



THE PIEDMONT ENVIRONMENTAL COUNCIL

A Better Path Forward on Renewable Energy

Virginia Piedmont region

Support received: grants in 2020 and 2025

The Piedmont Environment Council demonstrates how land trusts can help communities balance renewable energy development and growing energy demand with protection of natural, agricultural and historic resources.

PEC has a long history of advocating for Virginia's environmental principles in energy infrastructure development. Today, the organization is sounding the alarm about the soaring energy demand from data centers, which is driving a push for new large-scale solar projects and transmission lines.

Northern Virginia has become one of the fastest growing areas in the world for data centers, drastically accelerating demand for energy. If every data center that has been permitted in the region became operational, not only would they triple the current energy demand in the next 20 years, but they could also require up to 30% of the average annual flow of the Potomac River by 2050.

The region is only one of many where this scale of energy infrastructure development is moving forward unchecked, and PEC believes Virginians — and communities across the country — deserve a better path forward. With the endorsement of the Land Trust Alliance's Land and Climate program, PEC is urging land trusts to engage early on energy development projects.

"We should not have to choose among conserving our environment, building our economy around information technology and renewable energy," explained Chris Miller, president of the Piedmont Environmental Council. "Instead, we must seek solutions for renewable energy that avoid harming the natural resources to sustain life."

In Virginia, PEC advocates for a regulatory framework linking data center development with sustainable energy planning. This includes a transparent siting process, honest environmental impact assessments, a mitigation system funded by data center development and more financial support for distributed solar. PEC also led an effort to develop a statewide mitigation policy for utility-scale projects that aims to minimize impacts of renewables on soil, water and land use.

The organization hopes its experience and leadership on these issues can help other land trusts navigate this scale of development and better engage in decision-making related to energy infrastructure siting. In partnership with the Alliance, PEC staff have led peer groups, trainings and presentations to raise awareness of these emerging issues in land conservation.

"Land trusts are in the perpetuity business, so it falls to us to think about how our communities can get energy siting right, and we're going to have to be leaders on this issue," continued Miller. "The Alliance has not only helped amplify PEC's positions on energy siting and transmission, but also created necessary space for dialogue within the land trust community to build coalitions around these complicated issues."

As demand for energy is only expected to rise in the United States, PEC's leadership and advocacy serve as a rallying cry for how the land trust community can ensure that the path to a renewable future also protects the agricultural soils, forests and conservation lands we all depend on.



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