

## AI CENTER Montana to Washington (M2W) plan

💡 Thought for 9s

The **"AI CENTER Montana to Washington (M2W) plan"** likely refers to the intersection of booming AI data center development in Montana and the **Bonneville Power Administration's (BPA) Montana-to-Washington Transmission System Upgrade Project (M2W)**. [bpa.gov](https://www.bpa.gov)

This transmission upgrade supports increased electricity flow from Montana (with abundant land, cooler climate, and power resources like Colstrip) to Washington and the broader Pacific Northwest grid. Washington hosts major tech hubs and data center operators (e.g., Sabey Data Centers), while Montana attracts hyperscale AI projects due to lower costs and fewer restrictions. [montanafreepress.org](https://www.montanafreepress.org)

### Key Elements of the M2W Transmission Project

BPA's M2W project upgrades existing transmission infrastructure across Montana, Idaho, and Washington to meet rising customer demands for long-term transmission service. It was originally scoped in 2012, paused, and revived in 2023. [bpa.gov](https://www.bpa.gov)

#### Proposed upgrades include:

- New Moose Gully Compensation Substation near Missoula, MT (adjacent to Garrison-Taft 500-kV lines), plus a microwave tower for communications.
- Replacement of wires on ~11 miles of the Dworshak–Taft No. 1 500-kV line (Idaho/Montana).
- Equipment upgrades and possible yard expansions at substations like Hatwai (ID) and Bell (WA). [bpa.gov](https://www.bpa.gov)

#### Timeline (as of mid-2025 scoping):

- Scoping closed August 2025.
- Potential Environmental Assessment (EA) in 2026.
- Construction could start as early as summer 2029. [bpa.gov](https://www.bpa.gov)

Ask anything

 Auto 

## AI Data Centers in Montana (Driving the M2W Link)

Montana is seeing proposals for massive AI/high-performance computing campuses, lured by cheap land/power potential, tax incentives, and Governor Greg Gianforte's push for AI growth. NorthWestern Energy has agreements/LOIs for ~1,400+ MW total—nearly double current average customer load (~750 MW). [meic.org](#)

Notable projects:

- **Quantica (Big Sky Digital Infrastructure):** 5,000-acre campus near Broadview (Yellowstone County). Up to 1,000 MW. Plans for on-site renewables/batteries + grid/Colstrip power. Uses air/closed-loop cooling with minimal local water draw (deep aquifers/greywater). Faces local opposition over scale, water, and grid strain. [montanafreepress.org](#)
- **Sabey Data Centers** (Seattle-area company): Up to 250 MW west of Butte on 600 acres. Air-first cooling with limited water use from existing rights. Pending land deal; emphasizes sustainability. Sabey has existing facilities in Washington (e.g., Quincy). [montanafreepress.org](#)
- Smaller proposals (e.g., Atlas Power expansion in Butte, Krambu in Bonner/Missoula area). [northernplains.org](#)

These centers connect to broader networks (telecom/power) linking to Seattle, other hubs, and Washington's data center ecosystem. Transmission upgrades like M2W help integrate Montana's generation/export with Pacific Northwest demand. [youtube.com](#)

## Context and Concerns

- **Power/Water:** AI centers are energy-intensive (servers + cooling). Montana offers cool/dry air cooling advantages, but proposals raise issues around grid upgrades (costs to ratepayers?), water use, and reliance on coal (Colstrip) in the near term. [montanafreepress.org](#)
- **Economic/Community:** Potential jobs/tax revenue vs. rural impacts, noise, land use, and higher bills. Some view Montana as a "sacrifice zone" for Big Tech. [montanafreepress.org](#)
- **Broader Picture:** Aligns with national AI boom. Washington faces its own data center pressures (e.g., moratorium

talks in Seattle) and benefits from cross-border power flow. [kuow.org](https://www.kuow.org)

For official M2W details, check BPA's project page (including maps and comments). Local coverage from Montana Free Press or MEIC provides strong context on the data center side. Developments are fast-moving—proposals can shift with permitting, financing, and public pushback.

6 web pages

Montana AI data center water usage

Bonneville Power Administration transmission projects