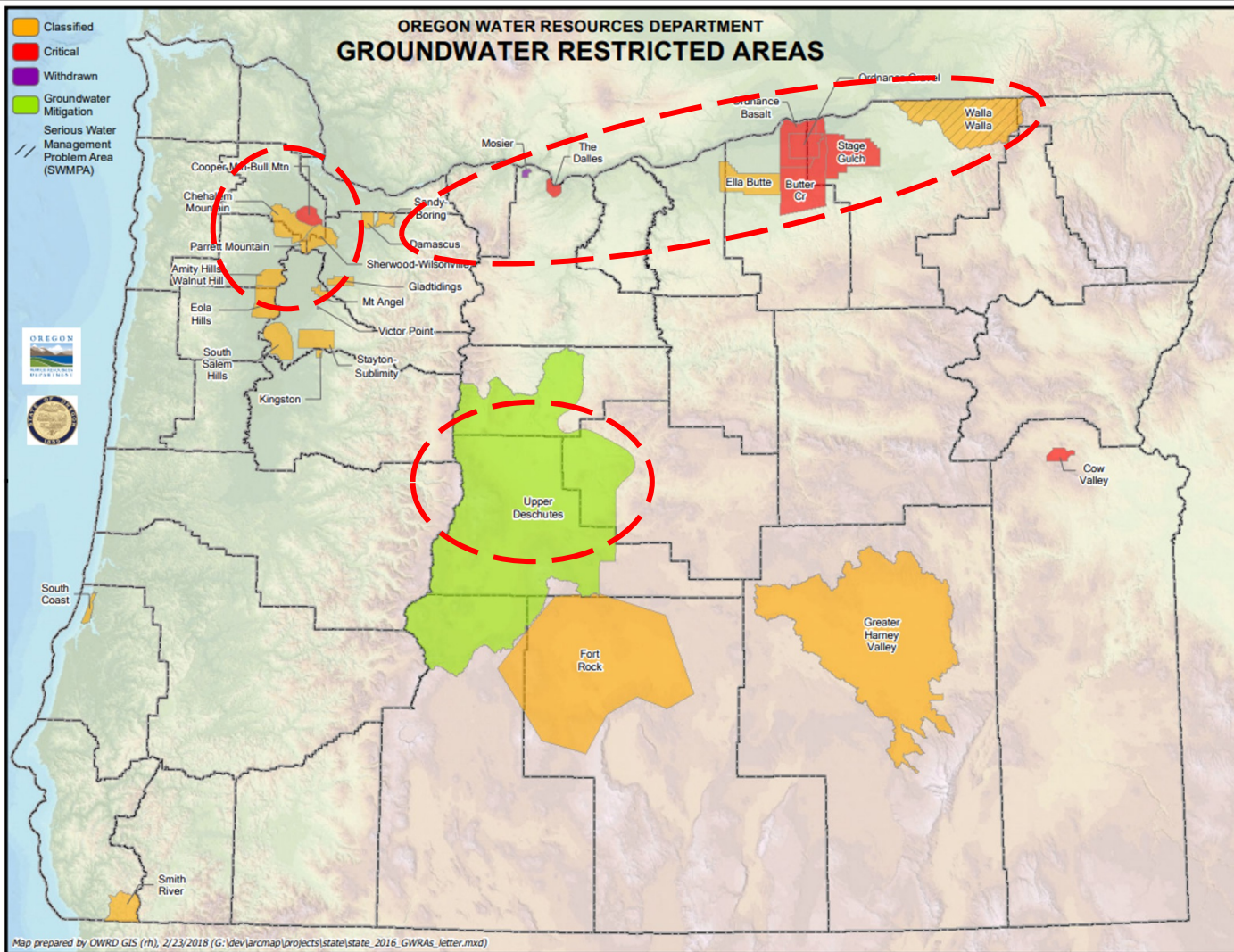
“.. National review of roughly 700 data centers across the country found that nearly half are in census tracts with **above-median environmental burdens, such as air pollution, park access and water pollution**, as measured by the Center for Disease Control’s Environmental Justice Index. Many were located in areas with social vulnerability indicators, such as poverty and lower education levels” (Walker & Goldsmith, 2026)



*Where are data centers being built in Oregon?*



OREGON WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT  
**GROUNDWATER RESTRICTED AREAS**



Data centers have been built in areas where there are already existing water issues.

The 3 areas circled here have the most data centers in OR.


How can Oregon mitigate and prevent adverse water impacts from datacenter development?

# Water Quality Impacts

## 1. Pollution from wastewater


- Concentration of chemicals, toxins
- Biocides, corrosion inhibitors, heavy metals, and PFAS

## 2. Compounding existing water issues



Rolling Stone

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An Amazon data center in Boardman. When nitrate-laden water pulled from the region's aquifer moves through the facility to absorb heat from servers, some of the water is evaporated, but the nitrates remain, increasing the concentration.

