



ICYMI: Tuesday - Data centers and NorthWestern's proposed merger at the PSC

1 message

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NorthWestern Energy aims to merge with Black Hills Energy to become a mega-monopoly – all to serve data center customers

Comment on the NorthWestern Energy and Black Hills Energy merger and attend the public hearing, which starts on Tues., May 12

COMMENTARY

NorthWestern's mega-monopoly merger is all about data centers



ANNE HEDGES

Anne Hedges' recent op-ed lays out the concerns that we have about this proposed merger, which may result in Montana becoming a cash cow for an enormous new monopoly utility. [Read the op-ed here.](#)

Last year, NorthWestern Energy announced a “merger” with the much larger Black Hills Energy, which serves more than a million customers in eight states. The new monopoly utility would serve *more than 2 million customers*, and

Montanans will become much less of a priority in the proposed new company's structure.

MEIC doesn't normally get to send this kind of action alert*, but **we need you to contact the PSC about NorthWestern's proposed merger, especially if you live in Annie Bukacek or Jeff Welborn's districts.** ([Check the PSC map here.](#))

This enormous new monopoly will be laser-focused on data centers.

When NorthWestern company executives announced the deal to investors, **they repeatedly pointed to data centers as a top reason for the two utilities' efforts.** NorthWestern CEO Brian Bird told investors that merging NorthWestern with Black Hills Energy would help both utilities be "[more competitive](#)" in the race to "[capture data center opportunities](#)" and would enable them to "[make strategic investments that foster economic development, including addressing the growing demand for energy, including from data centers.](#)"

NorthWestern is currently asking the Montana Public Service Commission to approve the so-called "merger" without considering any information regarding the [14 proposed data center projects](#) that NorthWestern mentioned on an investor call earlier this year. NorthWestern has refused to answer any questions in the PSC proceeding regarding data centers.

This is your chance to speak up and tell the PSC that we need transparency about NorthWestern's plans for data centers – before a merger is approved.

As our Executive Director told the PSC on April 14 ([click here to watch](#)), the companies must be required to answer questions about data centers before they can get approval for the merger from the Montana PSC.



The utilities' refusal to be transparent raises serious concerns about the potential impacts on electricity rates,

grid reliability, and water resources in Montana.

Speak up! How to comment online and at the hearing:

The Montana Public Service Commission has an ongoing contested docket (2025.10.078) on whether to approve the application for the merger, with a **public hearing kicking off Tuesday, May 12**. The PSC has scheduled four days for this hearing, but it could be completed in as few as two days.

- There will be opportunities for **public comment** at the beginning of each day of the hearing.
 - In-person comments do not need to register in advance.
 - To comment remotely, call 1-800-646-6150 by 4:30 on May 11 and request to comment on Docket 2025.10.078 via Zoom.
 - **Comments can be emailed** to the PSC at pschelp@mt.gov. Be sure to include Docket 2025.10.078 in the subject line.
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More information and talking points:

- **About the merger**
 - The proposed “merger” between NorthWestern Energy and Black Hills Energy is closely tied to the growing demand from large-scale AI data centers, which the companies have identified as a major opportunity for expansion.
 - When announcing the deal on August 19, 2025, NorthWestern CEO Brian Bird told investors that merging NorthWestern with Black Hills Energy would help both utilities be “[more competitive](#)” in the race to “[capture data center opportunities](#)” and would enable them to “[make strategic investments that foster economic development, including addressing the growing demand for energy, including from data centers.](#)”
 - The companies have sought approval from the Montana Public Service Commission without disclosing details about numerous proposed data center projects.
 - Without transparent information about potential impacts on electricity rates, grid reliability, and water resources in Montana, we could experience the same harmful impacts as other places in the nation – or worse.

- There are almost no protections in place to prevent Montanans from bearing rising costs or resource pressures, particularly related to powering energy-intensive data centers.
- **About the new utility: Bright Horizons Energy Corporation**
 - The deal would create a much larger, multi-state utility operating under the name Bright Horizons Energy Corporation, which NorthWestern executives have [gone on the record as saying would service 20% of the country geographically](#).
 - Montana customers would represent a small share of the overall system, reducing local influence over decision-making.
 - The new company is slated to be headquartered in South Dakota, with an executive team and board of directors composed of a majority of board members from Black Hills Energy. NorthWestern would have a minority number of board members on the new board.
 - The combined utility would serve more than 2 million customers across eight states. NorthWestern currently serves 700,000 gas and electric customers in Montana and has a small number of customers in South Dakota and even fewer in Nebraska.
- **About Black Hills Energy**
 - Black Hills Energy's gas utility serves a much larger geographic area and customer base than its electric utility, which could indicate a fossil fuel bias for the utility.
 - The merger is likely to lean into this bias, and could facilitate a major buildout of expensive infrastructure to serve AI data centers, likely including environmentally disastrous gas plants.

**When MEIC is a formal intervenor in proceedings before the PSC, we can't tell our supporters to contact the PSC directly. However, MEIC strategically chose not to intervene in this specific docket.*



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