

Welcome!

Duluth & Hermantown AI Data Center Education & Awareness Event



July 14th, 2026

Meet our SPEAKERS



**Rebecca
Gilbertson**

Scientist,
Educator,
Hermantown
Resident



**Prescott
Balch**

Caledonia Village
Board President,
Retired technology
executive



**Lori
Huntoon**

Geologist,
Educator



**Amanda
Mueller**

GLNU, Port
Washington resident,
Retired Engineer



**Alex
Morrisseau**

Lifelong Water
Protector,
Environmental
Advocate, Student

Duluth & Hermantown Next Steps!

- Attend your City Council meetings
- Comment on the environmental review (AUAR)
- Sign moratorium petitions!





Facilitated by

Charlie Berens

Comedian & Author,
Manitowoc Minute

Duluth & Hermantown Next Steps!

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Rebecca Gilbertson

Scientist, Educator,
Hermantown Resident



Submit A Question

Efforts to keep the proposed Hermantown data center a secret, revealed in documents obtained by public data requests, are some of the most extreme examples we've found of keeping the public in the dark about a data center.

Kathryn Hoffman, Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy

Hermantown's Story

Why do Hermantown residents object?

Government secrecy

Inappropriate siting

Environmentally sensitive location



POTENTIAL SITE OF HERMANTOWN DATA CENTER



Map source: OpenStreetMap

DULUTH

Google is behind Duluth-area data center that's been cloaked in secrecy

A proposed data center in Hermantown has been confirmed since September, but its owner has remained secret for more than a year.

By Jana Hollingsworth
The Minnesota Star Tribune

MARCH 3, 2025 AT 8:00AM

DULUTH

Northeastern Minnesota mystery project identified as data center

Mystery has been swirling for months around the project in Hermantown, Minn., amid zoning changes and offers to buy homes.

By Jana Hollingsworth and Walker Orenstein
The Minnesota Star Tribune

SEPTEMBER 23, 2025 AT 3:07PM

DULUTH

A massive development is proposed for a northeastern Minnesota city. Local officials aren't saying what it is.

The industrial project proposed for Hermantown carries some hallmarks of a data center.

By Jana Hollingsworth and Walker Orenstein
The Minnesota Star Tribune

MAY 21, 2025 AT 1:54PM

Northeast Minnesota data center wins key approval as hundreds protest

More than 300 people filled Hermantown's council chambers and an overflow room before spilling into hallways, as others waited outside during a 5-hour rezoning hearing.

By Jana Hollingsworth
The Minnesota Star Tribune

OCTOBER 21, 2025 AT 11:06AM

Governmental Secrecy

What's been happening in Hermantown?

September 18, 2024: Email from City Administrator to City Development Director privately confirms that **the City knows the proposed project is a data center brought to them by MN Power.**

Nov 26, 2024: **NDA signed** by St. Louis County Commissioner Musolf

April 2025:

City Rezones 14 parcels, begins AUAR.

Draft is posted in July, & finalized in Sept. AUAR does not reveal that the project is a data center.

Harmony Group LLC conducting contracts for land on behalf of Google. Landowners approach the city to request information & are denied.

Nov 2025: MCEA & SHDC sue the City of Hermantown, alleging the city hid the project's nature as a data center & conducted inadequate environmental review (EIS > AUAR). **Developer announces it will seek public input before taking next steps.**

May 21, 2024: NDAs signed by city administrator & assistant city administrator. Mayor becomes aware of the project in September.

March 12-13, 2025: NDAs signed by St. Louis County Commissioners Halara & Nelson

May 21, 2024 - Sept 23, 2025: **Multiple emails between the developer & city.** 1600+ pages of email communication (without attachments).

September 23, 2025: Residents learn about the project through a Star Trib article.

Sept 30, 2025: Comment period closes for environmental review, just 5 days after story broke.

Oct 6, 2025
10.6.25: City approves AUAR, first hearing of rezoning another 17 parcels ~278 acres.

Timeline Continued...

Oct 17, 2025:
Residents petition for an environmental assessment worksheet (EAW), which the city denies in Dec.

Oct 20, 2025:
City rezones another 200 acres.
Residents exceed the fire code (~300 people), attending the meeting in opposition.

April 2026: Harmony Group LLC has now bought \$5.91 million worth of land. Land was sold for 3-13x their tax value. Landowners are under NDA.

