



Resolution 26-07

Resolution type: Policy Statement

Local Input and Natural Resource Protection in Montana Data Center Approvals

Submitted by: Lewis and Clark CD

BACKGROUND DESCRIBING ISSUE

- Data center development is accelerating across Montana, with facilities proposed or under review in multiple counties. Proposed facilities raise significant concerns for water availability in over-allocated basins, water quality, soil and land conversion, energy demand, and impacts to agricultural operations and wildlife.
- In the absence of a consistent state framework, local governments and citizens have responded piecemeal. In July 2026, Missoula County commissioners adopted a temporary moratorium pausing new or expanded data centers for up to a year while the county updates its regulations to address impacts on public health, safety, and natural resources.¹
- Residents of Butte-Silver Bow and Yellowstone counties are pursuing ballot initiatives that would put approval of new or expanded data centers in the hands of voters.²
- Conservation districts are local subdivisions of state government charged with the conservation of soil, water, and related natural resources under the Conservation Districts. Districts currently have no defined role in data center siting or approval, and community input is often sought only after approvals are in motion.
- According to the Montana Department of Revenue, “qualified data centers are classified as Class 17 property with a taxable valuation rate of 0.9% of market value.”³

ACTUAL POLICY STATEMENT TO BE INCLUDED IN MACD POLICY BOOK IF ADOPTED

MACD supports and will pursue state and local policy options and approval processes for data centers that (1) prioritize local community input, including consultation with conservation

¹ Katie Fairbanks, “[Missoula County Adopts Temporary Moratorium on Data Centers](#),” Montana Free Press, July 9, 2026.

² Nick Mott, “[How Some Montanans Are Taking Data Center Regulation Into Their Own Hands](#),” Montana Free Press, June 18, 2026.

³ Montana Department of Revenue, “[Qualified Data Center Application](#),” accessed August 19, 2026.

districts, before approvals are granted, and (2) protect Montana's water, soil, land, and other natural resources by requiring transparent disclosure and assessment of natural resource impacts prior to land use or water use approvals.

IMPLEMENTATION RECOMMENDATIONS

- Engage in the 2027 legislative session by tracking data center legislation and providing testimony consistent with this policy.
- Engage DNRC, DEQ, NGO partners, state leadership, and local governments on approval processes and rulemaking affecting water and land resources.
- Support member districts in commenting on proposed data centers in their jurisdictions, including developing a brief guidance document for districts by the end of 2027.
- Monitor the issue and report to membership at the annual convention and through the newsletter, board meetings, and other regular communications.

SPONSOR(S) ACTIONS TO DATE

LCCD supervisor attended data center presentation at MACD Spring Board Meeting.

HOW WILL YOUR DISTRICT CONTINUE TO SUPPORT AND BE INVOLVED WITH THIS POLICY STATEMENT/STANCE?

LCCD will continue to monitor data center proposals affecting local resources, provide comment and local resource information in approval processes, and support MACD's legislative and agency engagement.

ARE THERE ANY EXISTING MACD POLICIES THAT THIS WOULD IMPACT OR INTERACT WITH?

No response

HOW WOULD THIS POLICY IMPACT MACD?

Modest staff and legislative committee time during the 2027 session and for agency engagement. No direct budget impact. The policy positions MACD constructively on a high-visibility issue with broad, bipartisan local concern, strengthening MACD's role as the voice of local natural resource conservation.

WOULD THIS POLICY STATEMENT IMPACT THE STATE BUDGET? IF SO, HOW?

No direct impact. This statement guides MACD advocacy only; any resulting legislation would carry its own fiscal note and be evaluated at that time.

MEETING AND DATE ADOPTED BY SPONSORING ENTITY

8/13/2026

AUTHORIZED SIGNATURE(S) AND TITLE(S)

Jeff Ryan, LCCD Board Chair