



Testimony of Kyle Hart
Mid-Atlantic Program Manager, National Parks Conservation Association
Before the House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

Hearing: "Unleashing a Golden Era: Examining the Use of Federal Lands to Power American Technological Innovation"

May 21, 2025

Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Dexter, and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Kyle Hart, and I serve as the Mid-Atlantic Program Manager for the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). NPCA is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization with more than 1.7 million members and supporters across the country, dedicated to protecting and enhancing America's national parks for current and future generations.

At NPCA, we recognize that data centers are a critical part of our country's digital infrastructure and economy. However, data centers, like any industrial or commercial development, present both direct and indirect threats to our national parks. Lawmakers, regulators, and industry must understand the impacts we have seen in our region, be proactive in how we plan for and build out our data centers and better engage with local communities and park advocates to protect parks from inappropriate development. NPCA's work in Virginia on this issue provides a cautionary story with lessons learned we want the Congress to keep in mind when considering any legislative action.

In Virginia and increasingly Maryland, we have been alarmed about the impact the increasing number of industrial-scale data center developments proposed immediately adjacent too—or even within the authorized boundaries of—our region's national battlefields, historic sites and other special places. We are also troubled by the potential impacts that new transmission lines being proposed to meet the energy demand of data centers will have on park sites around the Mid-Atlantic region.

The rapid expansion of data center developments proposed near national parks or within their broader landscapes of the Mid-Atlantic threaten the natural, cultural, and historical resources that millions of Americans cherish. NPCA has a long history of opposing industrial and commercial development next to and near parks, so our concern is consistent with our longstanding work in protecting parks from development that is incompatible with them.

NPCA first became aware of the risks to Virginia parks posed by data centers in 2021 with the proposed Potomac Technology Park (Image 1). This data center development was planned to include 1 million square feet of data center space inside the congressionally authorized boundary of Prince William Forest Park, a national park site in Northern Virginia that welcomed more than 355,000 visitors in 2024. The proposed development would have clearcut dozens of acres of



mature hardwood forests and filled in several acres of wetlands in the headwaters of Quantico Creek, the park's main tributary. The National Park Service opposed this development, and the plan faced widespread community opposition. Despite this opposition, developers remain staunch in their determination to develop this site.

Similarly, the planned Prince William Digital Gateway, the world's largest planned data center complex (more than 23 million square feet of development in one corridor) threatens Manassas National Battlefield Park (Image 2 and 3). The proposal directly borders the National Battlefield, and the developers plan to bulldoze more than 100 acres of land designated on the National Register of Historic Places. This project was called the biggest threat to the park in three decades by the National Park Service and is opposed by thousands of community members and national figures such as Ken Burns. Despite the park's proximity, the National Register of Historic Places designation and widespread public opposition, the Prince William County Board of Supervisors approved the proposal for construction in December 2023, underscoring the urgent need for stronger protections for national parks and their surrounding landscapes.

Unfortunately, this trend is accelerating. In addition to projects at Manassas Battlefield and Prince William Forest Park, developers are now proposing large-scale data center projects directly adjacent to Fredericksburg & Spotsylvania National Military Park and Richmond National Battlefield Park in Virginia, as well as the C&O Canal National Historical Park and Monocacy National Battlefield in Maryland.

Beyond the site selection of data center developments, many other factors must be considered to ensure this industry does not negatively impact national parks and other special places. One issue in the Mid-Atlantic is energy demand. Data centers require enormous amounts of electricity and in the PJM Interconnection region, this includes accelerating the buildout of natural gas power plants and pipelines, delaying the planned retirement of coal-fired power plants, and driving proposals for new or much larger transmission lines that would cut through numerous national park sites. For instance, new corridors have been proposed within Manassas National Battlefield Park (Image 4) and through Harpers Ferry National Historical Park and across the Appalachian National Scenic Trail (Image 5). These two projects damage historic viewsheds, negatively impact natural and cultural resources and cause habitat fragmentation for wildlife around parks.

