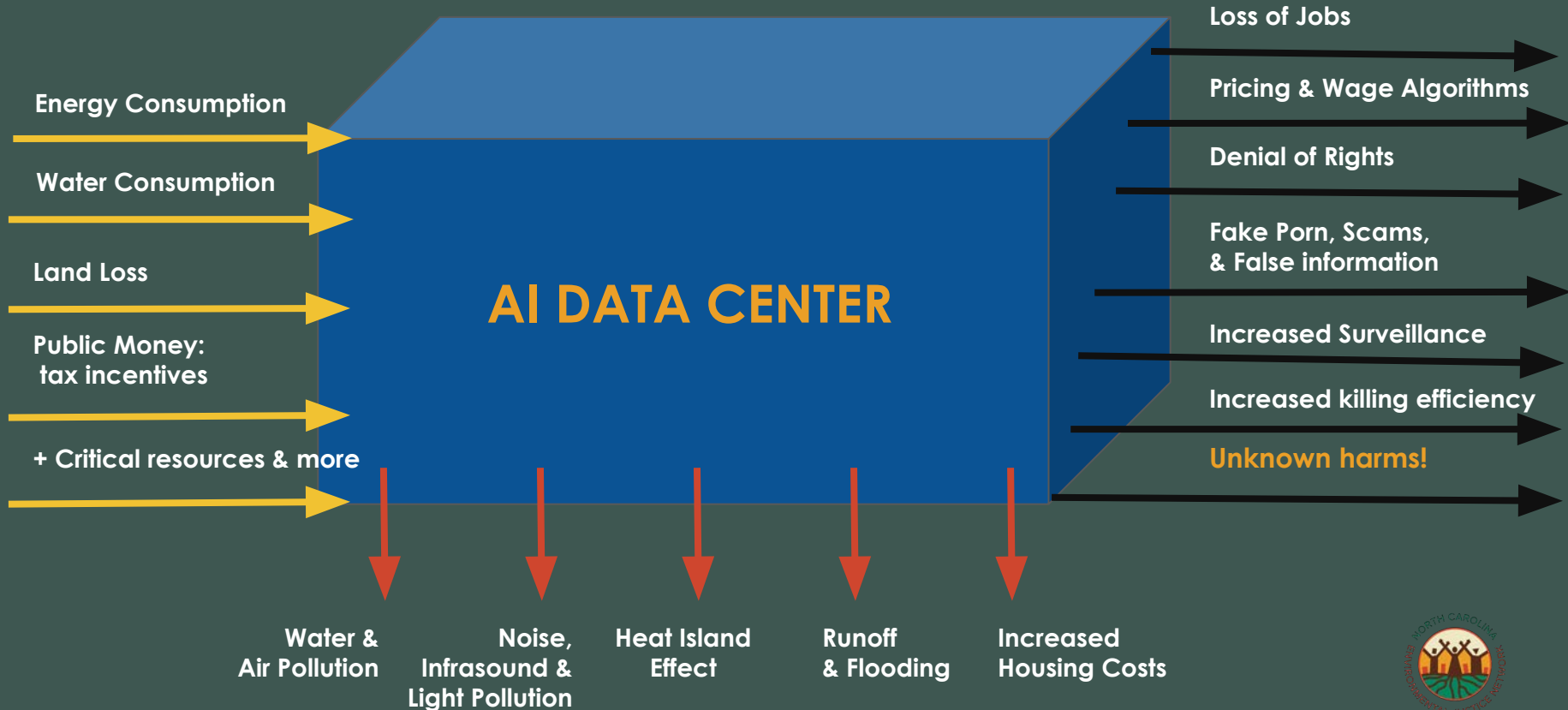




When AI Comes to Town: Decoding the Real Life Impact of Data Centers in Our Communities

RANIA MASRI, PhD
NCEJN CO-DIRECTOR

AI Data Centers: An Extractive Industry



“The empires of AI ... seize and extract precious resources to feed their vision of artificial intelligence: the work of artists and writers, the data of countless individuals posting about their experiences and observations online; the land, energy and water required to house and run massive data centers and supercomputers.” - Karen Hao, author of ‘The Empire of AI’

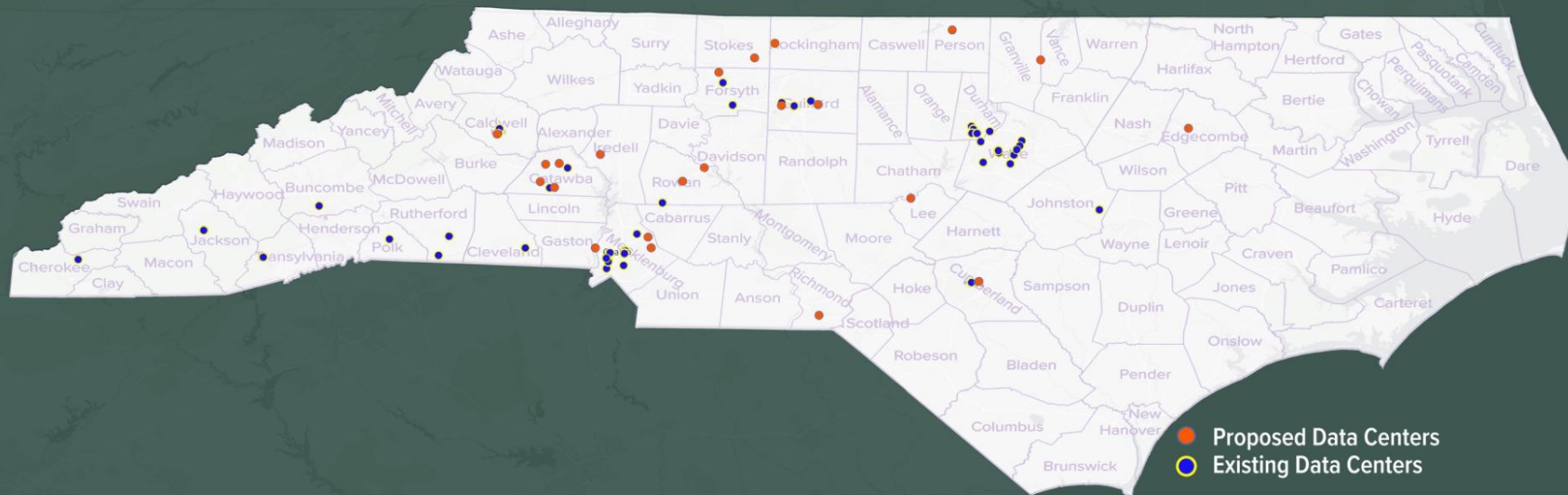
“AI is neither artificial nor intelligent. Artificial Intelligence is both embodied and material. ... AI depends entirely on a much wider set of political and social structures - and they are ultimately designed to serve existing dominant interests.” - Kate Crawford, Atlas of AI

“Artificial intelligence systems ... are designed to discriminate, to amplify hierarchies, and to encode narrow classifications. ...

They are expressions of power that emerge from wider economic and political forces, created to increase profits and centralize control for those who wield them.”

- Kate Crawford, Atlas of AI

EXISTING & PROPOSED NC DATA CENTERS



PROPOSED NC DATA CENTERS

Size of planned, proposed, & under construction: at least 6,659 acres!