May 4 2026: SHDC a letter to the city on Google's **Tax Abatement & Development Agreements**, and submitted a letter to the school district on later that week.

March 2026:
3.3.26: Google announces that it is "Fortune 50 company" behind the secretive data center. The plans have been underway since 2024 at least.
3.31.26: City announces draft order for an updated AUAR. The 1-month comment period for the 61-page AUAR scoping document begins.

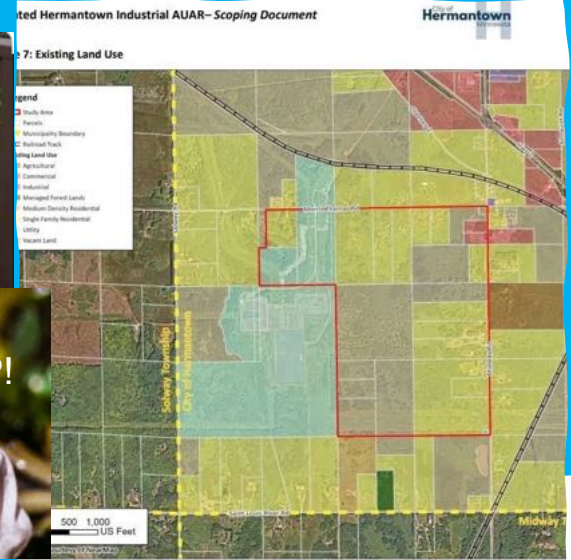
April 2026:
4.23.26: City provides notice for a public hearing on tax abatement & development agreements (11 days notice, 70 pages)
4.29.26: SHDC sues the City again, alleging open meetings law violations, improper changes to zoning & 2045 planning for the project
4.30.26: Comment period on AUAR scoping document ends.
Many organizations & residents commented.

Summer 2026
Draft AUAR comment period will begin. The City will likely vote in the Fall.

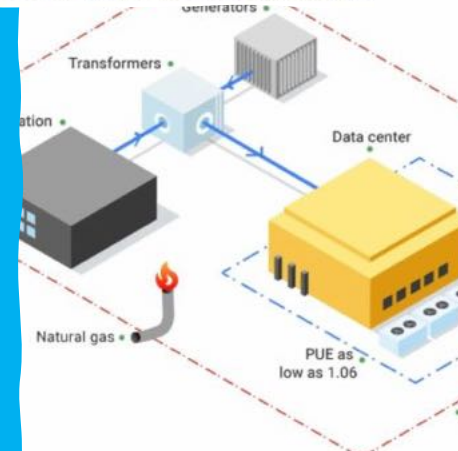
POTENTIAL SITE OF HERMANTOWN DATA CENTER