Virginia is now home to more than 483 data centers—by far the highest concentration in the world—handling upwards of 70% of global internet traffic (Image 6). Moreover, data centers continue to be proposed for construction at breakneck speed. This explosive pace of development has prompted local and state leaders to act. In 2023, the Virginia General Assembly directed its Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) to conduct a comprehensive study of the cumulative impacts of data center growth. JLARC's December 2024 report concluded that large-scale data center developments are largely incompatible with parks and residential areas due to their massive energy and water demands, noise pollution, and threats to cultural landscapes. The report also highlighted the extreme difficulty of meeting data center energy demand. It laid out a path forward that includes massive amounts of new renewable energy and fossil fuel energy



production, new nuclear facilities and increased out-of-state purchase of energy from the broader PJM grid, despite outstanding questions about whether other states will have enough energy to meet their own rising electricity demand. This report also put a spotlight on the cost of building all this new infrastructure and it estimated that every day Virginians can expect to pay upwards of \$444 extra on their utility bills annually to support this load growth.

The report reinforced what many Virginia parks and communities have experienced firsthand—siting data centers near parks without adequate planning and regulation can irreparably harm irreplaceable natural and historical resources. The report also recommended mandatory cumulative impact assessments and better coordination with state agencies to prevent adverse effects on sensitive areas, including national and state parks.

The JLARC report sparked a growing, bipartisan recognition among Virginia lawmakers and local officials that unchecked data center development poses serious risks to the state's environment, infrastructure and quality of life. During the 2025 General Assembly session, legislators from both parties introduced more than 40 bills aimed at increasing oversight of the industry—ranging from stricter land use regulations to improved energy and environmental standards. While only a handful of measures advanced, the volume and diversity of proposals reflected a broad, cross-party consensus that reform is needed. At the local level, counties such as Loudoun, Prince William and Fairfax have already begun implementing zoning changes and development guidelines to better manage the pace and placement of new projects.

Understanding the full scope of potential environmental impacts to Virginia's national parks from data center development is critical, and federal and state agencies need to rapidly update regulations and oversight of any industrial or commercial activity that impacts irreplaceable park resources. As this subcommittee considers how federal lands can support technological innovation, we urge you to recognize that national parks and their surrounding landscapes are not vacant land waiting to be developed—they are living classrooms, sacred places and engines of local economies. They also represent binding commitments made by Congress and the American people to preserve our shared natural and cultural heritage. The rapid expansion of data centers in the Mid-Atlantic to power AI will not be without its risks and environmental harms. Decision makers must go forward on this issue with eyes wide open and proceed with caution.

We are not opposed to innovation or development. But innovation and development should not come at the expense of places like the hallowed ground of Manassas and Fredericksburg and other national parks—special places that tell the story of our democracy, honor our shared history, and preserve the natural beauty that defines our nation.

If Congress considers legislation on this issue, it should seek to encourage the development of any industry, like data centers, in a way that does not negatively impact national parks. Our lessons learned from our advocacy to protect Virginia parks has identified the following areas for consideration:



1. Congress should make sure federal agencies consider impacts to national parks and other special places when undertaking studies of how any proposed development like data centers could negatively harm park resources, and make sure this work is shared with you and open to public comments.
2. Any congressional action should ensure federal agencies encourage and not impede efforts by state agencies to work with data center operators to report metrics such as energy use, water use, and renewable energy use, and to improve energy efficiency.
3. Any congressional action should encourage federal agencies to work with the National Park Service to develop policies and best practices to protect national park sites from incompatible development like nearby heavy data center development. The action should include policies that would ban, or at least discourage, data center development within one mile of national park sites.

We must find a path forward that fosters both technological progress and environmental responsibility. That begins with acknowledging the unique and irreplaceable role that national parks play in our society—and ensuring that future development does not come at their expense.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and I welcome your questions.



