

POLICY ACCOUNTABILITY SERIES – ISSUE NO. 5 – MARCH 2026

Feeding the Beast That Will Eat Us

The Machine Comes to the Magic Valley

Three parts on the solar farms, the data centers, and the AI boom reaching into rural Idaho, and who ends up holding the bill.

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A Feeding the Beast Series

The Machine Comes to the Magic Valley

Three parts on the solar farms, the data centers, and the AI boom reaching into rural Idaho, and who ends up holding the bill.

By Jeff Pierson • jeffapierson.substack.com

Part One: The Tax-Base Mirage

Part Two: The Beast’s Appetite

Part Three: The Fence Is Lowest Here

Feeding the Beast • Part One

The Tax-Base Mirage

An 8,000-acre solar farm would out-earn grazing while it runs. Then the bill comes due, and it lands on Lincoln County.

By Jeff Pierson • jeffapierson.substack.com

It may have started in a simple conversation, the way a lot of things do now. Someone floated what sounded like plain common sense: an 8,000-acre solar farm “would really help the Lincoln County tax base,” and besides, most of the ground over there is federal anyway. Empty desert, foreign to the tax rolls, might as well put it to work.

I want to take that seriously, because it deserves to be taken seriously. And because when you run the whole thing out, not just the first thirty years of it, it comes apart in a way that tells you almost everything about how these deals get sold.

Give the pitch its due first. While it runs, a utility-scale solar farm **does** pay the county more than cattle grazing does. That’s true, and I won’t pretend otherwise. If the only question were which use writes a bigger check this year, solar wins, and it isn’t close. But that’s the wrong question, and the people moving these projects know it. The whole trick of the machine, the beast this series is named for, is to hold up the front-end revenue and keep the back-end bill off the table until the ink is dry.

The words “tax base” are doing dishonest work

BY THE NUMBERS

\$120M

Estimated decommissioning cost per acre solar site at ~\$15,000/acre

17×

Private grazing lease rate (\$23 federal fee (\$1.35/AUM))

138%

Rise in the farm irrigation demand 2021 (\$6.94 to \$16.50 per kW)

\$635–690M

Hyperscaler AI capex guidance through 2024

DOCUMENT

Verified edition, July 18, 2026
calculations explained, full glossary of questions.

Idaho does not tax a solar farm the way it taxes your house. Under Idaho Code 63-602JJ, the panels, inverters, racking, and miles of wire, which is to say the valuable equipment, are exempt from property tax.¹ In their place the operator pays a production tax: 3.5 percent of gross energy earnings, under Idaho Code 63-3502B, split among the taxing districts.² So the 8,000 acres of “improvements” people picture landing on the assessor’s rolls never land there. What the county gets instead is a slice of revenue that swings with power prices and vanishes in about thirty years when the panels are spent.³ That is not a tax base. A tax base is durable. This is a lease with a sunset clause, wearing the language of permanence.

“It’s mostly federal anyway” runs backward

Through the Payment in Lieu of Taxes program, the Interior Department already sends Lincoln County a check every year precisely because that ground can’t be taxed. Idaho’s counties split \$41.2 million in PILT in 2024.⁴ Put solar on a BLM grazing allotment and none of that changes. The land stays federal. The PILT keeps coming. The panels are tax-exempt on top of it.⁵ You haven’t added a dollar to the rolls. You’ve just run the cattle off.

The cattle were never the point of the fee

It’s easy to shrug at grazing, because the federal grazing fee is a laughable \$1.35 an animal-unit-month.⁶ But that fee was never the value of the forage. It’s a subsidy. The going private lease rate across the West last year was \$23.40 for that same AUM, roughly seventeen times higher.⁷ And grazing is a perpetual, renewable use: the forage regrows every spring, the ranch keeps a family working, and the sagebrush underneath is winter range for mule deer and pronghorn, cover for the watershed, and a landscape that does not burn the way its replacement will.⁸

The bill nobody puts in the brochure

In thirty years the panels are spent, and someone has to take down 8,000 acres of steel and glass and haul it off. The published estimates run around \$15,000 an acre, which is about \$120 million on a site this size.⁹ The only question that matters for the county is whether the cleanup bond is fully funded, indexed to inflation, and held somewhere the developer can’t reach it. On federal land the BLM sets a standard reclamation bond of \$10,000 an acre inside its designated leasing areas, a floor that sits below the published cost estimates.¹⁰ Projects change hands and go broke over thirty years; when the bond comes up short, the bill lands on the landowner, and behind him, the county, on ground that by then earns nothing at all.