- Size of 8 NYC Central Parks // Larger than William B Umstead State Park
- Size of the Research Triangle Park

Energy capacity of these data centers: at least* 3,388 MW

- Average MW of data centers proposed is 212 MW - enough to power 152,428 homes
- 10 proposals did not reveal the MW
- 1 out of 3 of the projects in NC have not publicly disclosed energy capacity

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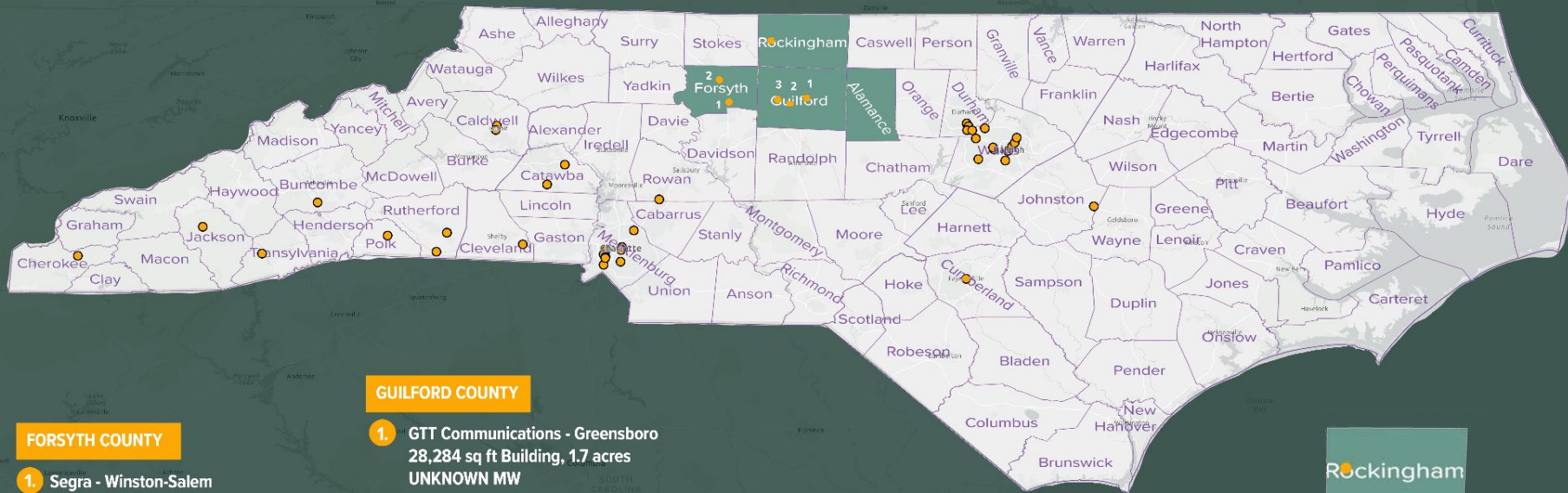
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FOCUS ON THE TRIAD - existing and proposed

The map displays the state of North Carolina, with county boundaries clearly delineated. The Triad region, consisting of Rockingham, Forsyth, and Alamance counties, is highlighted in a light green color. A legend in the bottom right corner identifies yellow dots as 'EXISTING' locations and red dots as 'PROPOSED' locations. The map shows a high concentration of both existing and proposed locations within the Triad area, particularly in Rockingham and Forsyth counties. Other locations are scattered across the state, with a notable cluster in the western part of the state near the Virginia border.

EXISTING NC DATA CENTERS



FORSYTH COUNTY

1. Segra - Winston-Salem
140,000 sq ft Building, 6.57 acres
6 MW
2. SolidSpace - Winston-Salem
164,000 sq ft Building, 15.76 acres
1 MW

GUILFORD COUNTY

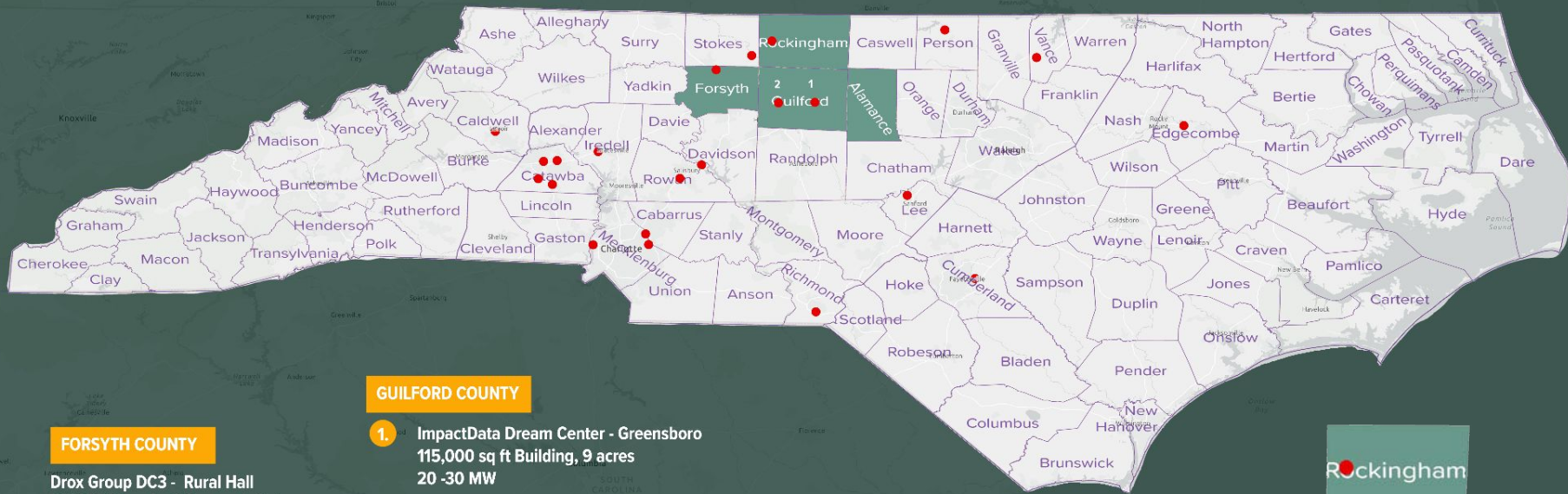
1. GTT Communications - Greensboro
28,284 sq ft Building, 1.7 acres
UNKNOWN MW
2. Dynamic Quest - Greensboro (1 Occupant)
12,832 sq ft Building, 3 acres
< 1 MW
3. Lumen II - Greensboro
105,263 - 120,000 sq ft Building, 58.69 acres
1-10 MW

ROCKINGHAM COUNTY

Enovum Data Centers - Madison
946,585 sq ft Building, 96 acres
24 MW



PROPOSED NC AI DATA CENTERS



FORSYTH COUNTY

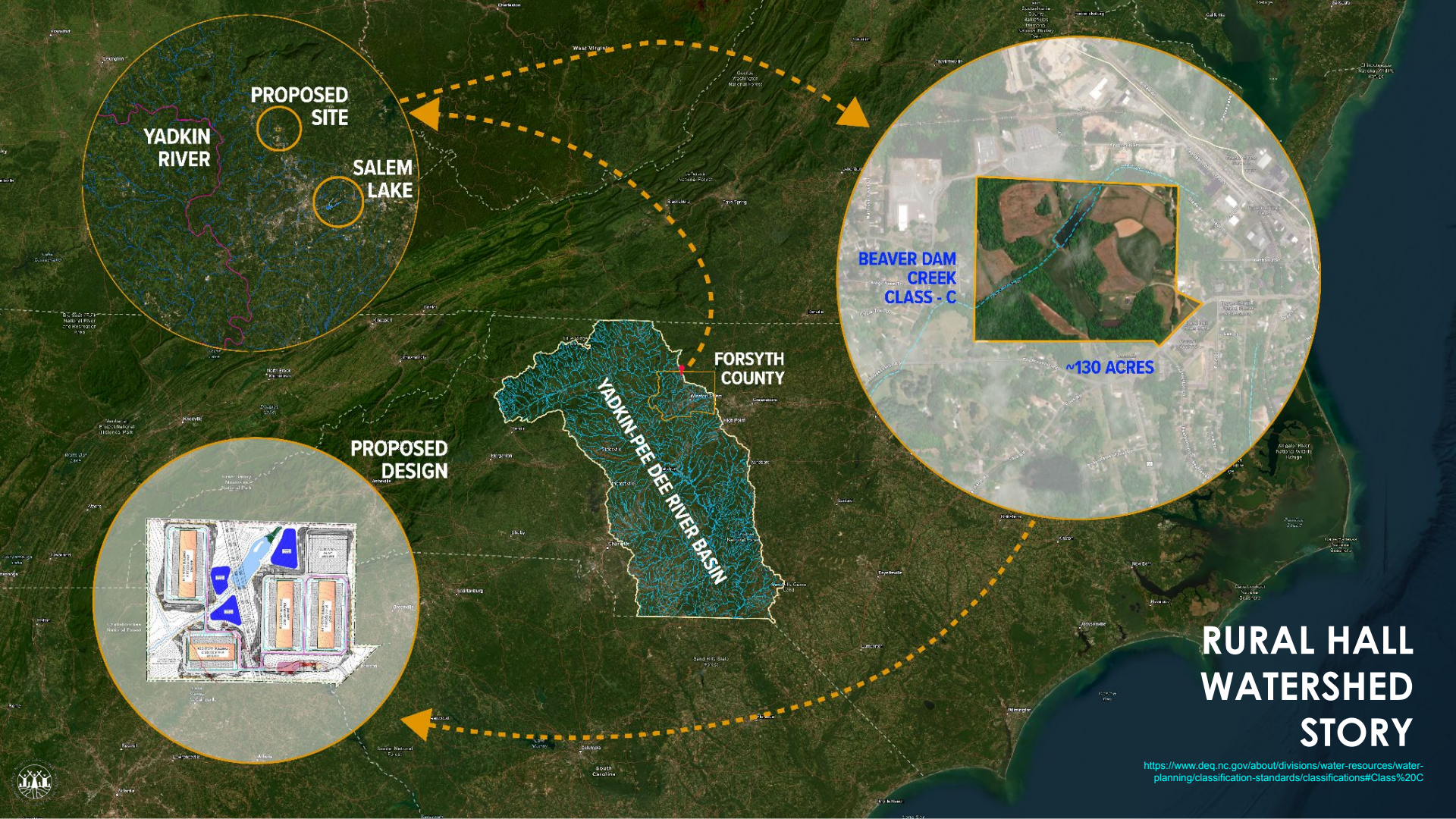
Drox Group DC3 - Rural Hall
 1,300,000 sq ft, 4x2-story buildings
 130 acres
 250 MW