Image 1:

Map showing the proposed Potomac Technology Park data center site within the authorized boundary of Prince William Forest Park, highlighting impacts to forests and wetlands near Quantico Creek. Source: CEA Engineers

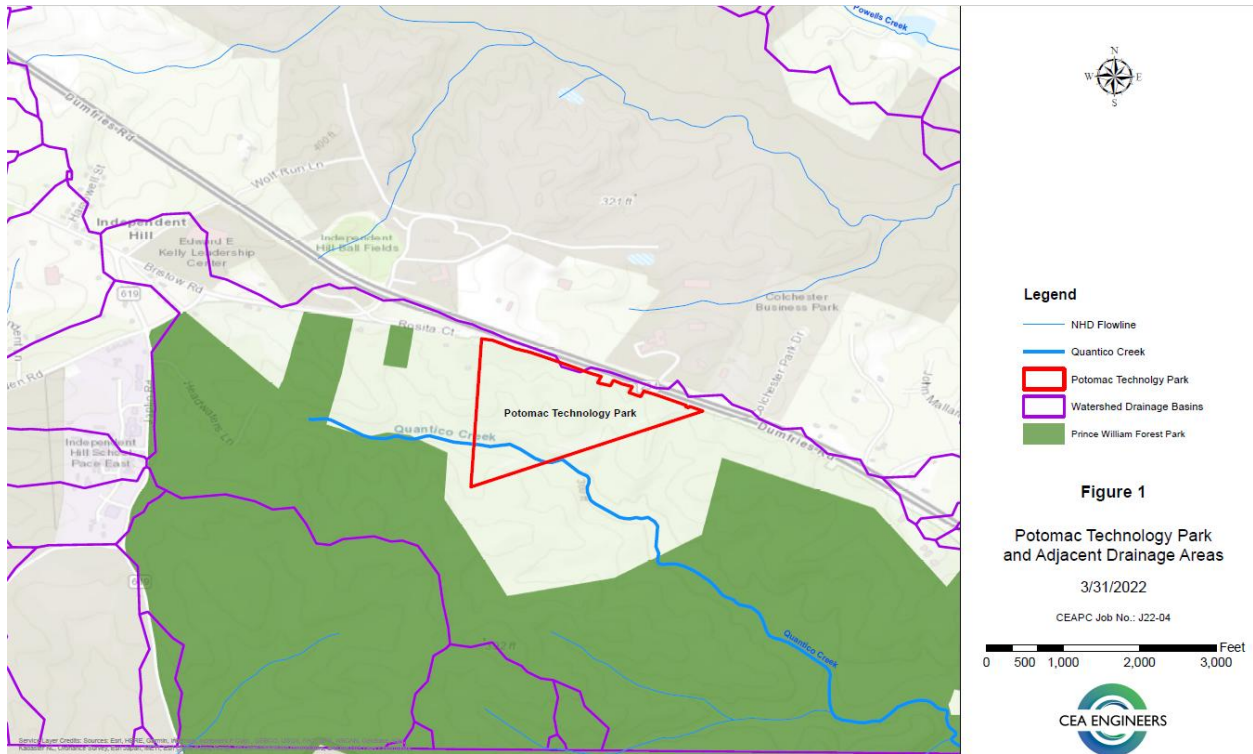


Image 2:

Map outlining the proposed Prince William Digital Gateway development corridor directly adjacent to Manassas National Battlefield Park, indicating the scale and proximity of the planned data center complex, in relation to Manassas Battlefield, a local state park, historic battle sites, and other resources. *Source: Piedmont Environmental Council and Prince William Conservation Alliance*

