

Soon after, the water returned with a gush — bringing new concerns, including erosion that might require rebuilding a small bridge over the creek. Kocinski said these fits and starts in water flow have occurred approximately 30 times since she first noticed the issue in May 2025.

She also said that the water supply to her farm and home has turned murky.

“It was cloudy, too,” Kocinski said.

She has reached out to government agencies, Meta and other companies involved in building the new data center.

“Every time I called, I was told to talk to a different department,” she said. “This is a big old mess.”

Kocinski eventually commissioned her own water study, which showed higher-than-acceptable levels of strontium — an alkaline earth metal that can cause cardiovascular or kidney issues in high doses. A new water filtration system for her farm to lower those levels could cost as much as \$40,000, she said.

She worries the spike in strontium stems from the construction site less than two miles away, questioning whether blasting caused the shift and whether ample environmental due diligence was conducted before work began.

In a response provided to Adams MultiMedia, Meta stated that a review of geographic information systems (GIS) data and a third-party analysis indicate the creek originates at a quarry near Kocinski’s property and does not extend into the data center parcel. Meta added that construction is occurring on the portions of the property farthest from her farm.

Roberta “Bobbi” Marck, mayor of the City of Beaver Dam, said she has met with the Kocinskis twice, including once alongside Meta and its water engineering consultant.

Meta — which currently operates 28 data centers in the U.S. — emphasizes that it uses more efficient, closed-loop cooling systems that recycle and reflow water used to cool servers and equipment. Facebook’s parent company also stated it will invest in operational water efficiencies at its facilities and fund local water restoration projects.

A LOCAL STORY

The Kocinski family’s concerns represent a single snapshot of a much wider national debate over how the surge of AI infrastructure will affect local water systems.

Data centers are undeniably thirsty.

Water-fueled cooling systems are essential to keep rows of servers and computing equipment from overheating. Larger facilities can consume up to 5 million gallons of water per day, according to the Environmental and Energy Study Institute (EESI).

Globally, water use by data centers could double to 2.46 trillion gallons by 2030, according to a United Nations report.

AI and data centers are national and global waves with machines learning programs poised to change the nature of work, creativity and innovation. AI could also potentially displace workers from their livelihoods.

“But water is really a local story,” said Rich “Raz” Razgaitis, a clean water and sustainability expert and CEO of FloWater, a Denver-based purification company.

Razgaitis said that a data center’s impact varies widely depending on local water supplies and infrastructure. “That’s why small towns really need to be at the table,” he said, stressing the need for transparency. “We’re in uncharted territory.”

He added that water systems across the nation have historically been underfunded compared to other utility infrastructure.

FARMERS’ FEARS

Tim Negris, executive vice president with MOCA Systems Inc., a Boston tech firm working with contractors, architects, and engineers, said that community resistance is often driven by local farmers and agriculture advocates worried about lost land and a potential strain on water supplies.

“The fear around water is being driven by agriculture,” Negris said, pointing to similar tensions playing

out in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Maryland and Iowa.

In Dubuque County, Iowa, County Supervisor Harley Pothoff said local concerns about water, energy and farmland helped drive a local data center moratorium approved in May.

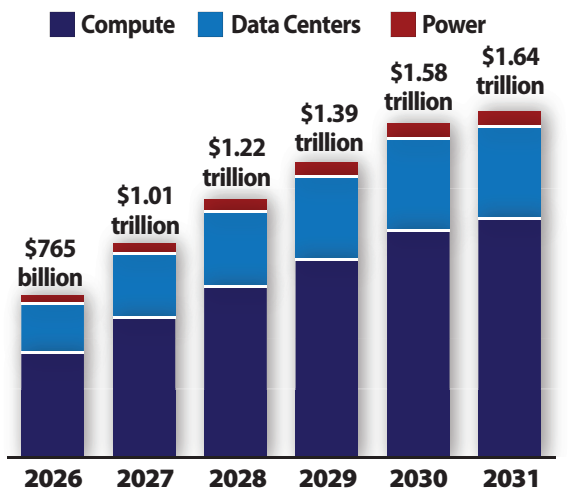
He said a one-year pause gives the community time to evaluate the impacts of a proposed data center on a 400-acre parcel — including on a nearby local airport.

“I have some concerns,” Pothoff said. “It just seems awfully big.”