Then there’s the land itself, the cost with the longest tail. You cannot grade it, road it, pile-drive thousands of steel piers, and shade the soil for three decades, then simply flip the desert back on. Big sagebrush needs at least three decades just to stabilize; for Wyoming big sagebrush the published recovery estimates run 50 to 120 years.¹¹ And if the reseeding fails in this cheatgrass country, as it often does, you don’t get sagebrush back at all. You get an invasive grassland that burns hotter and more often than what stood there before.¹²

The whole trade, not just the first thirty years

So here it is, laid all the way out: a thirty-year revenue pulse, in exchange for fifty to a hundred and twenty years of ground that's either industrialized or slowly, uncertainly healing.¹³¹⁴ The power and the profits leave on a wire. The cleanup, the fire risk, and the ruined ground stay home. Measured over the life of the land instead of the life of the developer, the "tax base" pitch is a short-term pulse of subsidized, out-of-state money traded for a long-term liability that stays right here.

That's the first thing to understand. The next question is why any of this is landing on Lincoln County at all, and that's where we go next.

Feeding the Beast • Part Two

The Beast's Appetite

Why the land rush is really here: the biggest building spree in the history of American business, and it's already on your power bill.

By Jeff Pierson • jeffapierson.substack.com

So why, all of a sudden, is there talk of 8,000-acre solar farms and new transmission lines and data-center campuses out here in the Magic Valley? The short answer is that we're standing in the path of the largest building spree in the history of American business, and it has a name: artificial intelligence.

The biggest companies in tech are spending well over half a trillion dollars this year alone, more than double what they spent two years ago, on AI data centers: warehouses of computer chips that each pull as much power as a small city.¹⁵ That's the demand behind the land rush. Nobody's proposing to blanket the desert in panels to light your house. They're doing it to feed the machines.

It may well be a bubble

And that's not cranks talking. This past June the Bank for International Settlements, the central bank for the world's central banks, named an "AI capex bust" one of the top threats to the entire global financial system.¹⁶ The buildout is running on borrowed money, and the spending is racing far out ahead of the actual revenue.¹⁷ Booms built that way have a way of ending. And when this one does, the buildings go dark, but the transmission lines, the torn-up ground, and the rate increases stay right where they were put.

You don't have to wait for the bust to feel it

It's already on your power bill. Idaho Power has raised rates two years running, about 4 percent in 2025 and 7.48 percent effective January 1, 2026, and the company ties the pressure to load growth from large new customers.¹⁸¹⁹ Its own resource planner said the utility just needs to "expand like crazy."²⁰ The new demand? Data centers. Meta's already in Kuna, Micron's expanding in Boise, and there's interest circling the Magic Valley.²¹

Ask a farmer what that feels like. In 2021 the demand charge Idaho Power billed an irrigation customer ran about \$6.94 per kilowatt. In 2026 it's \$16.50, a 138 percent jump in that single charge.² ² Pile every irrigation cost together, energy and demand and fixed charges, and one Magic Valley farm family reports its all-in cost to water its crops is up 45 percent since 2021, over a stretch when general inflation ran about 19 percent.²³ That gap is the data-center boom, showing up on the bill

of a man just trying to water a field. Meanwhile the utility has scaled back its renewable plans and penciled in new natural-gas plants to keep up.²⁴ So much for solar being about clean power for locals. It's about raw volume for the machines, whatever it takes.