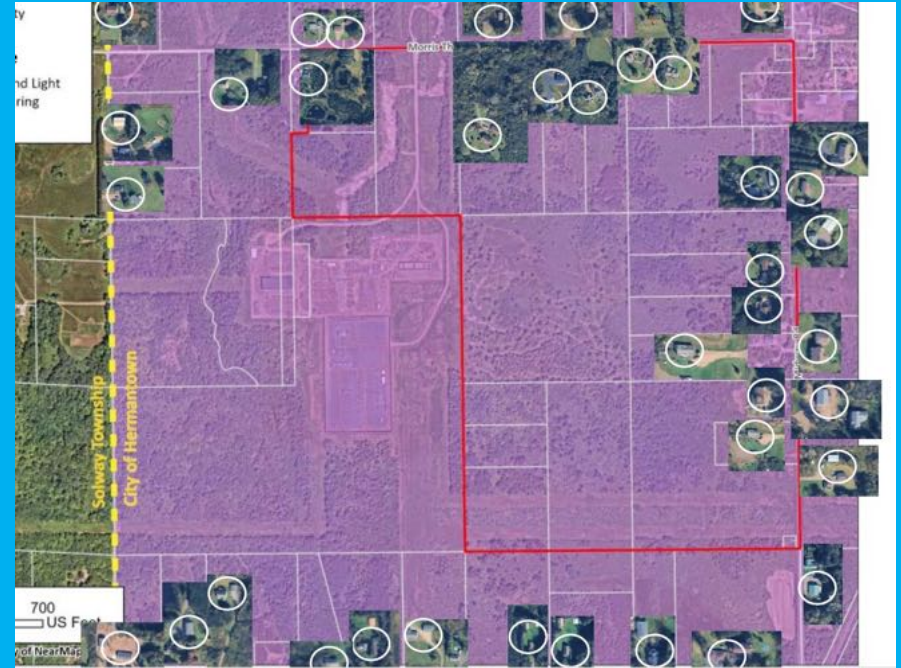
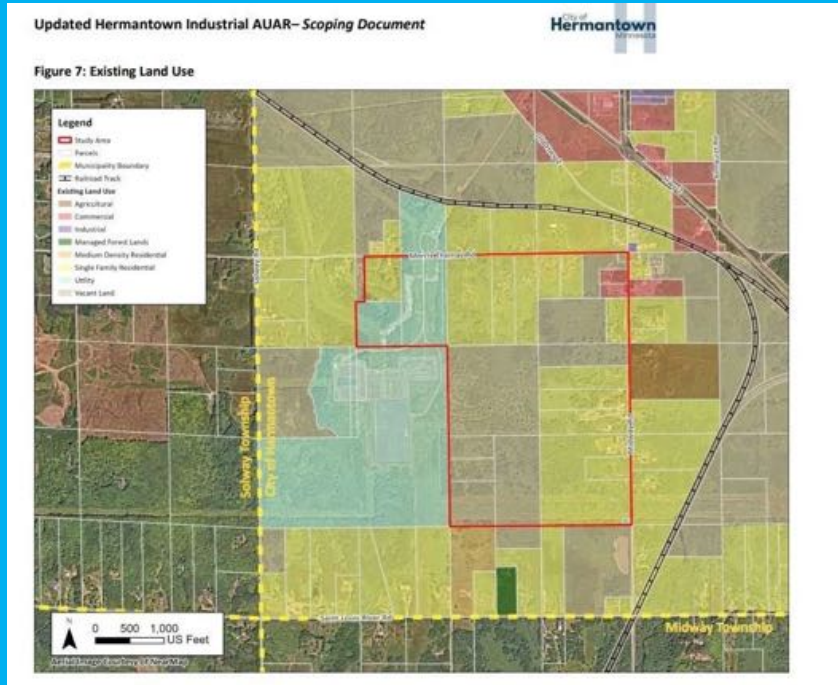
Map source: OpenStreetMap



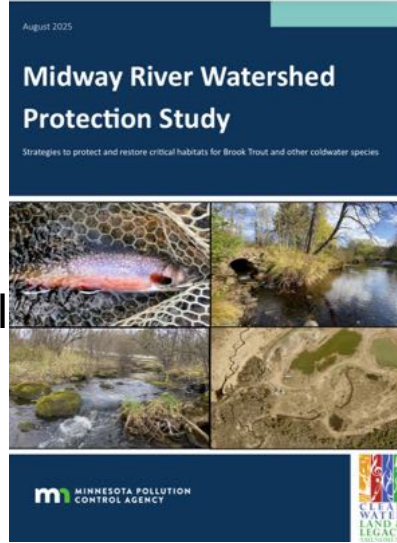
Inappropriate Siting



Adolph Neighborhood is Residential



Residential Dwellings Within Data Center Perimeter = ~11
Residential Dwellings Within Future Industrial Zone Area = ~38
Residential Dwellings in Midway and Solway Township = ~24



St. Louis River
Watershed



Lake Superior



State study warns that placement of Duluth-area data center could harm native brook trout

A Minnesota Pollution Control Agency study mapped the Midway River Watershed that originates in Hermantown.