JENNY KANE/AP



The Guardian

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Pfas

This article is more than 5 months old

Advocates raise alarm over Pfas pollution from datacenters amid AI boom

Tech companies' use of Pfas gas at facilities may mean datacenters' climate impact is worse than previously thought

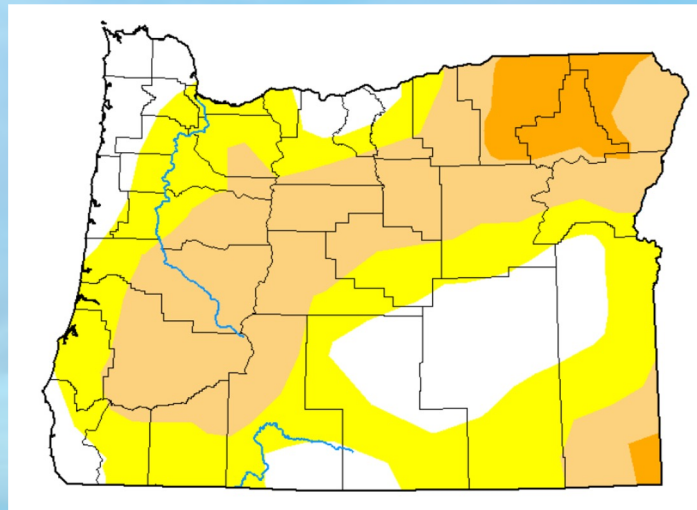
# Water Quantity Impacts

More frequent and increasingly intense droughts and heatwaves







- Contribute to thermal pollution, algae blooms > harms salmon

Most of OR is currently under “moderate” drought to “abnormally dry” with some areas in severe drought

Reduced snowpack by 60-90% by 2100, current climate projections



## Intensity:

	None
	D0 Abnormally Dry
	D1 Moderate Drought
	D2 Severe Drought
	D3 Extreme Drought
	D4 Exceptional Drought

## Author:

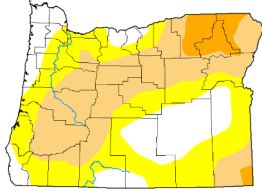
Curtis Riganti  
National Drought Mitigation Center



[droughtmonitor.unl.edu](http://droughtmonitor.unl.edu)

*What can we do to balance the water needs of all who rely on water, including future generations?*

# Compounding Water Issues



**Intensity:**

- None
- D0 Abnormally Dry
- D1 Moderate Drought
- D2 Severe Drought
- D3 Extreme Drought
- D4 Exceptional Drought

The Drought Monitor focuses on broad-scale conditions. Local conditions may vary. For more information on the Drought Monitor, go to <https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/About.aspx>