Opponents of the Iowa project claim it could consume up to 3 million gallons of water daily. Conversely, developers argue it could generate as much as \$6.2 billion in long-term economic impact, including construction jobs, permanent operations, and tax revenue.

Big CapEx spending on AI

Projected AI capital expenditures on data centers, computing, power sources 2026-2031. Total: \$7.6 trillion



SOURCE: GOLDMAN SACHS

SO MUCH MONEY

Shelley Copsey, CEO and founder of FYLD, an AI technology company that works with data center developers on infrastructure, believes this wave of projects presents opportunities alongside its challenges.

“I think we will see a whole new way of thinking when there is so much money to manage these projects,” Copsey said. “It’s a force to be reckoned with.”

Negris agreed, expecting a “force of capital” to spur technological and infrastructure changes.

Evolving chip designs and hardware could alter cooling mechanisms, potentially reducing long-term water needs.

Copsey added that investments could drive improvements to local municipal water, wastewater and power grid systems. This includes upgrading aging pipelines, constructing reservoirs or building desalination plants that convert brackish or saltwater into freshwater.

There are currently approximately 400 desalination plants in the U.S., mostly focused on brackish water in California, Florida and Texas, according to the APM Research Lab.

WATER IMPROVEMENTS

In some areas, developers are footing the bill for public infrastructure improvements as part of data center deals.

Jesse Burke, a town council member in Ashville, Ohio — a village of 4,700 people south of Columbus — said a new 800-megawatt AI data center was approved before the town instituted a moratorium.

The developer, Virginia-based EdgeConneX, agreed to fund upgrades to Ashville’s aging municipal water plant to meet EPA mandates as part of the deal with the town.

“It’s currently in need of a lot of work,” Burke said “The developer has agreed to cover those costs up to \$35 million,” saving local residents from rate hikes.

The money is part of a large community benefits deal for the Ohio town that also includes an allotment for local schools.

For Ashville, concerns center on power. EdgeConneX has applied with Ohio regulators to build an on-site, 800-megawatt natural gas power plant to run the facility.

DATA CENTERS

Five questions on water

Artificial intelligence (AI) data centers are quite thirsty. Just how thirsty are they and why?

1 Why do data centers need water?

Data centers operate 24/7 and their computers, servers and chips require cooling to avoid overheating. Data centers use different cooling approaches that can require significant amounts of water.

Power plants also use water to help convert heat energy into electricity that fuel data centers.

2 What are the different cooling systems used at data centers?

Data centers can use open-loop/evaporative cooling systems (akin to swamp coolers) that are more energy efficient than air conditioning but require water flow.

There are also closed-loop systems that reuse water circulated through sealed pipes and coils to cool servers. This approach uses less water but has a more expensive upfront cost and requires more complex designs.

3 How much water do data centers currently use?

Existing data centers can consume between 300,000 gallons to 5 million gallons of water per day.

4 How does that compare to other uses, such as agriculture?

AI data centers are thirsty. But they are still a drop in the bucket. Agriculture accounts for 70% of global water use and 86% of freshwater use in the U.S. Still, power plants that will help energize machine learning also utilize substantial amounts of water.

5 How much more water could AI data centers use?

AI data centers have significantly greater cooling and power needs than existing digital infrastructure.

By 2030, data centers could consume 9.3 trillion litres of water, according to the United Nations. They currently consume 4.5 trillion litres.

Big hyperscalers and AI chip makers say wider options of closed-loop cooling and innovations could lower data center water use.

SOURCES: United Nations, U.S. Geological Survey, Reuters, University of Georgia, EESI, Earth.org, Sentient Media, Bank for Nature

“From our viewpoint, the biggest concern is going to be power generation, air quality, and the power plant’s noise,” Burke said.

Razgaitis said while closed-loop cooling systems reduce direct water consumption, they can use 10% to 40% more electricity than open-loop systems. Additionally, he said recycled water within closed loops poses potential risks if recirculated contaminants become concentrated before disposal.

“You’re solving one side of the ledger,” Razgaitis said, referring to water.

“But you are creating stress on the other side of the ledger,” he said referring to power.

Up next in this series: Power hungry: How AI data centers are poised to reshape the energy landscape.

About this series: Digital forums

Adams MultiMedia (AMM) will host upcoming forums online featuring experts in the artificial intelligence (AI) data center space, as well as our journalists from across the country who have been covering projects and community concerns.

For more news and content on AI data centers and information on digital forums check out www.datacenterdiscord.adamsmultimedia.com.