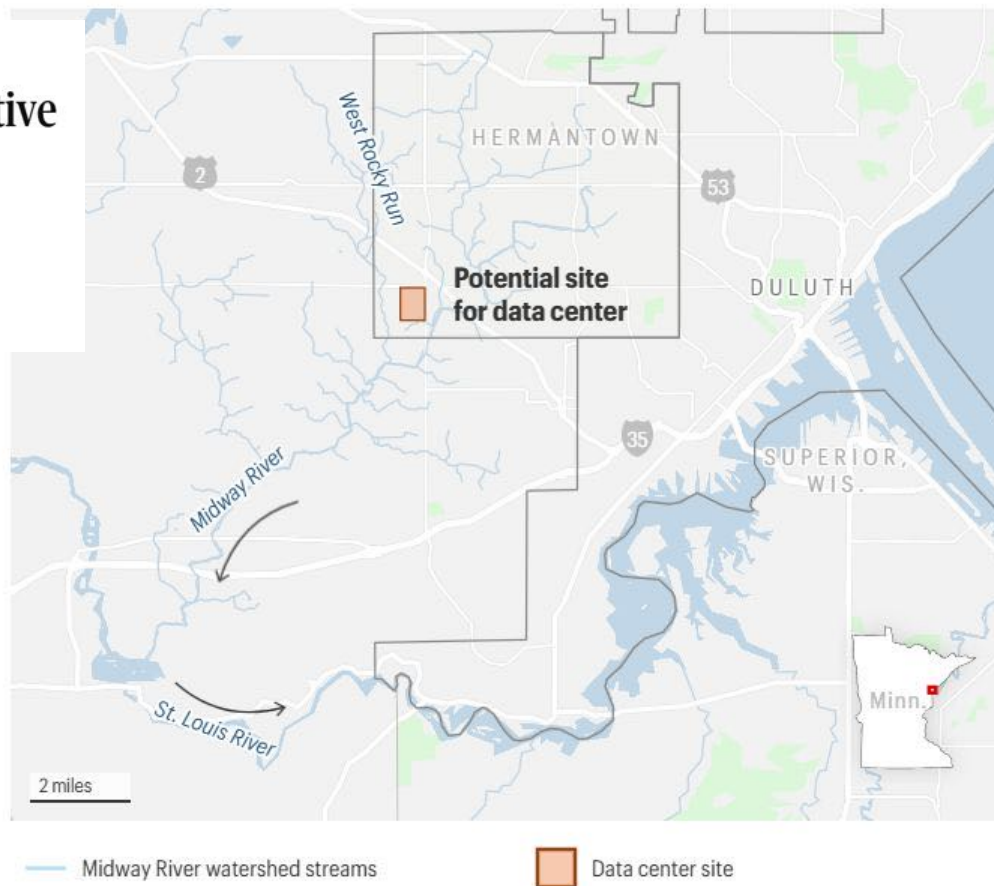
By Jana Hollingsworth
The Minnesota Star Tribune

APRIL 3, 2026 AT 6:00AM

August 2025

Midway River Watershed Protection Study

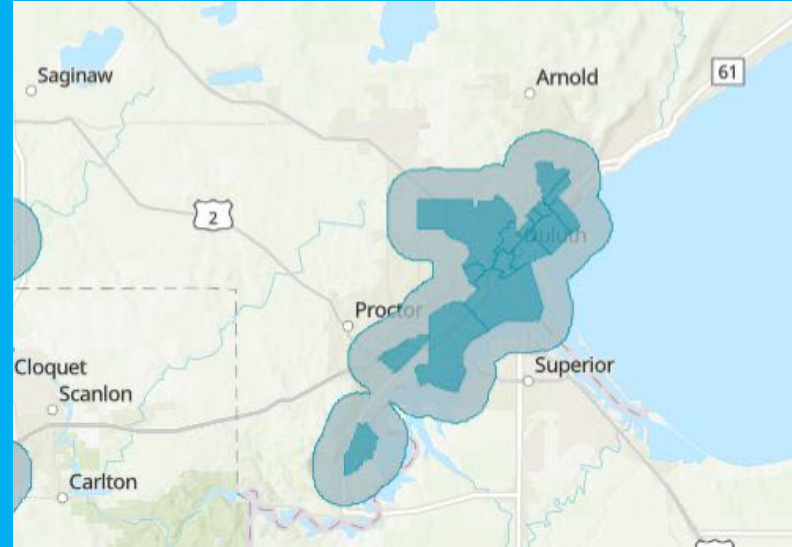
Strategies to protect and restore critical habitats for Brook Trout and other coldwater species



Map source: OpenStreetMap • Mark Boswell, The Minnesota Star Tribune

Environmental Justice

- This means that all people — regardless of their race, color, national origin, or income — benefit from equal levels of environmental protection, that pollution does not disproportionately impact any group of people, and that everybody has opportunities to participate in decisions that may affect their environment or health.
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency principle
- Adolph neighborhood meets principle but not statutory guidelines for environmental justice community.



