CLEAN WATER ACTION
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MINNESOTA CURRENTS

Summer 2025 • The Clean Water Action Newsletter

Protecting Amara's Law

This year we saw industry emboldened by a divided Minnesota House of Representatives. This, along with just a one vote majority in the State Senate, seemed to open the door for massive attacks on Amara's Law. Thankfully, because of bipartisan relationships we worked hard to build and maintain, we were able to fight off egregious attacks. There was an attempt to exempt all industry and manufacturing from Amara's Law; a push to extend the timeline for implementation of information disclosure for products with PFAS; and a prolonged timeline for oil refineries to switch over to PFAS-free firefighting foam. Thanks to our hard work, the elevation of community voices, and strong relationships in St. Paul, we protected the integrity of Amara's Law.

What happens in Minnesota has a global impact.

What happens in Minnesota has a global impact. Recently, Clean Water Action Minnesota Director Avonna Starck testified before the Committee on PFAS Contamination of the Parliament of New South Wales, Australia. Also, a documentary crew from France recently spent three days with her here in Minnesota to learn about Amara's Law. This comes after her work with a Japanese documentary crew and a news outlet out of England. The world is watching — and more importantly, they want to follow our lead!

We cannot give up. We are able to stay diligent to protect the world's strongest regulations on toxic PFAS "forever chemicals" because of the strength of our membership and partnerships.

We're grateful to the legislators who held firm to protect Amara's Law. ***Join us in letting them know that their hard work is appreciated***. We must continue to send the message to both Minnesota legislators and industry that we won't give up protecting the strongest PFAS regulations in the country!

Data Centers and the Threat to Minnesota's Environment

To say this legislative session was "business as usual" would be the understatement of the century. To say it was the "Year of Data Centers" though would be spot-on.

Due to the huge demand for cloud computing and artificial intelligence, large-scale (or "hyperscale") data centers are popping up everywhere around the country, including Minnesota. As the moniker implies, these are *huge* facilities. According to JLL, Inc., an international property management company, "these mammoth facilities require 500-800 acres of land and may have multiple power substations on site."[1] Further, if a multibillion-dollar company like Amazon wants to build a data center, they may actually decide they want two data centers on one campus, like they did in Mississippi.[2] In that instance, Amazon purchased a total of 1,700 acres of land for their facilities. For reference, 1,700 acres is roughly 2.65 square miles; Minnesota has 913 cities and towns, 619 of which are smaller than 2.65 square miles. Let that sink in: one hyperscale data center campus could be bigger than 68% of our cities and towns in the state. To make matters worse, one hyperscale data center can use anywhere between 1 million and 5 million gallons of water per day,[3] equivalent to the daily water use of 20,000-96,000 Minnesotans[4] — that's the population of places like Albert Lea, Stillwater, or Northfield, all the way to places like Bloomington or Duluth. And that's not even bringing up the energy demands: according to Michael Shaw, VP of Land Acquisition at

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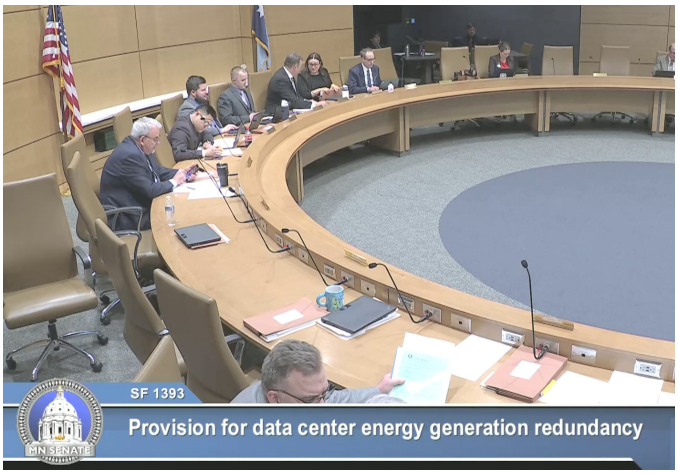

▲ *In front of the Legislature this year has been a decision on whether to extend tax credits for data centers, expand the eligibility for data centers to acquire those tax breaks, and put people over corporations.*