- ImpactData Dream Center - Greensboro**
 115,000 sq ft Building, 9 acres
 20-30 MW
- DC BLOX - High Point**
 54,000 sq ft Building, 14 acres
 18 MW

ROCKINGHAM COUNTY

White Fiber - Madison
 ~ 1,000,000 sq ft Building, 96 acres
 99 MW, with potential 200MW





PROPOSED SITE

YADKIN RIVER

SALEM LAKE

BEAVER DAM CREEK CLASS - C

130 ACRES

PROPOSED DESIGN

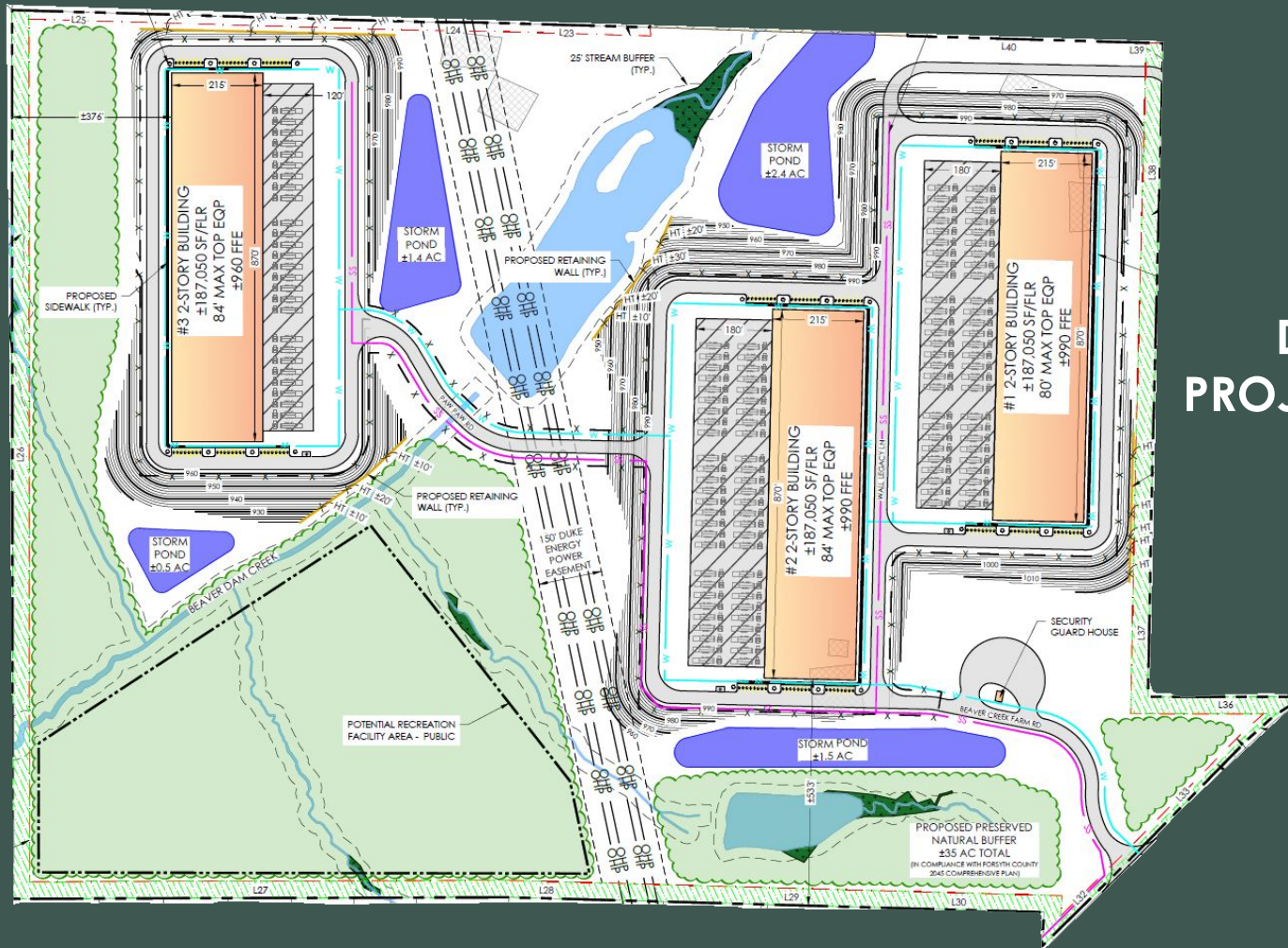
FORSYTH COUNTY

YADKIN-PEE DEE RIVER BASIN

RURAL HALL WATERSHED STORY

<https://www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/water-resources/water-planning/classification-standards/classifications#Class%20C>





DROX GROUP PROJECT "IRON SPUR" PROPOSAL

CURRENT SITE STATUS



129 ACRES

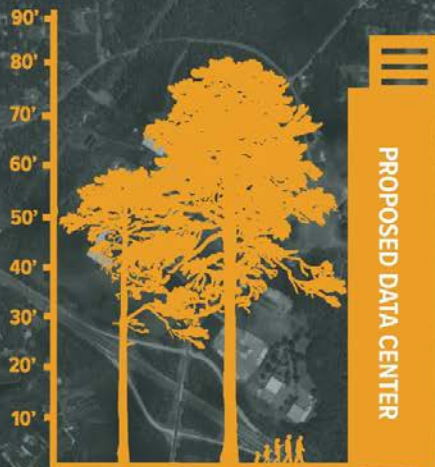
DROX GROUP PROPOSAL

PROJECT IRON SPUR



3 BUILDINGS -187,050 SQFT EACH

RURAL HALL AI DATA CENTER DIMENSIONS



85 FT - EQUIPMENT
72 FT - ROOF



~ 3.25 FOOTBALL FIELDS



ENERGY HUNGRY AT DROX AI DATA CENTER IN RURAL HALL

The energy requirement for this
250 MegaWatt facility: ~ **82,000**
homes running continuously