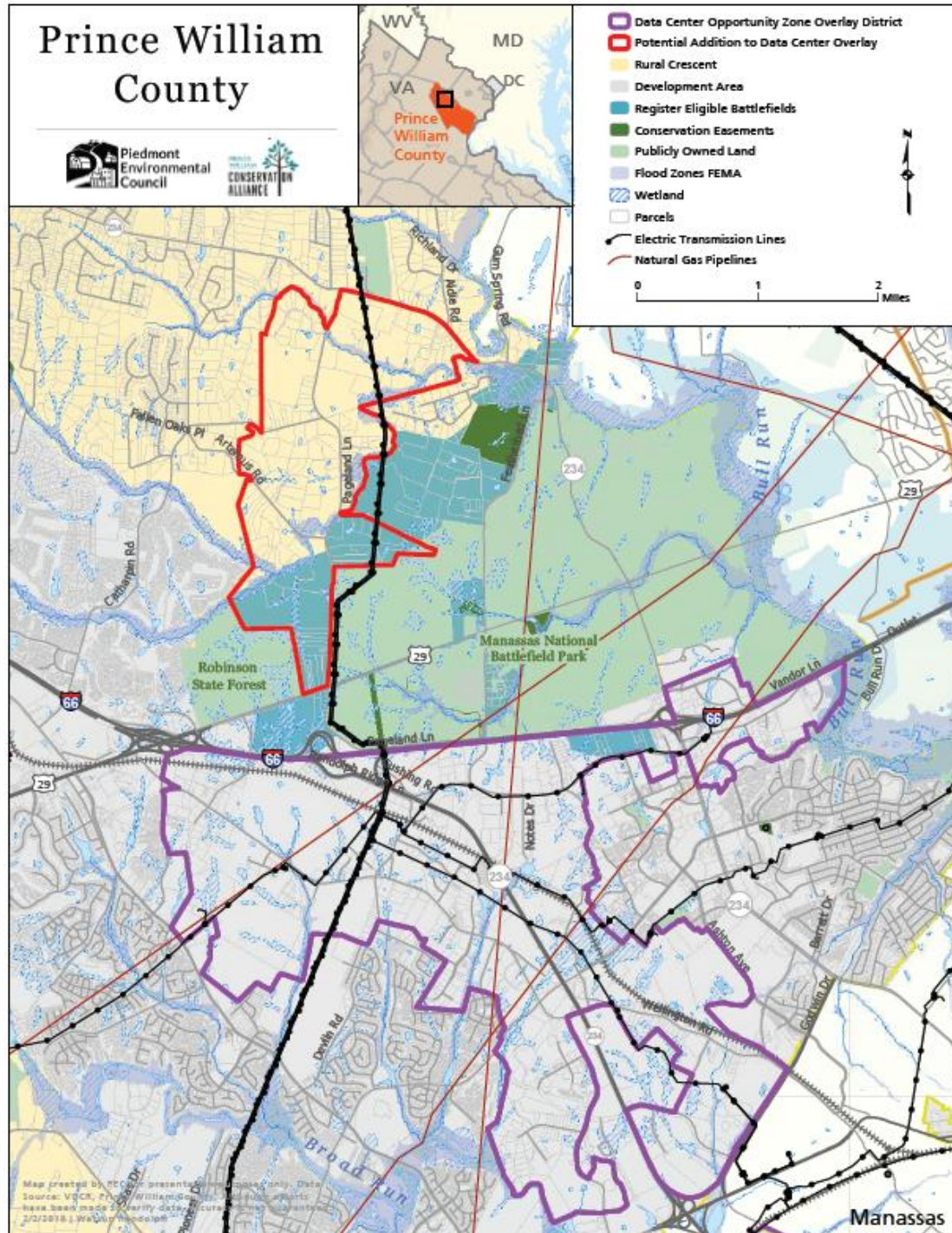


Image 3:

Map of the building plan for the Prince William Digital Gateway project adjacent to Manassas National Battlefield Park, demonstrating the dramatic impacts to its historic viewshed. *Source: Prince William County Prince William Digital Gateway Rezoning Documents*





Image 4:

Map depicting proposed transmission line corridors, called the Morrisville to Wishing Star project, cutting through Manassas National Battlefield Park to meet the energy demands of nearby data center developments. *Source: Dominion Energy*