Data Center Moratorium

Minnesota

Minneapolis

Inver Grove Heights

Carlton County (requires a hearing)

Mankato

Minnesota Chippewa tribe

Wisconsin

Superior

Madison

Dane County

Manitowoc County



Data center moratorium
nationally = 314



Press conference April 29, 2026

References

- [Adolph Small Area Plan](#)
- [Google Council Bluffs Iowa](#)
- [Google growing internet while reducing energy](#)
- [Google's thirstiest data centers](#)
- [Hermantown Industrial AUAR](#)
- [Midway River Watershed Protection Study](#)
- [A Massive Development](#)
- [Northern Minnesota Mystery Project](#)
- [Northern Minnesota Data Center Key Approval as Hundreds Protest](#)

References

- [Google is Behind Duluth-area Data Center](#)
- [Prescott Balch](#)
- [What are AI Tokens](#)
- [Pine Island Blueprint](#)
- [Pine Island Counterpoint](#)
- [Minnesota Power Pledges No Carbon by 2050](#)
- [Iron Range Minnesota Mines Close](#)
- [Data Center Infrastructure](#)
- [Iron Range St. Louis County Arrowhead](#)
- [Google Signed Interconnection Agreement with Minnesota Power](#)
- [MCEA Pause on Data Center Development](#)
- [Answers Needed Resources Hogging Hermantown Data Center](#)
- [Google's Eco Failures](#)
- [Minnesota's Long Predicted Data Center Boom on Shaky Ground](#)
- [Understanding Environmental Justice in MN](#)

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Prescott Balch

Caledonia Village Board
President, Retired Tech
Executive



Submit A Question

Scan to submit questions



Prescott's video:

YT link

Original video file

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Lori Huntoon



Geologist and Educator



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Environmental Issues with Data Center Development: A Local Perspective

prepared for:

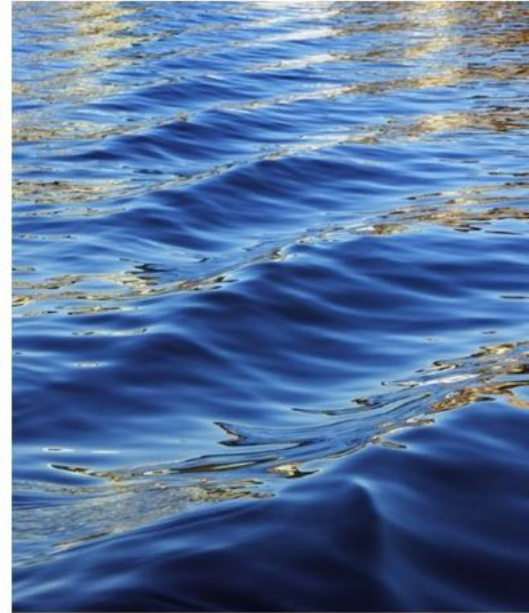
Stop Hermantown Data Center
AI Data Center Education & Awareness Event

14 July 2026

prepared by:

Lori Huntoon, PG

Huntoon Environmental Risk Advisors, LLC



Overview

- What is a Hyperscale Data Center?
- Specific Issues with Closed Loop Systems
- Specific Water Issues with Data Center Development
- Potential Contaminants
- Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)
- Project-Specific Changes Identified in Area-Wide Review
- Wastewater Issues
- Groundwater-Surface Water Interface
- Environmental Issues of Concern Identified
- Migratory Bird Probability of Presence
- Watershed Vulnerability
- Questions for Developers, Local Officials, and Regulators

Hyperscale Centers

Hyperscale data center systems have miles of piping, thousands of valves and joints, and use massive volumes of fluid.



- As facilities get larger, the risk of leaks increases significantly
- The increased number of cooling loops results in the likelihood of more failure points
- Leak monitoring is more difficult; small leaks can be difficult to detect and, over time, may have significant environmental consequences

The most common hyperscale design uses hybrid cooling (closed-loop + limited evaporation)

Closed Loop Systems

Closed-loop systems estimate water usage of 70,000 gallons per day. This total water demand includes additional systems such as:

- Evaporation and blowdown (if used)
- Humidification of internal components
- Maintenance flushing and periodic water replacement
- On-site power generation (diesel or gas turbines)
- Construction phase water use

Much of the water use is “indirect,” meaning that the water use happens as part of the process of generating energy to supply the center and its cooling system.

Massive heat loads contribute to localized “heat islands” and potential microclimate shifts, especially near rivers.

Closed-loop systems generate intermittent wastewater streams which often have concentrations of various chemicals including PFAS.

Specific Water Issues with Data Center Development

Water Withdrawal Volumes — Concerns include the risk of depleting river flow, impacts on downstream users and ecosystems, and seasonal vulnerability.