 = 10,000
Homes



similar to that of a city of
~ **250,000 people**

a city like Winston-Salem

~ **The output** of a nuclear
power plant or a large coal plant
at full capacity

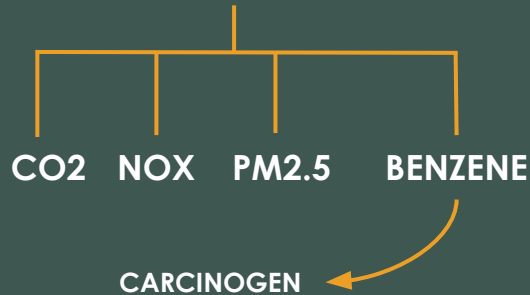
 = 10,000
People



ENERGY HUNGRY AT DROX AI DATA CENTER IN RURAL HALL

AIR QUALITY + HUMAN HEALTH

Running generators for this 250 MegaWatt data center will use **diesel fuel**



Lung Irritation

Asthma

Chronic
Obstructive
Pulmonary
Disease
(COPD)

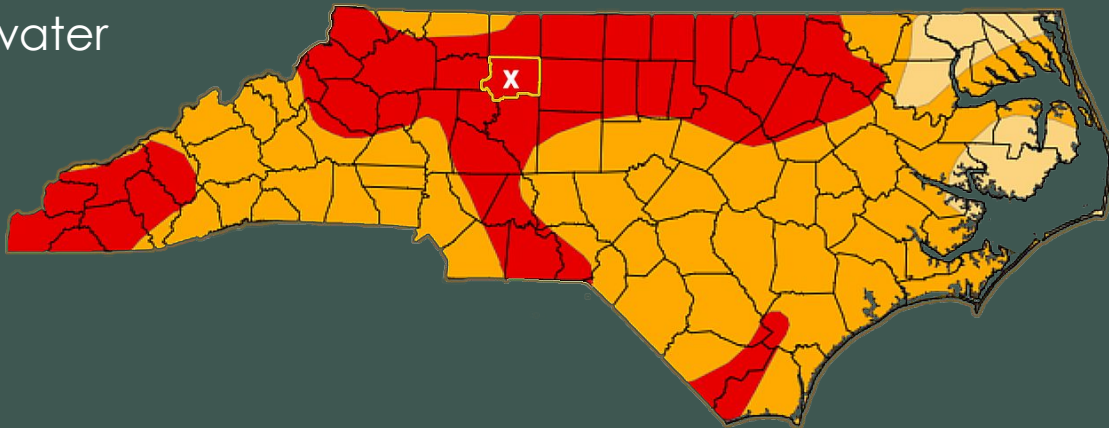
Premature
Death



WATER THIRSTY AT DROX AI DATA CENTER IN RURAL HALL

The average household in the U.S. consumes ~ **400 gal/day** of water

EXTREME DROUGHT!



A **250 MW** Data Center
uses **2.7-5 million gallons
water/day (MGD) or 4.177 -
7.74 cubic FT/day**

D0 – Abnormally Dry

D1 – Moderate Drought

D2 – Severe Drought

D3 – Extreme Drought

D4 – Exceptional Drought

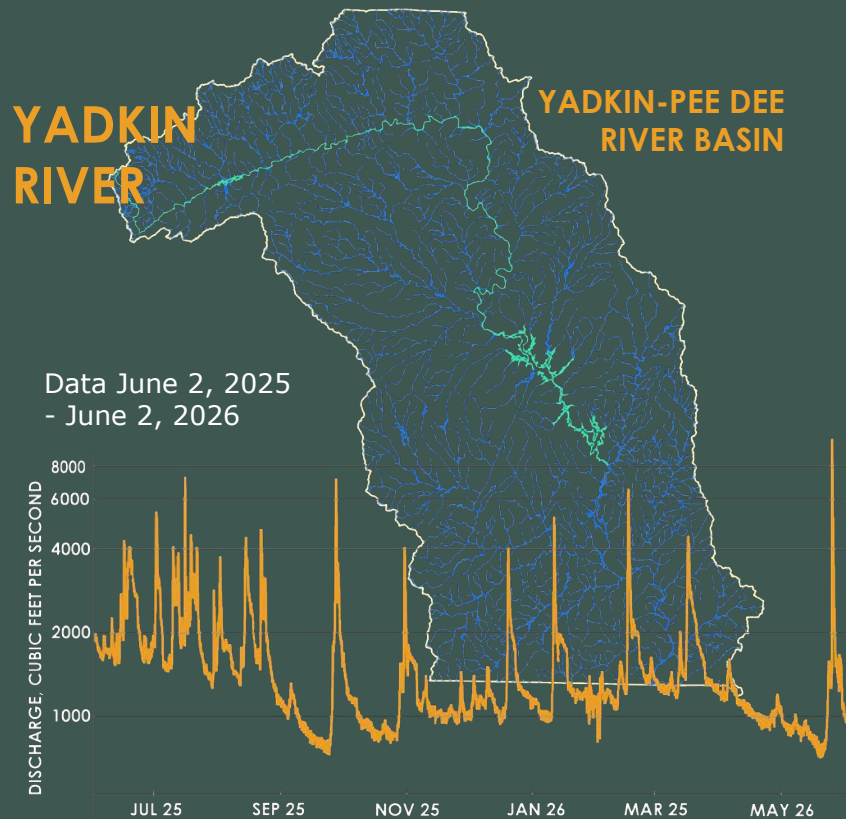


WATER THIRSTY AT DROX AI DATA CENTER IN RURAL HALL

The Yadkin River serves as the drinking water supply for **1.1 million** residents in over **12** counties

Discharge at the Enon, NC station shows a significant decrease of **961 cubic FT/ sec**
1950 CUBIC FT/SEC (2025)
989 CUBIC FT/SEC (2026)

The Yadkin River does not have a strict, state-mandated volumetric allocation plan that caps total water usage at a fixed number



THE IMPACTDATA DREAM CENTER...