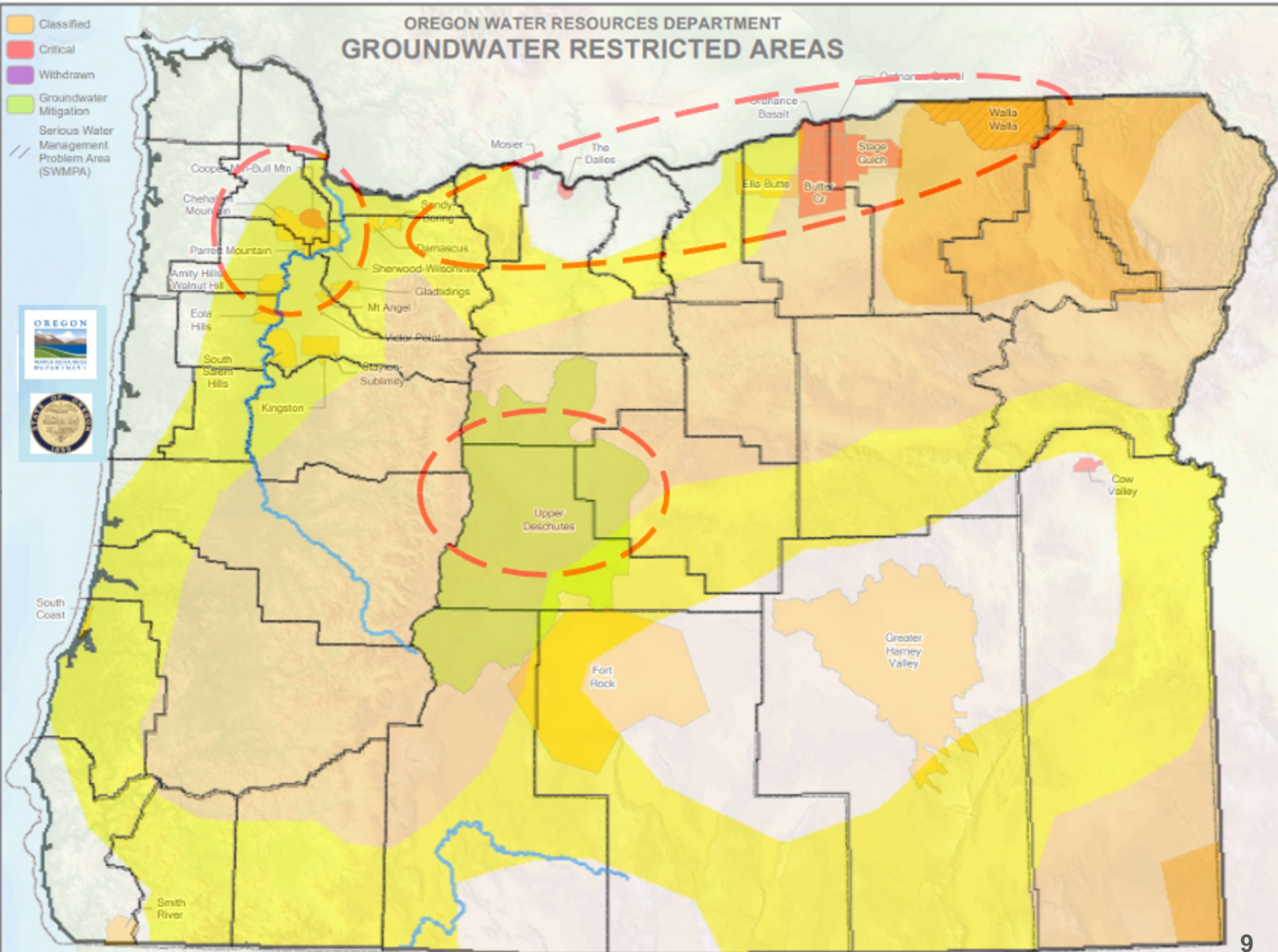
**Author:**

Curtis Riganti  
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## OREGON WATER RESOURCES DEPARTMENT GROUNDWATER RESTRICTED AREAS



Map prepared by OWRD GIS (rh), 2/23/2018 (G:\dev\arcmap\projects\state\state\_2016\_GWRAs\_letter.mxd)

# Water Infrastructure Impacts

- Over the next 20 years, the **Oregon requires \$46 billion in investment** to bring its water and wastewater infrastructure to a state of good repair. This equals roughly \$2.3 billion each year—or \$548 per resident per year.
- Every \$1 invested in water infrastructure in Oregon supports \$1.99 in economic output nationally.

*Is there a way that they can help Oregon address our water infrastructure needs while we allow them to build and use our water resources?*

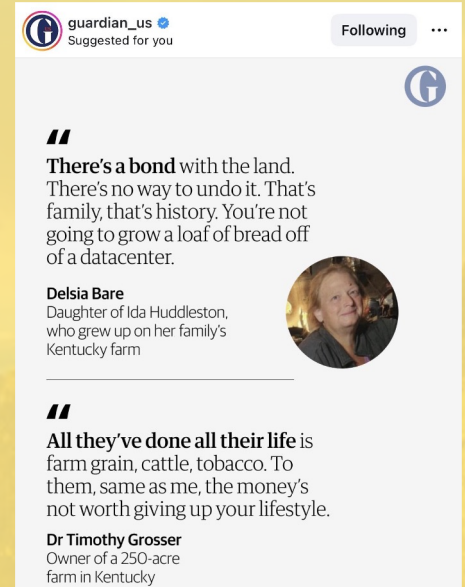
# Water Affordability Impacts

- Water rates often go up whenever new water infrastructure or upgrades need to be made.
- The Dalles forecast residential water rates to increase by 99% by 2036
  - 2023-24 base rate = \$55.30
  - 2035-36 base rate = \$113.07
- Portland water rates are increasing at about 7% annually

*What economic benefit is the state really gaining and who is it for?*

# Impacts

- Health and wellbeing
- Social and cultural
- Borrowing from future



# Data Centers Pose Environmental Justice Risks

## House Bill 4077 defines environmental justice community as

- communities of color,
- communities experiencing lower incomes,
- communities health inequities,
- tribal communities,
- rural communities,
- coastal communities,
- communities with limited infrastructure
- other communities traditionally underrepresented in public processes and adversely harmed by environmental and health hazards, including seniors, youth, and persons with disabilities.

# Water Policy Examples

- **Require reporting on expected water use, water quality (including an assessment of prior conditions before building data center) and evidence that operations won't have adverse impact on water quality/quantity.**
  - Ex: Pennsylvania
- **Community Benefits Agreements (CBA)**
  - Ex: Lancaster, Pennsylvania; Detroit and Southeast, Michigan; Chicago Metropolitan Region Illinois; Ohio and Wisconsin Urban area
- **Require data centers to pay all upfront infrastructure costs related to their water usage — Including upgrades needed to support operations**

# Suggestions

## Protect Community and Environment

- Increase transparency and accountability.
- More community representation in decision-making and planning around data centers.
- Ensure data center development doesn't shift financial or environmental costs onto communities.
- Develop safeguards to protect water for current and future generations.
- Invest more in Oregon water infrastructure, research and education.
- Identify other industries for development in Oregon.

# Thank you!!

Oregon  
Water  
Futures



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