Thermal Pollution — Warm water discharges may increase the temperature of the river, reducing dissolved oxygen and impacting fish and aquatic life.

Water Quality & Contaminant Discharge — Risks include discharge of contaminants into groundwater, surface water, and stormwater.

Groundwater Impacts — Surrounding wells could be impacted by drawdown from wells.

Stormwater & Impervious Surface — Increased permeable surfaces result in runoff, erosion, sediment, and flooding risk to homes and businesses.

Regulatory Gaps & Enforcement — There is a documented pattern of data centers exceeding regulatory limits and other compliance requirements; fast-track development plans often overlook permit requirements; transparency is vital between stakeholders and responsible agencies; the responsibility for compliance monitoring needs to be defined.

Potential Contaminants

Hydrofluorocarbons: Synthetic chemicals commonly used in cooling systems in data centers.

PFAS: Primary cooling fluid in some data centers, including fluorinated gases such as perfluorohexane which is 10,000 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide.

Common additives: Corrosion inhibitors such as phosphates, molybdates, and azoles; Biocides including glutaraldehyde, isothiazolinones, and chlorine.

Fuel/chemical storage risks: Backup diesel generators require on-site fuel storage; spills and leaks can impact soil and groundwater and proximity to the river increases contamination risk.

Glycol (the biggest “closed-loop” vulnerability): Wisconsin climates likely require glycol in closed loop systems. Glycol is mobile in soil and depletes oxygen in water bodies; systems use significant volumes onsite (tens to hundreds of thousands of gallons); concerns include migration to groundwater, wetlands, the river, and nearby streams.

Per- and Polyfluoroalkyl Substances (PFAS)

Hyperscale data centers rely on PFAS for specialized server high-density liquid-cooling systems, semiconductor manufacturing, and fire suppression. These ‘forever chemicals’ are highly toxic, accumulate in ecosystems, and don't break down naturally. Potential releases of PFAS pose significant contamination risks to local watersheds, drinking water supplies, and soil through wastewater discharge and stored e-waste as follows:

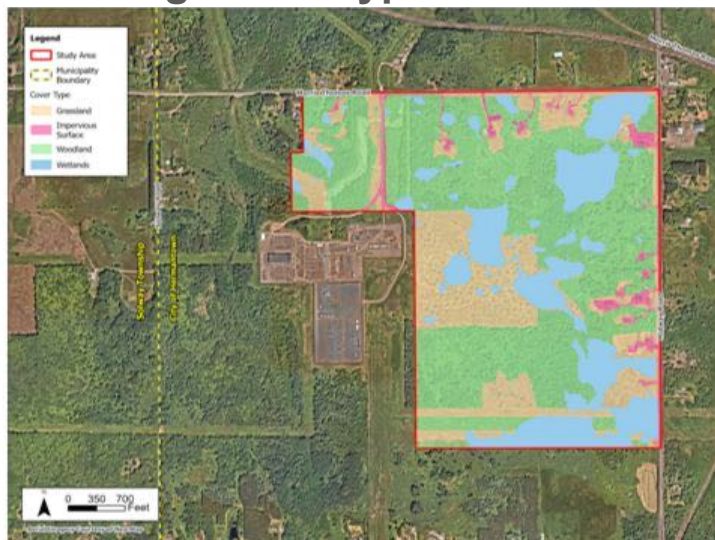
- leaks in massive piping associated with closed loop systems
- stormwater filtration systems that release wastewater into the ground surface
- wastewater discharge
- toxic runoff from surface areas including roofs (from air emissions)
- stored e-waste; when servers are upgraded or discarded, decomposing e-waste can leach PFAS into the environment

Project-Specific Changes Anticipated

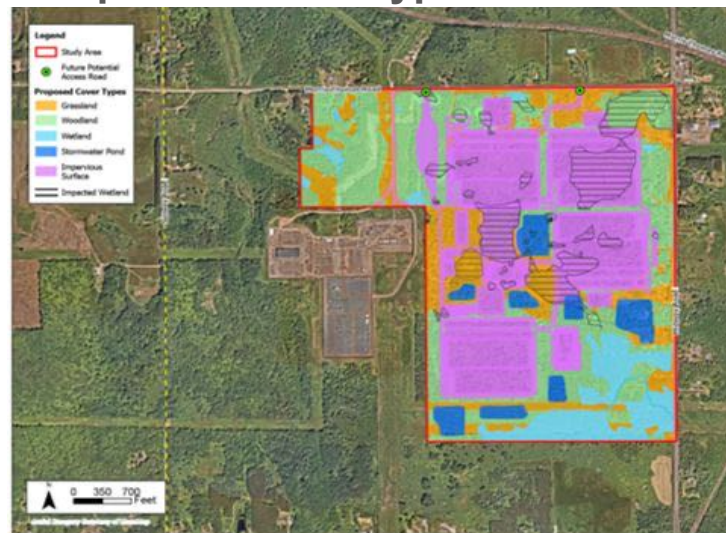
Source: Draft Alternative
Area-Wide Review, June 2026