The poorest trade a county can make

And here's the insult under the injury: a data center is one of the worst bargains a rural county can strike. It sprawls across thousands of acres, drinks enormous amounts of water and power, and leaves behind a handful of permanent jobs. The computing goes out on a fiber line to somewhere else. The profits go to shareholders somewhere else. What stays behind is the strain, on the grid, on the aquifer, on the land.

So this is the beast's appetite: better than half a trillion dollars a year, chasing cheap power and cheap land, financed on debt, and hungry enough that it's already reaching into a farmer's irrigation bill three states from Wall Street.²⁵²⁶ The solar farm out on the sagebrush isn't the story. It's just the first thing the beast reached for.

Which raises an obvious question. If the federal government wanted these things built, it owns plenty of land of its own, including military bases it threw wide open for exactly this purpose. So why aren't they being built there? That's where we finish.

Feeding the Beast • Part Three

The Fence Is Lowest Here

Trump opened the military bases to data centers. They mostly didn't build there, and why they didn't is the whole story.

By Jeff Pierson • jeffapierson.substack.com

Last summer, President Trump signed an executive order throwing open America's military bases to data-center developers.²⁷ Thousands of acres of federal land, permits fast-tracked, environmental review streamlined, federal loans and tax breaks laid out on the table.²⁸ If these projects were really about serving the country, that's where the line would form.

The order, "Accelerating Federal Permitting of Data Center Infrastructure," tells the executive branch to identify sites on federal land, including military installations, and open them to private developers.²⁹ On base, the vehicle is what's called an Enhanced Use Lease, authorized under 10 U.S.C. 2667: long-term deals, up to fifty years, where the company builds the data center, takes on the financial risk, and gets to use or sell the excess capacity.³⁰ And it's moving. The Army has picked developers for hyperscale data centers at Fort Bliss in Texas and Dugway Proving Ground in Utah, the first such commercial agreements it has struck on its installations.³¹ The Air Force has put out solicitations at several bases and offered 4,700 acres across three installations in Alaska.³² The Energy Department tapped Idaho National Laboratory as one of its first four sites on federal land.³³

So why isn't the rush going there?

With all that federal land on offer, why is the land rush landing on ranch country and BLM grazing ground instead of an Army base? The answer is the whole story. It comes down to two things: cheap power, and nobody watching.

Cheap power

On a base, a data center has to compete with the base itself for electricity and water, and Congress is moving to make the developers actually pay for what they draw. The Army's own people warn those rules amount to a "federal land penalty" that could scare off more than a billion dollars in private capital.³⁴ That's the last thing a developer wants. What they want is to plug into a utility like Idaho Power, tap some of the cheapest electricity in the country, and let the cost of every new line and power plant get spread across the rest of us, the captive ratepayers who can't shop elsewhere. They don't want to build their own power. They want yours.

Less oversight

And here the base works backward from what you'd think. Build inside the gate and you're under federal security requirements, supply-chain rules, congressional scrutiny, and a base commander who can tell you no. So the developers go looking for the opposite of a base: a rural county with cheap land, a friendly commission, and not much appetite to ask hard questions. Less oversight, not more. That's the product they're actually shopping for, and a county board that wants a ribbon-cutting is the easiest thing on the shelf.

The same shape, every time

Strip it down and you've seen this before. Put it on federal or leased ground and it's off the local tax rolls. Wrap it in "national security" and the objections get harder to raise. Feed it with federal subsidies and tax breaks the rest of the country funds. Spread the grid costs onto ratepayers. Privatize the upside, which comes first and leaves, and socialize the downside, which comes last and stays. The base version and the sagebrush version are the same deal. They just have different landlords.

So when the government practically handed these companies the land, they hesitated, because a base has rules, and rules cost money. They'd rather find a place where the power is cheap, the land is cheap, and nobody's going to push back. Which is exactly why it's coming for Lincoln County and not Fort Bliss. It was never about the empty desert being special. It was about it being cheap, and quiet, and unwatched.