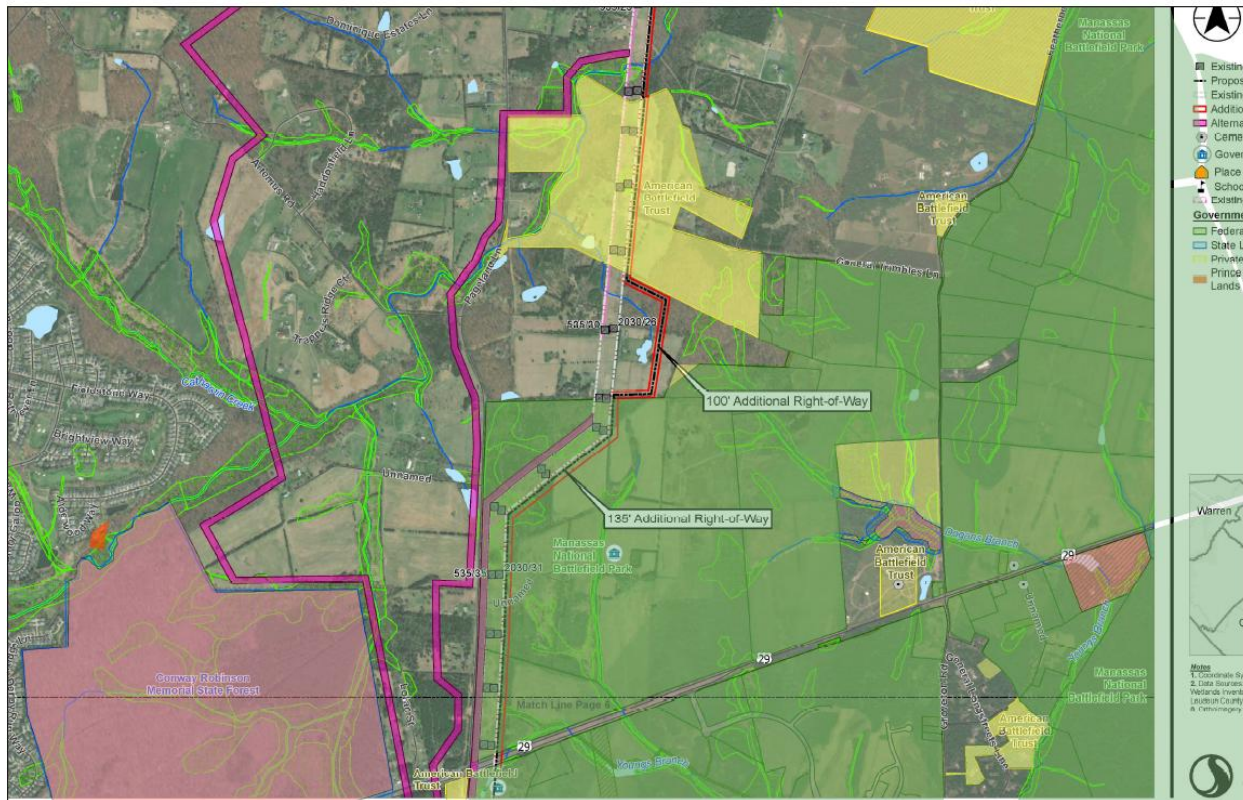


Image 5:

Map showing proposed transmission line routes from the proposed Mid-Atlantic Resiliency Link (MARL) project, impacting Harpers Ferry National Historical Park and crossing the Appalachian National Scenic Trail, illustrating potential harm to scenic views and park resources.



Image 6:

Graph showing 2025 operational data center capacity globally. Virginia has more than 60 million square feet of operational data centers, with another 200 million square feet in the pipeline. Virginia alone far surpasses data center operational capacity of any other nation. Source: Cushman & Wakefield 2025Global Data Center Market Comparison