▲ *Data Center in Ashburn, Virginia.*

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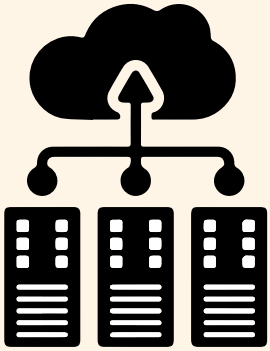
EdgeCore Digital Infrastructure, "[t]he demand for land capable of accommodating 300+ MW data center campuses has skyrocketed in the wake of AI and cloud applications."[5] According to energy usage data provided by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA),[6] one hyperscale data center would represent a 4% increase or more in electricity demand *for the entire state* — the equivalent of adding roughly 285,000 homes.[7]

These numbers are important because they give the true scale of what has been considered at the Capitol this year: massive tax breaks for the world's richest companies to build massive facilities which consume astronomical amounts of land, water, and energy resources. And as things tend to go, short-term jobs were favored over long-term environmental protection and *permanent* jobs in the legislature's final decision. While it is true that construction will provide good, quality short-term and temporary jobs for potentially thousands of Minnesotans, Amazon's own lobbyist said[8] these data centers typically only produce 50 permanent jobs. Further, the lobbyist for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) said[9] that it's likely that we'd have to import IBEW members from other states to complete the construction, meaning all that money paid is leaving across our borders when they're done with the work.

Clean Water Action believes it is fundamentally wrong to give $100+ million in corporate welfare to the richest companies in the history of the world to come into our state, eat up our land, drain our water, and use up our energy. These giveaways for the rich are even more appalling when the state is still facing a structural deficit in the upcoming years and hundreds of thousands of Minnesotans are bearing the brunt of tariffs and government spending cuts.

This fight is far from over, and if you agree that the State should be prioritizing average Minnesotans and our finite resources over the Bezos' of the world and their unbridled greed, stand with us.

Data centers are billed and perceived as an unstoppable force, coming into Minnesota whether we want them or not. As such, data center proponents say we have to capitulate now to appease these companies to come to Minnesota. The logic is confounding: on one hand, data centers are coming whether we like it or not, yet on the other hand, we must entice them with tax breaks — which is it? Learn more ***here***.



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Minnesota Wildfires

In Minnesota's rich water-woven landscape, fire is no longer a distant drama — it is a rising force, reshaped by climate change and casting profound shadows on our lakes, rivers, and wells. The massive wildfires blazing across northeastern Minnesota and southern Canada this year are not isolated catastrophes; they are the latest expressions of a warming world, and their effects flow far beyond scorched forests.

University of Minnesota researchers have begun quantifying the watershed consequences of these fires. In lakes near burned land, water clarity plummets as erosion washes sediment and dissolved organic material into the water, creating murkier water and threatening aquatic life. Disturbed soils become pathways for ash-borne pollutants and nutrients — fuel for algal blooms that threaten drinking water and ecosystem health. Worse, microbial processes sparked by this new organic load can contain methylate mercury, raising toxic risk in fish populations and threatening human consumers.

These impacts are symptoms of a larger systemic shift. Climate change — through warmer summers, longer droughts, and erratic precipitation— is fueling more frequent and intense fires in Minnesota and Canada. Smoke from Canadian blazes has repeatedly triggered air-quality alerts across our state, with levels reaching up to "unhealthy for all". This smoke also carries fine particles and ozone precursors that threaten respiratory health and warm the atmosphere, completing a vicious feedback loop.

We are seeing a stark truth: fire, air, and water are inextricably linked. When uncontrollable fire reshapes the land, it sends shocks through the watershed — into the veins of Minnesota's 10,000 lakes. When smoke fills the sky, it signals a warming planet and weakened climate resilience.

Addressing this complex challenge demands integrated thinking. At Clean Water Action, we advocate for watershed management approaches that fuse climate mitigation, proactive land stewardship, and fire-aware infrastructure. Strategies such as shoreline revegetation after fires can reduce erosion. Prescribed burns — carried out with scientific precision and Indigenous collaboration — can reduce fuel loads before fires spiral out of control. Strengthened air-quality monitoring and watershed resilience funding are essential to mitigate future damage to lakes, wetlands, and drinking water sources.

The wildfires of today offer a philosophical reckoning: we are witnessing elemental forces out of harmony. But they also offer an opportunity — a moment to rediscover the ancient link between fire and the living land and water. By realigning policy and practice with ecological wisdom and climate science, Minnesota can evolve from reactive action to anticipatory stewardship. In doing so, we protect not only landscapes, lakes, and people, but also the subtle, enduring balance that defines our shared home.

► A Minnesota wildfire raging along a freshwater shoreline.