The beast goes where the fence is lowest. Right now, out here, that's us. But a fence is a thing you can raise: a decommissioning bond you demand up front, a ratepayer protection you insist on, a county ordinance that keeps the say local, a commission that asks the hard question before the ribbon-cutting instead of after. The beast is only ever as hungry as we let it be.

Calculations Explained

This section walks through every number the articles rely on, so you can check the arithmetic yourself.

1. Decommissioning cost for an 8,000-acre site. The published per-acre estimate is about \$15,000, itself derived from an average decommissioning cost of roughly \$93,000 per megawatt divided across the roughly six acres a megawatt of solar occupies ($\$93,000 \div 6 \approx \$15,500$ per acre, rounded to \$15,000).³⁵ Multiply the per-acre figure by the site size: 8,000 acres $\times$ \$15,000 per acre = \$120,000,000. That is the \$120 million cleanup figure. It is an order-of-magnitude estimate, not a

bid, and the real number depends on the project's nameplate capacity and salvage value at end of life.

2. Private grazing lease versus the federal fee. The 2025 federal grazing fee is \$1.35 per animal-unit-month.³⁶ The 2024 average private lease rate in the western states was \$23.40 per AUM.³⁷ Dividing one by the other, $\$23.40 \div \$1.35 \approx 17.3$, gives the “roughly seventeen times higher” comparison. The point is not that ranchers should pay seventeen times more. It is that the federal fee is a deep subsidy, so “grazing barely pays” is not evidence that the land has no value.

3. The irrigation demand-charge increase, and the corrected 45 percent. The published draft of this series originally described the jump from a \$6.94 per kilowatt demand charge in 2021 to \$16.50 in 2026 as “a 45 percent jump.” That was wrong, and it is corrected here. The demand charge alone rose from \$6.94 to \$16.50, an increase of $(\$16.50 - \$6.94) \div \$6.94 = \$9.56 \div \$6.94 \approx 1.38$, or about 138 percent.³⁸ The 45 percent figure is a different and correctly reported number: it is one Magic Valley farm family's total, all-in cost to irrigate, up 45 percent since 2021, a blend of the 138 percent demand-charge jump, a roughly 17 percent rise in the per-kilowatt-hour energy rate, and fixed charges.³⁹ The corrected text keeps both numbers and labels each for what it is.

4. The thirty-year pulse against a fifty-to-120-year recovery. A utility-scale solar farm produces for roughly thirty years before the panels are spent.⁴⁰ Recovery of the sagebrush it displaces runs at least three decades to stabilize, and for Wyoming big sagebrush the published estimates run 50 to 120 years.⁴¹ Setting the revenue period beside the recovery period (30 years of production against 50 to 120 years of land out of its prior use) is the basis for calling the trade a short-term pulse against a long-term liability. It is a comparison of durations, not a single subtraction.

5. Capex “more than double.” Combined 2026 hyperscaler capital-expenditure guidance runs about \$635 to \$690 billion.⁴² Two years earlier, in 2024, the comparable figure was on the order of \$230 to \$260 billion. Because \$635 billion is more than twice \$260 billion ($2 \times \$260 \text{ billion} = \$520 \text{ billion}$, which \$635 billion exceeds), the phrase “more than double what they spent two years ago” holds.⁴³

Glossary of Terms

AUM (animal-unit-month): the amount of forage one cow and her calf (or equivalent livestock) eat in a month. Grazing fees are charged per AUM.

PILT (Payment in Lieu of Taxes): federal payments the Interior Department makes to counties to offset the property taxes they cannot collect on tax-exempt federal land within their borders.

BLM (Bureau of Land Management): the Interior Department agency that manages most federal rangeland, including the grazing allotments discussed here.

Decommissioning bond (reclamation bond, financial assurance): money a developer must set aside in advance to guarantee that a site is cleaned up and restored at the end of its life, so the cost does not fall on the landowner or the public if the company fails.

Production tax / in-lieu tax: a tax on the output or gross earnings of a facility, paid instead of ordinary property tax on the equipment. Idaho levies a 3.5 percent production tax on solar generators' gross energy earnings in place of taxing the panels and hardware.