Cover Type	Existing (Acres) ¹⁴	Proposed Project (Acres)
Woodland	132	37
Grassland/Landscaping	77	74
Wetlands	58	26
Impervious Surface	11	126
Stormwater/Green Infrastructure (see Table 4)	0	15
Total	278	278

Existing Cover Types



Proposed Cover Types



Wastewater Volume Anticipated Creates Confusion

The proposed development would utilize either a closed-loop or air-cooled system for cooling and **both systems would not withdraw groundwater or surface water. No production wells, high--capacity wells, dewatering systems, or consumptive process water use are proposed.**

Under the proposed Project, the development is expected to generate up to 50,000 gallons per day (GPD) of wastewater, primarily from routine domestic facility uses such as restrooms, break areas, kitchens, and other employee-support spaces. Utility systems designed to serve the Project would be appropriately sized to safely collect, convey, and treat this demand in accordance with applicable regulatory and environmental standards.

Source: Draft Alternative Area-Wide Review, June 2026

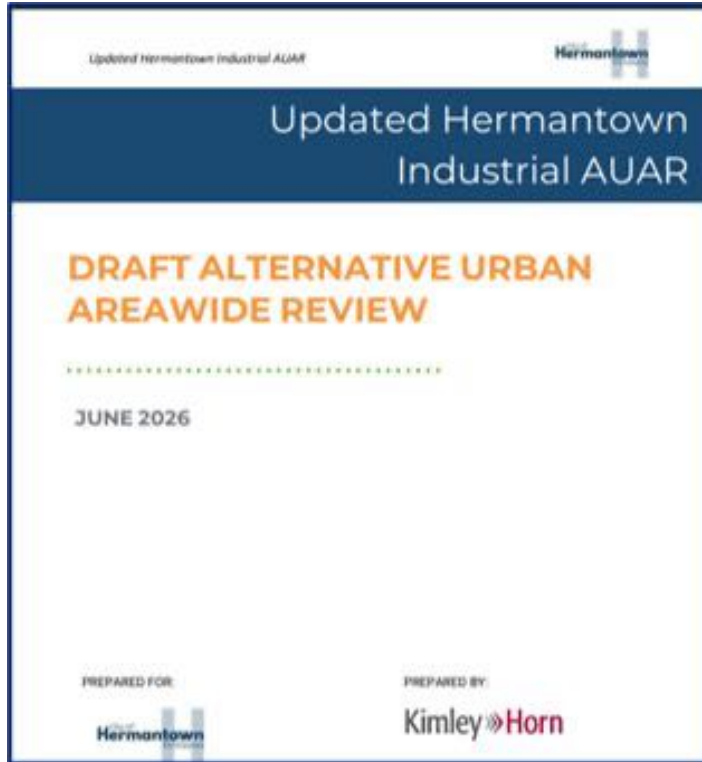
Groundwater-Surface Water Interface

The MDNR recognizes that groundwater and surface water in this region are commonly hydraulically connected, particularly where seepage, springs, or headwater drainage features are **present** (MDNR, Groundwater–Surface Water Interaction Guidance, Minn. Stat. §103G).

A series of eight filtration basins are proposed to be located throughout the Study Area to serve as the primary stormwater management system for the development. Filtration with underdrains is proposed due to the inability to infiltrate with the presence of poor soils and nearby trout streams.

