TUWaterWays

Water News and More from the Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law & Policy
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New Thrills for Rural Communities

Darkness falls across the land; the midnight hour is close at hand. Creatures crawl in search of blood (or natural resources) to terrorize y'all's neighborhood. What are these creatures you may ask, none other than… Data Centers! They are creeping up on many communities, especially rural communities, potentially threatening their water resources. However, community members are now fighting back to have more transparency and control over their water. Using local government land use laws, communities are demanding more information and a greater say in the construction of data centers. In Caledonia, Wisconsin, the local government utilized the public comment process to voice its concerns, which ultimately led to the halt of development of a data center, and in Tucson, Arizona, a new ordinance was passed to require large water users seeking access to Tucson's water to apply to the city and demonstrate their water conservation efforts.

Listen, this isn't just about us being Luddites arising as grizzly ghouls from every tomb. AI might deliver on all the promises made by its promoters, but the way they're advancing its buildout shows a real lack of care about the facilities' consequences. For instance, when one rural Michigan township pushed back, they were found without the soul for getting down (with data centers) and now must face a lawsuit. In early September, developers and landowners sought to rezone 575 acres of agricultural land, with only 250 acres designated for the data center, for business partners Oracle and OpenAI, the makers of ChatGPT. But the community was very wary of the construction; they were concerned not only with water and energy use but also with rising utility costs, noise, light pollution, traffic, and habitat loss. During the Saline Township Board of Trustees meeting, locals voiced their concerns, stating that the "rezoning is a self-imposed environmental catastrophe." In that meeting, the Township Board voted 4–1 against the rezoning of the site. However, a week later, the development firm filed a lawsuit accusing the township of engaging in exclusionary zoning, stating that the township's refusal of the data center was interfering with the plaintiff's reasonable use of the property.

Last week, the Township, rather than pursuing a lengthy and costly legal battle, entered into a settlement agreement with the developer and landowners regarding the data center. The settlement allows the project to move forward if it ensures the protection of farmland, wetlands, and limits water use and noise. In the agreement, the developers have pledged $4 million for a trust fund to preserve agricultural land and $2 million for a community investment fund to support projects such as playgrounds and the upkeep of township buildings and cemeteries. Although the settlement was reached and endorsed by the Governor, some local residents, like many rural communities

across the U.S., remain skeptical of these large-scale projects. Who knows what the future holds as data centers continue to creep into communities? Only time will tell.

Hurricane Melissa's Devastation Vibrates throughout the Caribbean

Hurricane Melissa, one of the strongest hurricanes to hit the Caribbean in recorded history, made landfall in Jamaica on Tuesday as a Category 5 hurricane. Although the storm briefly weakened, it regained strength once it was over open ocean and then slammed into Cuba and Haiti as a Category 3 hurricane. But what made this hurricane so powerful? Experts say that climate change is intensifying hurricanes by amplifying them with heat and moisture, making them almost unrecognizable from the Atlantic hurricanes of the past. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is becoming more common. Scientists indicate that there has been an increase in the rates of explosive intensification, with winds increasing by at least 60 mph in 24 hours across most ocean basins, over the past four decades or more.

Scientists also found that Hurricane Melissa was so powerful that it shook the ground over a hundred miles away. Its path through the Atlantic Ocean was so strong that it was picked up by seismometers, tools designed to detect earthquakes. With these tools, researchers can record storm-generated waves and potentially track the strengthening storm conditions to better understand the rapid weather changes caused by climate change. As the affected countries and communities begin the recovery process, nations must contend with the realities of climate change and incorporate better practices for hurricane resilience. This storm will be putting Jamaica's natural disaster financial response framework—including contingency funds and catastrophe bonds—to the test.

Coming Up:

CRCL Coastal Stewardship Awards; Baton Rouge, LA; November 13, 2025

Environmental Law & Policy Summit
Tulane University Law School; New Orleans, LA; March 5–7, 2026

Water jobs:

Policy Analyst, Land and Water, Lincoln Institute of Land Policy, Phoenix, AZ

Water Law Fellow, Getches-Wilkinson Center at Colorado Law, Boulder, CO

Clinical Assistant or Associate Professor, Tulane Environmental Law Clinic, New Orleans, LA

The Tulane Institute on Water Resources Law and Policy is a program of the Tulane University Law School. The Institute is dedicated to fostering a greater appreciation and understanding of the vital role that water plays in our society and of the importance of the legal and policy framework that shapes the uses and legal stewardship of water.

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