Demand charge: a portion of an electric bill based on the customer's peak rate of power draw (measured in kilowatts), separate from the charge for total energy consumed (kilowatt-hours).

Irrigators pay significant demand charges to run pumps.

kW (kilowatt): a unit of power, meaning the rate at which electricity is used at a given instant. A kilowatt-hour (kWh) is the amount of energy used by running one kilowatt for one hour.

MW (megawatt): one thousand kilowatts. Utility-scale solar capacity is measured in megawatts.

Nameplate capacity: the maximum power output a generator is rated to produce under ideal conditions. A solar farm's revenue, production tax, and decommissioning cost all scale with its nameplate capacity.

Hyperscaler: one of the giant cloud and technology companies (such as Amazon, Microsoft, Alphabet, Meta, and Oracle) that build and operate very large data centers.

Capex (capital expenditure): money a company spends to acquire or build long-lived physical assets, such as data centers, servers, and buildings.

Enhanced Use Lease (EUL): a long-term lease, authorized under 10 U.S.C. 2667, that lets a military department lease non-excess land or facilities to a private party, here to build and operate a data center on a base.

Integrated Resource Plan (IRP): a utility's long-range plan, filed with regulators, laying out how it intends to meet projected demand over roughly twenty years.

Cheatgrass: an invasive annual grass that colonizes disturbed sagebrush country, dries early, and carries fire more readily and frequently than native vegetation.

Five Questions the Public Is Likely to Ask

1. Doesn't a solar farm still pay the county more than grazing does? Yes, while it operates. The articles do not dispute that. The argument is that the comparison is incomplete: the solar revenue lasts about thirty years and is a production tax, not property tax, while the cleanup cost, fire risk, and decades of displaced land use stay local long after the panels stop paying.

2. If the land is mostly federal, how does the county lose anything? Because the county already receives a federal PILT check every year on that untaxed federal ground, and it keeps receiving it whether cattle or panels sit there. Solar on a federal allotment adds no property to the tax rolls (the equipment is exempt) and displaces the grazing use, so the county's tax position does not improve.

3. Is the AI data-center boom really driving up my power bill? Idaho Power ties its recent increases to load growth from large new customers, its planners cite data-center interest directly, and demand charges on irrigation accounts have risen sharply since 2021. New large loads drive investment in lines and plants whose costs are spread across all ratepayers.

4. What is a decommissioning bond, and why does it matter so much? It is money set aside up front to guarantee a worn-out solar site is torn down and restored. If it is underfunded, not inflation-indexed, or reachable by the developer, and the company goes broke over the thirty-year life of the project, the cleanup bill can fall on the landowner and, behind him, the county.

5. The government opened military bases to these projects. Why build in Lincoln County instead? Because a base makes the developer compete for power and water, pay for what it uses, and submit to federal oversight and a base commander who can say no. A rural county with cheap utility

power and a welcoming commission offers cheaper electricity and less scrutiny, which is what the developers are actually shopping for.

Document Metadata

Description (150 characters): The AI land rush reaches rural Idaho: why the solar and data center pitch shortchanges Lincoln County, and who ends up holding the bill.

Longer description: Issue No. 5 of the Feeding the Beast series, in three parts. Part One (The Tax-Base Mirage) runs the full arithmetic on an 8,000-acre solar farm pitched as a tax-base boost: exempt equipment, a thirty-year production-tax pulse, a \$120 million decommissioning liability, and ground that takes fifty to a hundred and twenty years to heal. Part Two (The Beast's Appetite) names the demand behind the land rush: the AI data center buildout, financed on debt, already showing up on Idaho farmers' power bills. Part Three (The Fence Is Lowest Here) asks why the projects skip the military bases the federal government threw open, and answers: cheap power and nobody watching.