**PROPOSED
DESIGN**



**PROPOSED
SITE**



~7.65-acre

**GUILFORD
COUNTY**



CAPE FEAR RIVER BASIN

**ENTIRE
PROPERTY**



38-acre

**GREENSBORO
WATERSHED
STORY**

115,000 SQFT
mixed-use facility
Joint venture with
Raeden

Phase I
20 MW capacity

master-plann to
scale up to
100 - 300 MW of
capacity in future
phases

38-acre plot
This rendering
shows only
~ 7.65- acre

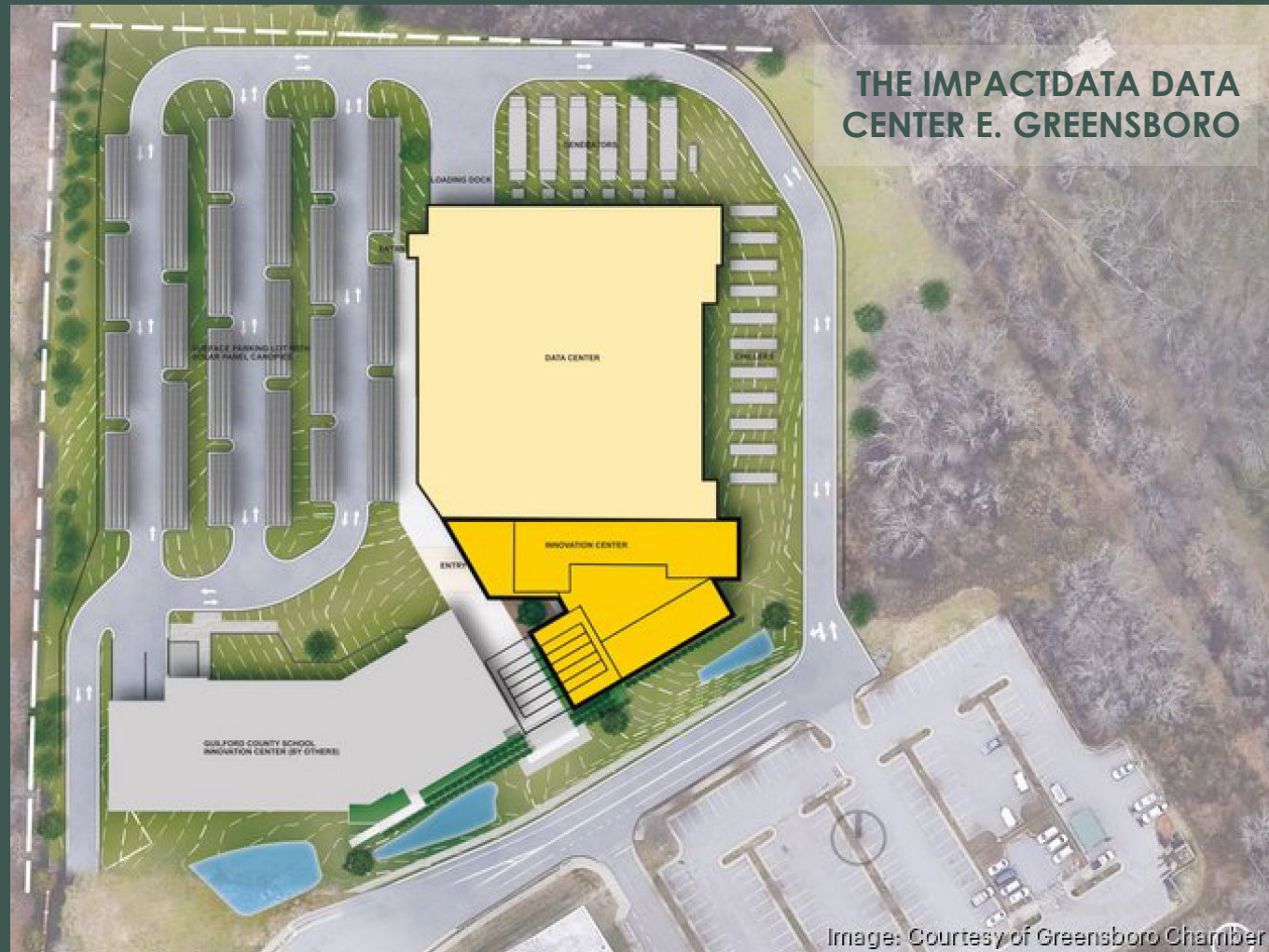
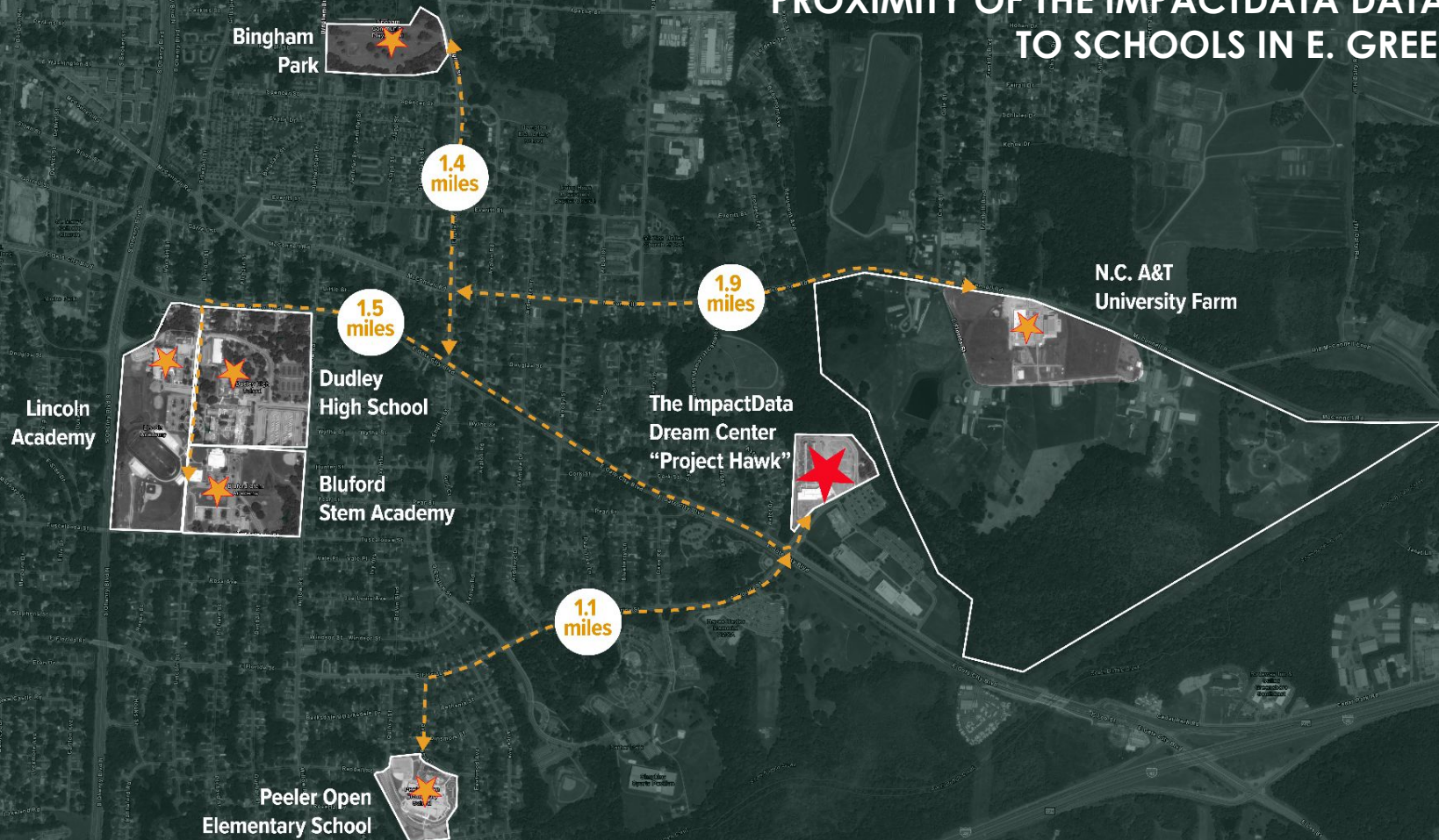
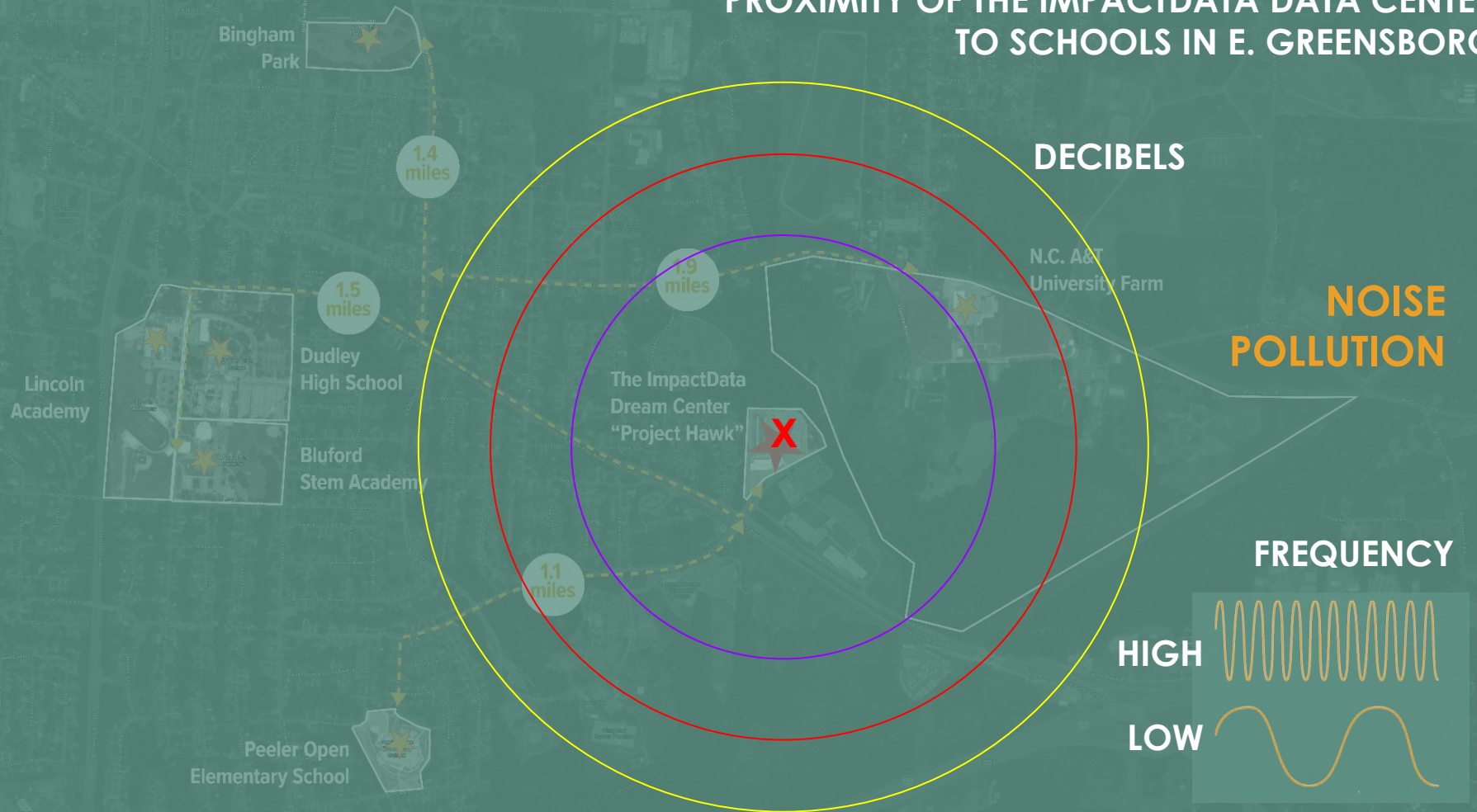