Toxics in Menstrual Products and Cosmetics

Many mainstream menstrual products and cosmetics can contain harmful toxins that pose serious health risks. For example, we're learning that menstrual products may contain toxic chemicals such as lead and PFAS (*CNN*). These toxins may be linked to health risks like cancer, reproductive harm, and more.

Additionally, cosmetics are often packed with hazardous chemicals like formaldehyde, lead, and phthalates (*Berkeley Public Health*). Many of these ingredients are not adequately regulated or disclosed due to labeling laws. Formaldehyde-releasing substances are not identified explicitly on ingredient labels, but rather by their formal chemical name, which is less recognizable (*NPR*). This leaves consumers in the dark about what they're putting on and in their bodies. As a result, health experts and activists are advocating for stricter safety regulations, clear product labels, and safer products overall. In 2009, the European Union banned formaldehyde as a cosmetic ingredient. However, if cosmetics include formaldehyde-releasing substances, the products must be listed with a warning (*NPR*).

Americans deserve the same transparency to ensure we are making the best decisions for our health and safety. By pushing for clearer labeling, safer ingredient standards, and holding companies accountable, we can work towards a future where health and safety come first. Protecting our health should not be a mystery or privilege.

In July of 2018, a public health law in New York went into effect mandating that all public schools provide menstrual products in bathrooms for students, improving access and safety to these products. In July of 2024, ***the law was amended*** to ensure that all public and private schools with students from grade six through twelve provide menstrual products as well. New York state also mandates that menstrual products sold in the state shall contain a printed ***list of ingredients***. Collectively, these laws advance transparency by enhancing product safety, ensuring free access, and eliminating stigma. Find out more about these laws ***here***.

NATIONAL UPDATES

Drastic Budget Cuts Would Put Clean Water at Risk

The Trump administration's Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 budget proposal threatens to eliminate critical State and Tribal Assistance Grants (STAG) under the Clean Water Act — putting public health, environmental protection, and local economies at serious risk. These grants fund essential state programs that monitor water quality, control pollution, issue permits, and support community-led restoration. Without this funding, many states report they would be forced to shut down core clean water operations, lay off staff, and abandon key projects that protect drinking water, prevent harmful algal blooms, and ensure safe rivers and lakes. Clean Water Action has urged Congress to reject this proposal and is partnering with fellow advocacy groups to educate lawmakers on its harmful consequences. Learn more about potential impacts of the White House budget proposal ***here***.

Celebrating $1 million in micro-donations!

Clean Water Fund's long-running partnership with SurveyMonkey's Contribute program recently passed a major milestone: $1 million donated to Clean Water Fund, and counting. One powerful demonstration of what we mean when we talk about "strength in numbers."

You can help speed us on our way toward a second $1 million. Just join the almost half-million others who have signed up to take surveys benefiting Clean Water Fund.

Learn more at
cleanwater.org/surveys

Clean Water Action has been monitoring the reconciliation Bill H.R. 1 (the "Big Beautiful Bill"), which would gut essential protections for our water and communities. This legislation slashes funding for coastal resilience, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) facilities, and environmental justice programs. These are vital investments that safeguard drinking water, protect vulnerable communities, and prepare for climate impacts. It strips away the regulatory tools needed to prevent pollution and hold polluters accountable. We need bold, equitable action to protect clean water, not rollbacks that put public health and our environment at risk.

Around Town: Source Water Collaborative Member Meeting

Source Water Collaborative's Co-Chairs Lynn Thorp (Clean Water Action) and Deirdre White (Association of State Drinking Water Administrators) welcomed attendees to the annual Source Water Collaborative Member Meeting on June 17. This hybrid gathering brought together 31 national organizations to give updates, exchange ideas, and advance the shared goal of protecting America's drinking water at the source.

Toxic Chemicals:
EPA Should Do More — Not Less — to Keep PFAS Chemicals Out of Our Water

In April 2024, Clean Water Action applauded EPA for finalizing drinking water limits for six of the notorious per-and poly-fluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) chemicals. PFAS are widely used chemicals that are highly persistent in the environment, have been found in drinking water sources nationwide, and are known to cause serious health problems. Yet this May, EPA announced plans that it would reconsider these Safe Drinking Water Act limits for four PFAS chemicals and delay protections for two more. Clean Water Action ***released a statement*** opposing weakening these health-based drinking water limits and urging EPA to accelerate Clean Water Act pollution limits and other initiatives that would keep PFAS out of our water and the environment in the first place.

These are examples of why we must urge our representatives not to cut EPA's budget or weaken our environmental and health safeguards. ***Take action today!***

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