Summary: Under Idaho Code 63-602JJ, utility-scale solar equipment is exempt from property tax; operators instead pay a 3.5 percent production tax on gross energy earnings under 63-3502B, a revenue stream that swings with prices and ends when the panels die. PILT already pays counties for untaxable federal ground (\$41.2 million to Idaho counties in 2024), so siting solar on BLM allotments adds nothing to the rolls. Decommissioning runs about \$15,000 an acre, roughly \$120 million for 8,000 acres. Behind the rush: hyperscalers spending \$635 to \$690 billion in 2026, more than double 2024, while the BIS names an AI capex bust a top global financial threat. Idaho Power raised rates about 4 percent in 2025 and 7.48 percent in 2026, and the farm irrigation demand charge went from \$6.94 to \$16.50 per kW since 2021, a 138 percent increase. Executive Order 14318 opened military bases to data centers; developers mostly went elsewhere, because bases mean rules and full-cost power. The fence can be raised: bonds up front, ratepayer protections, local ordinances.

Keywords: solar farm, Lincoln County, data centers, AI capex, Idaho Code 63-602JJ, 63-3502B, production tax, PILT, BLM, grazing AUM, decommissioning bond, sagebrush recovery, Idaho Power rates, demand charge, hyperscalers, BIS, Executive Order 14318, Enhanced Use Lease, Fort Bliss, Magic Valley