Image: Courtesy of Greensboro Chamber

PROXIMITY OF THE IMPACTDATA DATA CENTER TO SCHOOLS IN E. GREENSBORO



PROXIMITY OF THE IMPACTDATA DATA CENTER TO SCHOOLS IN E. GREENSBORO



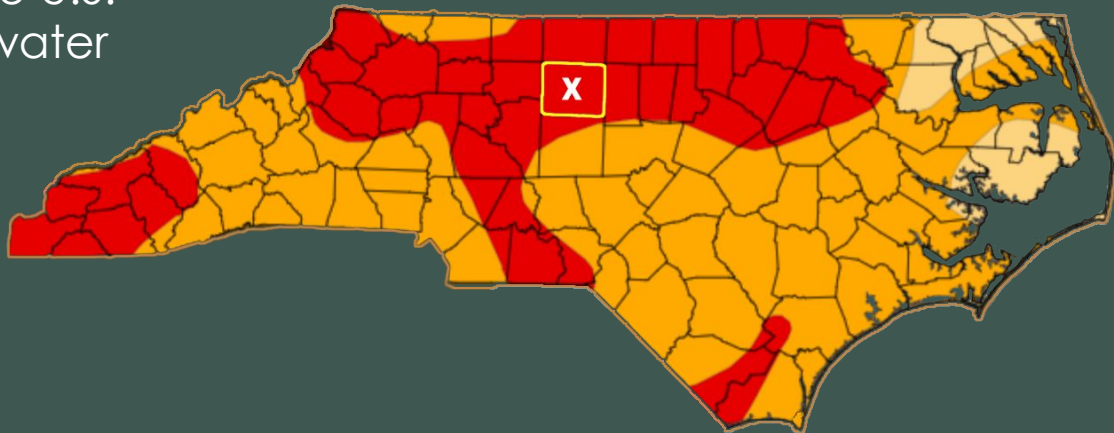
WATER THIRSTY AT THE IMPACTDATA DATA CENTER E. GREENSBORO

The average household in the U.S. consumes ~ **400 gal/day** of water

A **20 MW** Data Center uses **0.05 - 0.15 million gallons water/day (MGD)**.

A **100 MW** uses **0.5 - 3 million gallons water/day (MGD)**.

EXTREME DROUGHT!



East Greensboro receives its drinking water from the City of Greensboro Water Resources Department, which primarily draws from surface water reservoirs including **Lake Townsend**, **Lake Brandt**, and **Lake Higgins**

City reports indicate
Townsend lake is **down ~ 16 inches**,
Lake Higgins is **6 inches low**
Lake Brandt is roughly **8 inches below**

The city has an allocation to purchase **7.83 MGD** from the Piedmont Triad Regional Water Authority (PTRWA), and local reservoirs (Lake Townsend, Lake Brandt, and Lake Higgins) hold **8 billion gallons**



MISSING INFORMATION!



- Where is the proposal?
- PROPOSAL
 - What fuel generators will be used?
 - Any commitment to a specific MW?
 - How much water consumption do they even claim?
 - What about claims on noise generation?
- 1 out of 3 of the projects in NC have not publicly disclosed energy capacity

SO WHAT DO WE DO?

“70% of Americans
oppose AI Data Centers
in their area”

Source - March Gallup Survey, published on May 13, 2026



OPPOSE LOCAL CONSTRUCTION OF AI DATA CENTERS

Democrats

75%

Independents

74%

Republicans

63%

MARGIN OF ERROR: +/- 6% PTS.