Source: Draft Alternative Area-Wide Review, June 2026

Environmental Issues of Concern Identified



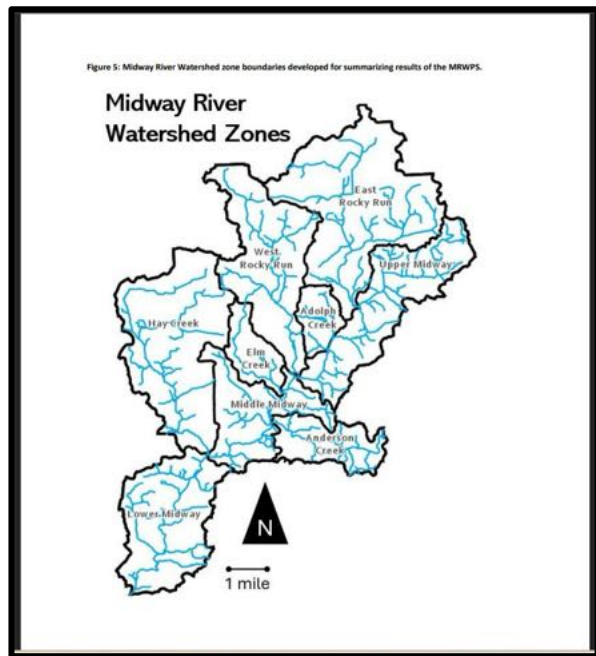
Environmental concerns are already identified; these need to be addressed.

- Importance of protecting critical surface water bodies (including trout streams) and stormwater management should be emphasized with MPCA.
- Jurisdiction of wetlands by US Army Corps of Engineers should be pursued.
- Endangered and threatened species should be further evaluated with US Fish & Wildlife Service.

Environmental Issues of Concern Identified (continued)

- Impervious surfaces can influence changes to stormwater runoff volumes, temperatures, and rates and reduce groundwater recharge.
- May impact water resources: The project would result in an increase in water runoff and impervious surfaces.
- Not anticipated to generate hazardous waste or materials during operations: Data center use may require storage of hazardous materials and wastes for backup generators. If not managed properly, leaks/spills could result in hazardous substances to enter soils, groundwater, surface water, and air.
- Would change land use cover and availability of habitat: suitable habitat for species may become unsuitable due to land use changes, increased temperature, and increased runoff.

Watershed Vulnerability



Source: Midway River Watershed Protection Study, MPCA, August 2025.

Hermantown straddles two major basins—the Lake Superior-South and St. Louis River basins which include vital headwater wetlands and coldwater streams, including the Midway River, Miller Creek, Kingsbury Creek, and Keene Creek. Local conservation of these watersheds is a major focal point due to sensitive native trout habitats.

The Midway River Watershed originates in Hermantown's wetlands and flows into the St. Louis River and Lake Superior.

Questions for Developers, Local Officials, and Regulators

- What is the source of water for the site and the energy source?
- What is the designed water use and volume and how have these been estimated?
- The cooling system requires occasional flushing; what is the anticipated engineering design proposal for this?
- What is the design for the cooling system and what type and amounts of glycol will be used?
- What are the plans for discharge - including the monitoring plan?
- Has a water impact assessment been completed?
- Has the contingency plan for spills and floods been prepared?
- What pre-development monitoring will be conducted?
- Who pays for longterm groundwater, surface water, and stormwater monitoring and oversight?

Thank you for attending!



Lori Huntoon, PG

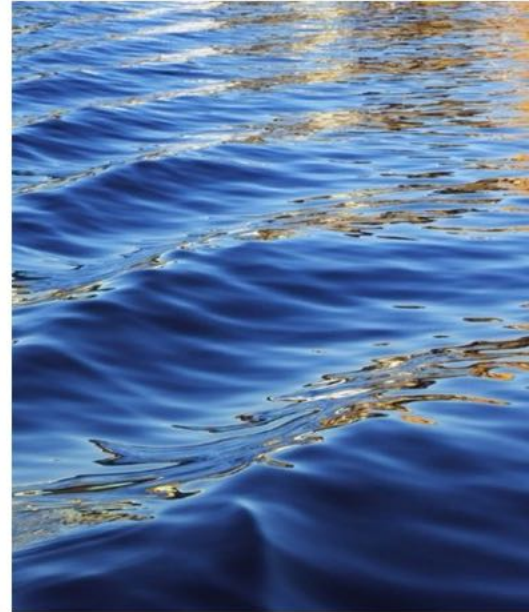
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Amanda Mueller

GLNU, Port Washington
resident, Retired
Engineer



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Amanda's video:

<https://vimeo.com/1191015392/e98fb48965?fl=ls&fe=ec>

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Alex Morrisseau

Lifelong Water Protector,
Environmental Advocate,
Student



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