Footnotes and Citations

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18. Idaho Power 2025 general rate increase: 3.73 percent overall effective January 1, 2025 (4.84 percent for irrigation customers), lower than the 7.31 percent requested. “Idaho Power rate increase lower than requested,” Capital Press, January 6, 2025. <https://capitalpress.com/2025/01/06/idaho-power-rate-increase-lower-than-requested/>[↗](#)
19. Idaho Power rate increase of 7.48 percent effective January 1, 2026 (a roughly \$110 million revenue increase, down from the 13.09 percent requested), approved by the Idaho Public Utilities Commission. “Idaho Power, Intermountain Gas rates are rising in the new year,” East Idaho News, January 2026. <https://www.eastidahonews.com/2026/01/idaho-power-intermountain-gas-rates-are-rising-in-the-new-year-what-you-need-to-know/>[↗](#)
20. Jared Hansen, Idaho Power Resource Planning Leader, quoted saying the utility needs to “expand like crazy,” citing data-center interest, Meta’s Kuna data center, and Micron’s Boise expansion. “Idaho Power’s 20-year energy plan predicts large increase in customer growth and peak energy load,” Idaho Capital Sun, August 6, 2025. <https://idahocapitalsun.com/2025/08/06/idaho-powers-20-year-energy-plan-predicts-large-increase-in-customer-growth-and-peak-energy-load/>[↗](#)
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22. Adam Young, “Data centers and other new large loads are driving sharp increases in Idaho farmers’ electric bills,” Idaho Capital Sun, February 23, 2026. Reports the irrigation demand charge rising from \$6.94/kW (2021) to \$16.50/kW (2026), a 138 percent increase; the per-kilowatt-hour energy rate up about 17 percent; and the author’s family’s total cost to irrigate up 45 percent since 2021, against roughly 19 percent general inflation. Correction: an earlier draft of this series applied the “45 percent” figure to the demand charge itself; the 45 percent is the all-in irrigation cost increase, and the demand-charge increase is 138 percent. <https://idahocapitalsun.com/2026/02/23/data-centers-and-other-new-large-loads-are-driving-sharp-increases-in-idaho-farmers-electric-bills/>[↗](#)
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24. Idaho Power’s 2025 Integrated Resource Plan scales back planned renewable additions (from about 6,500 MW in the 2023 plan to about 3,030 MW through 2045) and adds natural-gas capacity, including converting Jim Bridger coal units to gas in 2026 and building new gas plants in 2029 and 2030. “Idaho Power scales back plans for conversion to renewable energy,” BoiseDev, November 25, 2025. <https://boisedev.com/news/2025/11/25/natural-gas-2045/>[↗](#)
25. Combined 2026 hyperscaler capital-expenditure guidance of roughly \$635 to \$690 billion, more than double the 2024 figure. Futurum Group, “AI Capex 2026: The \$690B Infrastructure Sprint,” 2026 (Amazon ~\$200B; Alphabet \$175-185B; Microsoft \$120B+; Meta \$115-135B; Oracle ~\$50B; aggregate ~\$660-690B versus ~\$380B in 2025). <https://futurumgroup.com/insights/ai-capex-2026-the-690b-infrastructure-sprint/>[↗](#)
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27. Executive Order 14318, “Accelerating Federal Permitting of Data Center Infrastructure,” signed July 23, 2025, directing streamlined permitting and federal-land availability, including financial support and categorical exclusions from certain environmental review. The White House, Presidential Actions, July 23, 2025. <https://www.whitehouse.gov/presidential-actions/2025/07/accelerating-federal-permitting-of-data-center-infrastructure/>[↗](#)
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30. Enhanced Use Lease authority under 10 U.S.C. 2667, permitting military departments to lease non-excess real property for up to 50 years. Applied to Army data-center agreements; see note 20. Legal background: 10 U.S.C. 2667 (leases of non-excess property).[↗](#)
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https://www.army.mil/article/291360/army_reaches_conditional_agreement_with_private_industry_for_hyperscaled_data_centers[↗](#)
32. “USAF Offers Land for AI Data Centers on Three Alaska Bases,” Air & Space Forces Magazine, April 2026: the Air Force offered 4,700 acres across Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Clear Space Force Station, and Eielson Air Force Base, following an earlier October solicitation covering five additional installations (Arnold, Edwards, Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, Davis-Monthan, and Robins). <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/usaf-land-ai-data-centers-three-alaska-bases/>[↗](#)
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35. Grace Stocks and Jeremy G. Weber, “What will it cost to decommission solar farms? Estimates suggest \$15,000 per acre,” Pitt GSPIA and GCSU Energy & Environment Blog, January 6, 2026. Reviews decommissioning plans for 21 utility-scale solar projects (15 Maryland, 5 Michigan, 1 New York); finds an average decommissioning cost of nearly \$93,000 per megawatt (half of projects between \$54,000 and \$136,000 per MW), equating to roughly \$15,000 per acre in 2024 dollars.
https://medium.com/@GSPIAe_eBlog/what-will-it-cost-to-decommission-solar-farms-estimates-suggest-15-000-per-acre-862e88c5445f[↗](#)
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38. Adam Young, “Data centers and other new large loads are driving sharp increases in Idaho farmers’ electric bills,” Idaho Capital Sun, February 23, 2026. Reports the irrigation demand charge rising from \$6.94/kW (2021) to \$16.50/kW (2026), a 138 percent increase; the per-kilowatt-hour energy rate up about 17 percent; and the author’s family’s total cost to irrigate up 45 percent since 2021, against roughly 19 percent general inflation. Correction: an earlier draft of this series applied the “45 percent” figure to the demand charge itself; the 45 percent is the all-in irrigation cost increase, and the demand-charge increase is 138 percent.
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39. Adam Young, “Data centers and other new large loads are driving sharp increases in Idaho farmers’ electric bills,” Idaho Capital Sun, February 23, 2026. Reports the irrigation demand charge rising from \$6.94/kW (2021) to \$16.50/kW (2026), a 138 percent increase; the per-kilowatt-hour energy rate up about 17 percent; and the author’s family’s total cost to irrigate up 45 percent since 2021, against roughly 19 percent general inflation. Correction: an earlier draft of this series applied the “45 percent” figure to the demand charge itself; the 45 percent is the all-in irrigation cost increase, and the demand-charge increase is 138 percent.
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42. Combined 2026 hyperscaler capital-expenditure guidance of roughly \$635 to \$690 billion, more than double the 2024 figure.
Futurum Group, “AI Capex 2026: The \$690B Infrastructure Sprint,” 2026 (Amazon ~\$200B; Alphabet \$175-185B; Microsoft \$120B+; Meta \$115-135B; Oracle ~\$50B; aggregate ~\$660-690B versus ~\$380B in 2025). <https://futurumgroup.com/insights/ai-capex-2026-the-690b-infrastructure-sprint/>²
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