Gallup Poll | March 2-18

BIPARTISAN BACKLASH

LIVE

TOWN HALLS ERUPT OVER PLANS TO BUILD AI DATA CENTERS



12:52 PM ET

AT THE UPCOMING FIFA WORLD CUP HAS SPARKED AN INVESTIGATION FROM THE ATTORNEY GENERAL

INSIDE POLITICS

[Source](#) - CNN, May 28, 2026

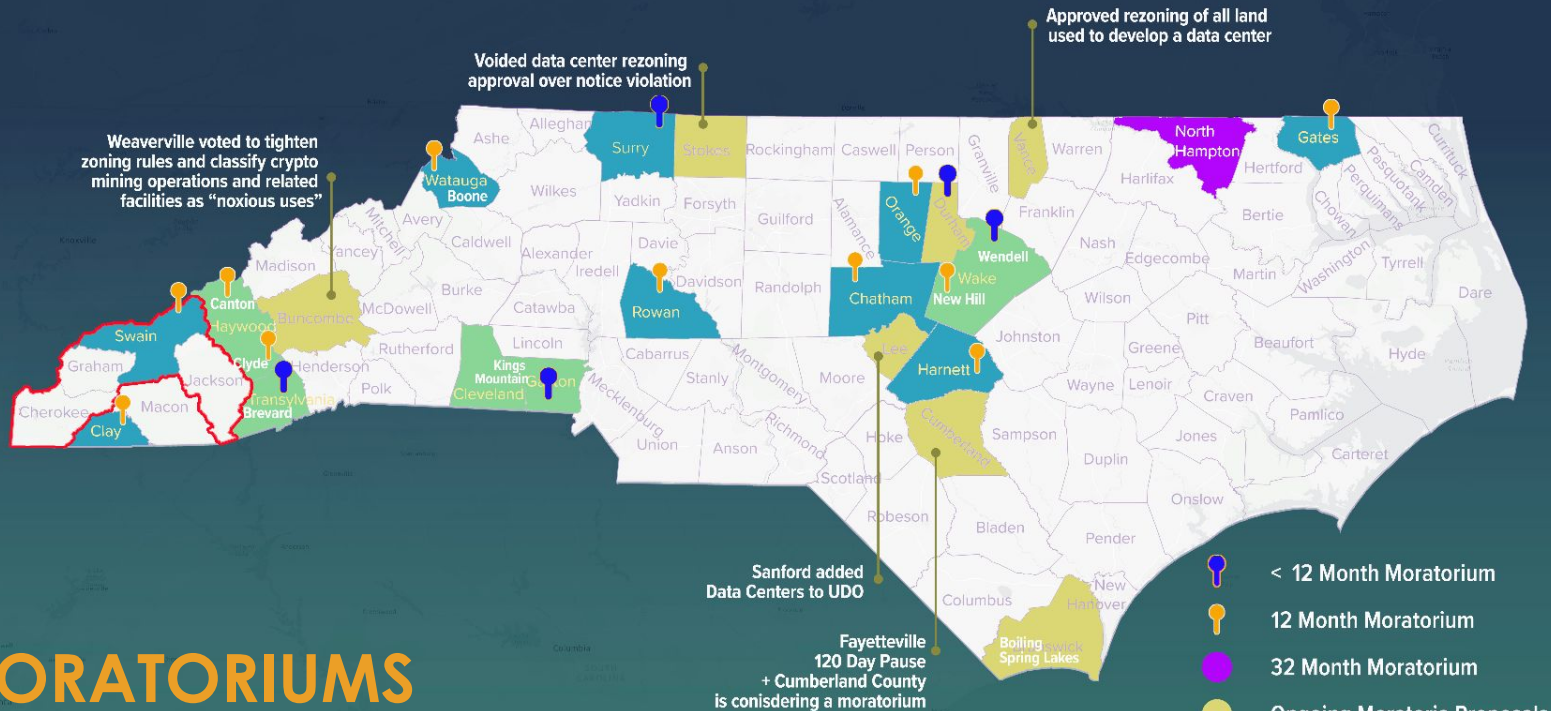


“Despite their large footprint,
no legally binding federal energy standards
are currently in place to oversee
private-sector data center
construction and management.”

Source: Congressional Research Service, May 12, 2026



MORATORIUMS



WHY MORATORIUMS?

Moratoriums



Removal of
tax incentives
*(investments in
harm)*

12 - 32 months

Enforceable
regulations to protect
communities



Investments in care



WHY 32 MONTHS?

Month 1-6	Study the potential impacts (energy, water, noise, pollution, rate hikes, land use) of data centers, cryptocurrency mining and other data processing facilities, in consultation with local utility providers, residents, and subject matter experts, preferably grounded in a justice framework.
Month 6-12	Draft specific land use ordinance amendments and performance standards to regulate these facilities
Month 12-18	Hold public workshops and meetings to gather public input, review the draft amendments, and revise them if necessary based on public input
Month 18-24	The City Council / County Commissioners / NCGA to examine data and provide a recommendation for regulation
Month 24-32	The City Council / County Commissioners / NCGA to hold the necessary public hearings to consider and potentially adopt the final ordinance amendments

Public input and expert advice would be sought during each part of the process



POLICY TOOLS

LOCAL	STATE	BOTH
Conditional use permits & rejections (Need to attach binding conditions)	Limits to corporate influence	Prohibitions, restrictions, moratoriums
Zoning ordinances and municipal code amendments	Environmental protections	Repeal & limit tax incentives
Noise mitigation		Transparency measures (inc. post approval) & ban NDAs
Community health protections (air pollution)		Energy & Water Regulations
Need to establish strong <u>enforcement</u> mechanisms		Labor protections
(Source: North Star Data Center Policy Toolkit)		AI use regulation



STRONG EXAMPLE OF CONDITIONAL USE PERMITTING

The city of Chandler, Arizona stipulates that
“data centers are not permitted to operate
unless explicitly approved.”

([Ordinance No 5033, passed in December 2022](#))



STRONG EXAMPLE OF WATER REGULATION

Aurora, Colorado stipulates that high-water-use industries projecting consumptive water demands above certain thresholds cannot be developed unless water sustainability measures are taken.



SUGGESTED LANGUAGE FOR WATER PROTECTION in S730

No data center shall be approved unless the applicant demonstrates, through independently verified hydrologic analysis, that the facility will not impair existing or reasonably anticipated residential, agricultural, ecological, municipal, or industrial water uses, including water resources necessary to support planned future growth, under normal, drought, or projected climate conditions.



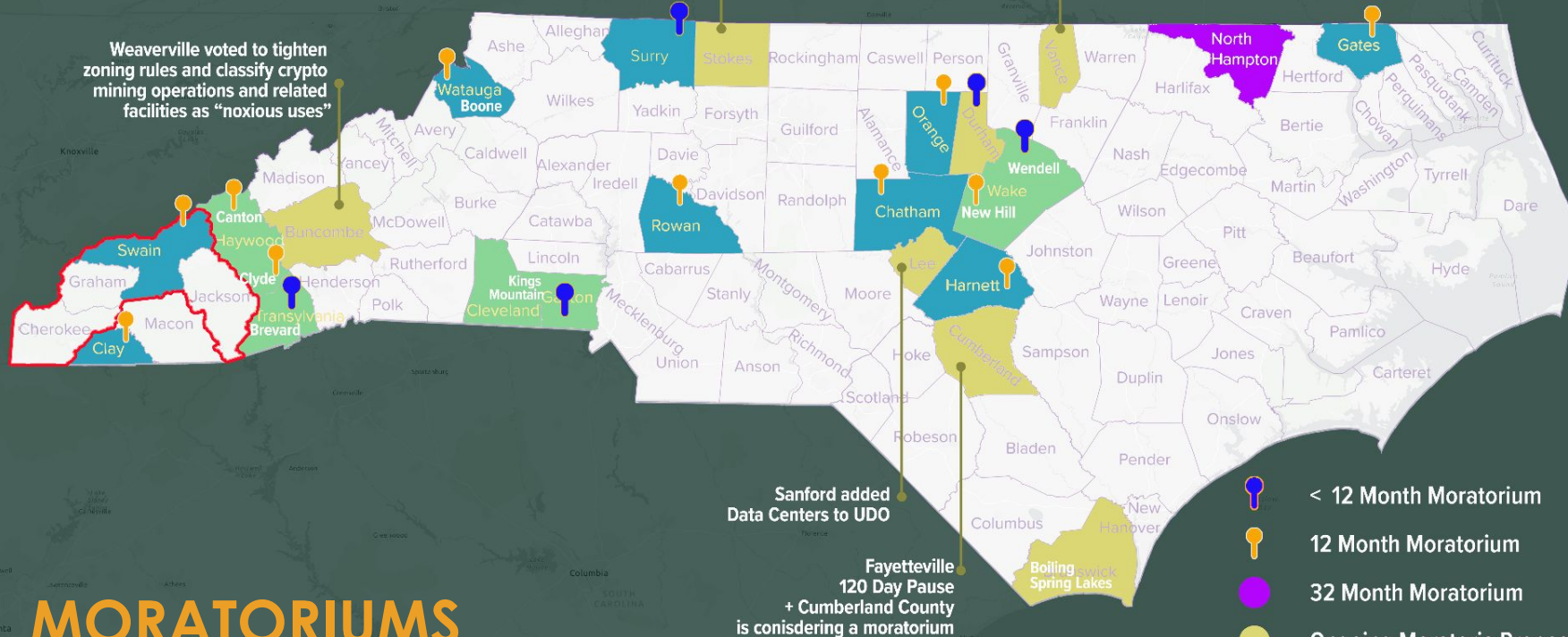
MORATORIUMS

As of May 27, 2026

Voiced data center rezoning approval over notice violation

Weaverville voted to tighten zoning rules and classify crypto mining operations and related facilities as "noxious uses"

Approved rezoning of all land used to develop a data center



- < 12 Month Moratorium
- 12 Month Moratorium
- 32 Month Moratorium
- Ongoing Moratoria Proposals
- City or Town
- County
- Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians Ban



Organizational Challenges ...

- One more day for the in person strategy convening ..
- Keeping up with the commitments made
 - **Planning is easier than implementation**

- Network → Coalition / vs Alliance
- Greens vs Communities
- Pragmatic vs Revolutionary

Tactics

- Continue to connect organizers together
- Verify the information (when possible)
- Organize Defense & Offense

Reject the Inevitability Narrative!

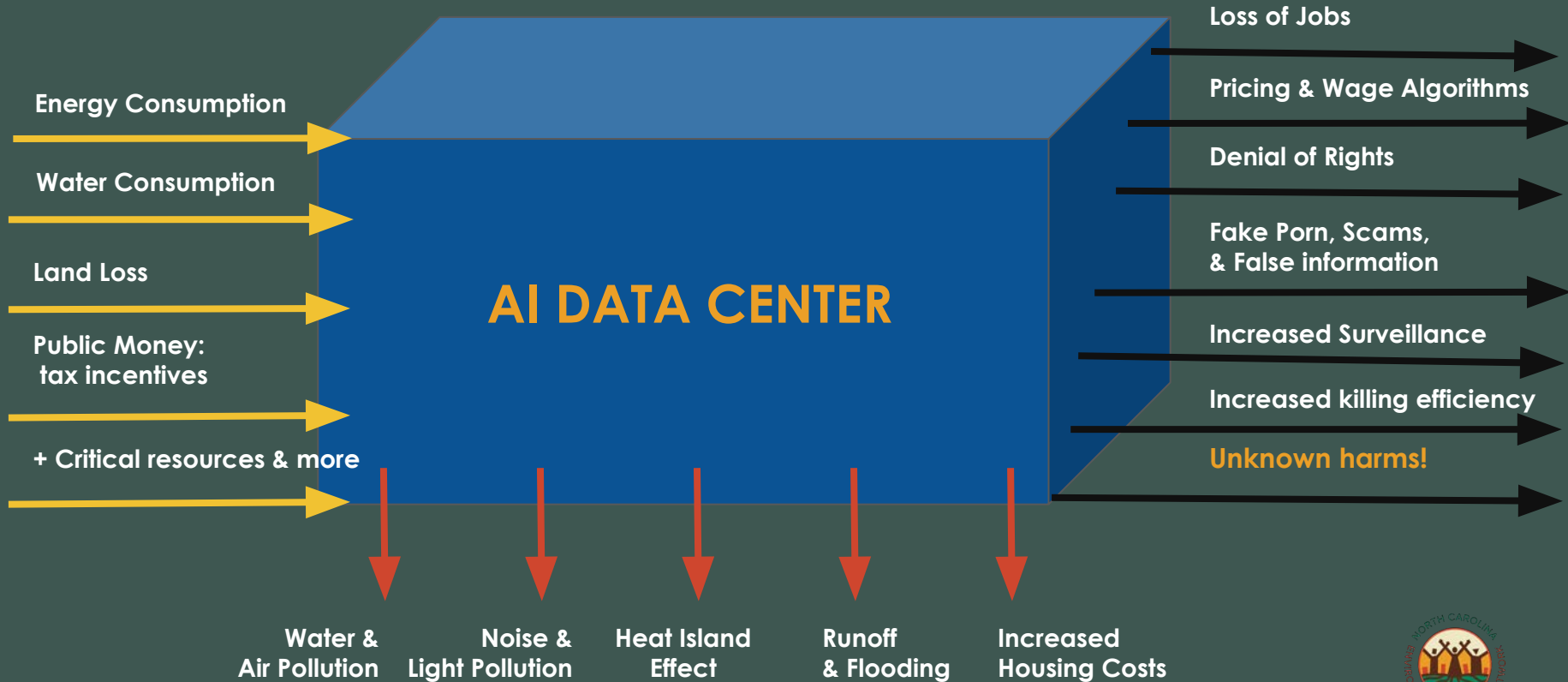
- Raise the alarm
 - Media & Signage
 - Town hall meetings w/ livestream
 - Protests
- Win an election
- Flood the City Councils & County Commissioners Meetings
- Build on previous relationships
 - Private meetings
 - Community Meetings
- Be ready to litigate

Messaging

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AI Data Centers in their area”

[Source](#) - March Gallup Survey, published on May 13, 2026

AI Data Centers: An Extractive Industry from Start to Finish



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Tactical Challenges

- Define data centers!
 - Hyper-data center? Define it
 - AI-data center? Define it
- Moratoriums are a means - not an end goals
 - NCGA proposed bill - 2 year moratorium but...

[Candidate Questionnaire!](#)

What has been the most helpful

- Communication
 - Delegation
 - Grounded messaging
-
- → Justice Framework

Buildinging a powerful network

**Revolutionary
Optimism**



Let's Build a Political Tsunami of Transformational Change!

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used to develop a data center

Voided data center rezoning
approval over notice violation

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zoning rules and classify crypto
mining operations and related
facilities as "noxious uses"

Sanford added
Data Centers to UDO

Fayetteville
120 Day Pause
+ Cumberland County
is considering a moratorium

MORATORIUMS

< 12 Month Moratorium

12 Month Moratorium

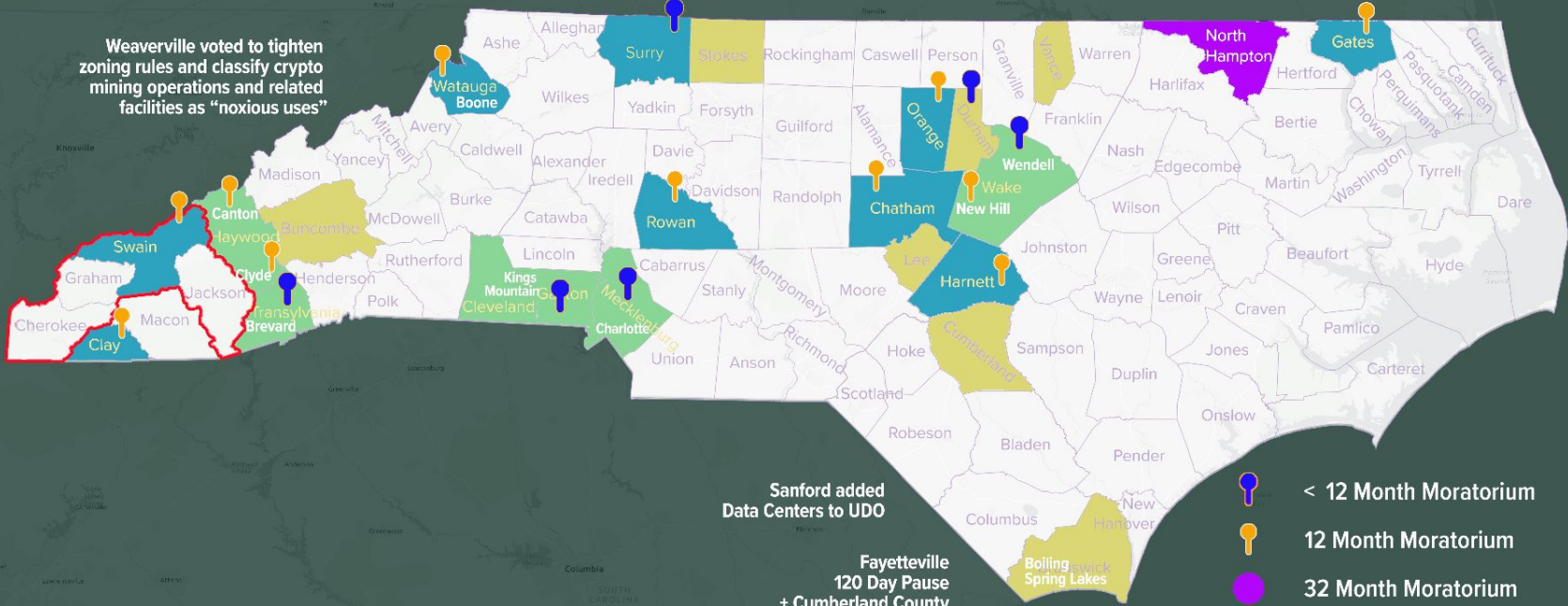
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Cherokee Indians Ban



Founded in 1998, the **North Carolina Environmental Justice Network (NCEJN)** is a grassroots, people of color-led coalition that builds power with systematically marginalized communities to resist climate, environmental, racial, and social injustice.

**Sign Up for
Our Newsletter**



**Follow us on
Social Media**



North Carolina
Environmental
Justice Network



@ncej.network



info@ncejn.org

www.ncejn.com