



BOLD IDEAS

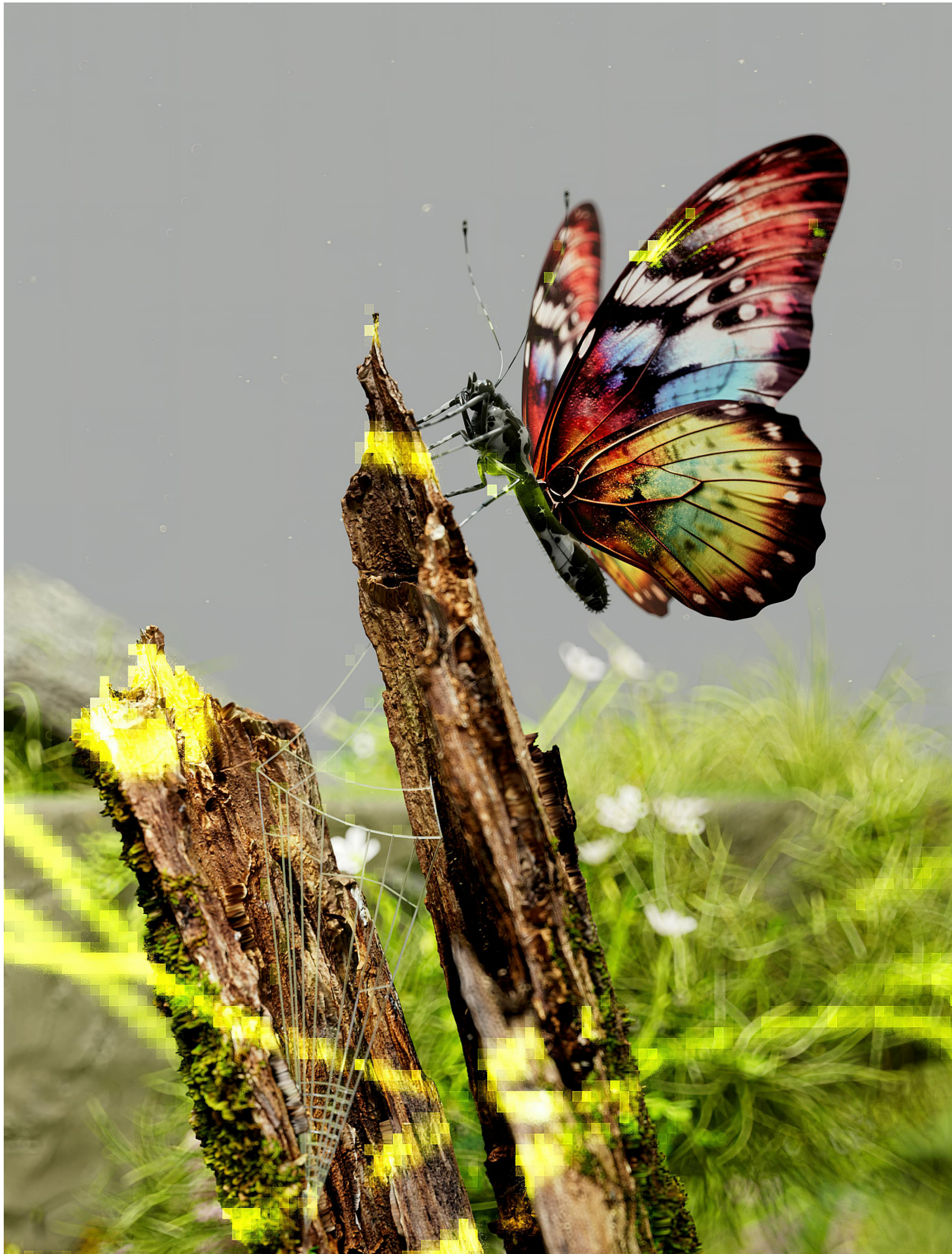
Balancing the Benefits of AI & the Health of Our Planet

*How to Embrace the Benefits of AI Technology without
Sacrificing Environmental Progress*

A white paper spearheaded by the Women's Leadership Center at Williams Bay to encourage **bold ideas** and **actions**.

Women's Leadership Center

At Williams Bay



Introduction

One definition of excellent leadership is the ability to balance risk and reward, bringing competing forces into equilibrium. This is undeniably true with Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Each day brings more commentary about the current state of AI adoption. This seemingly ubiquitous technology is an exciting and potent toolset. AI can be deployed to develop innovative solutions to address the complex environmental challenges we face. At the same time, AI is driving a large increase in energy, water, and mineral consumption. It is up to humans to deploy AI responsibly and ethically, to establish guardrails, to insist on transparency, and to direct AI to solve problems and improve our world for all.

This white paper spotlights the convergence of science, technology, innovation, and social responsibility where “Responsible AI” is taking root. Drawing insights from a wide range of experts across business, technology, transportation, supply chain, government, NGOs, and academia who are grappling with this tension, we identify six practical steps that any organization can take to ensure that AI simultaneously improves operational efficiency and the health of our planet.

*Gathering perspectives from featured experts, we arrive at **Six Recommendations for Action** (see page 26) with practical steps on incorporating a balanced approach to AI, by addressing:*

Corporate Strategy – Tracking & Reporting – Systems Innovation

Sustainability Across Suppliers – Federal Advocacy – Cross-Industry Networks

Featured Experts



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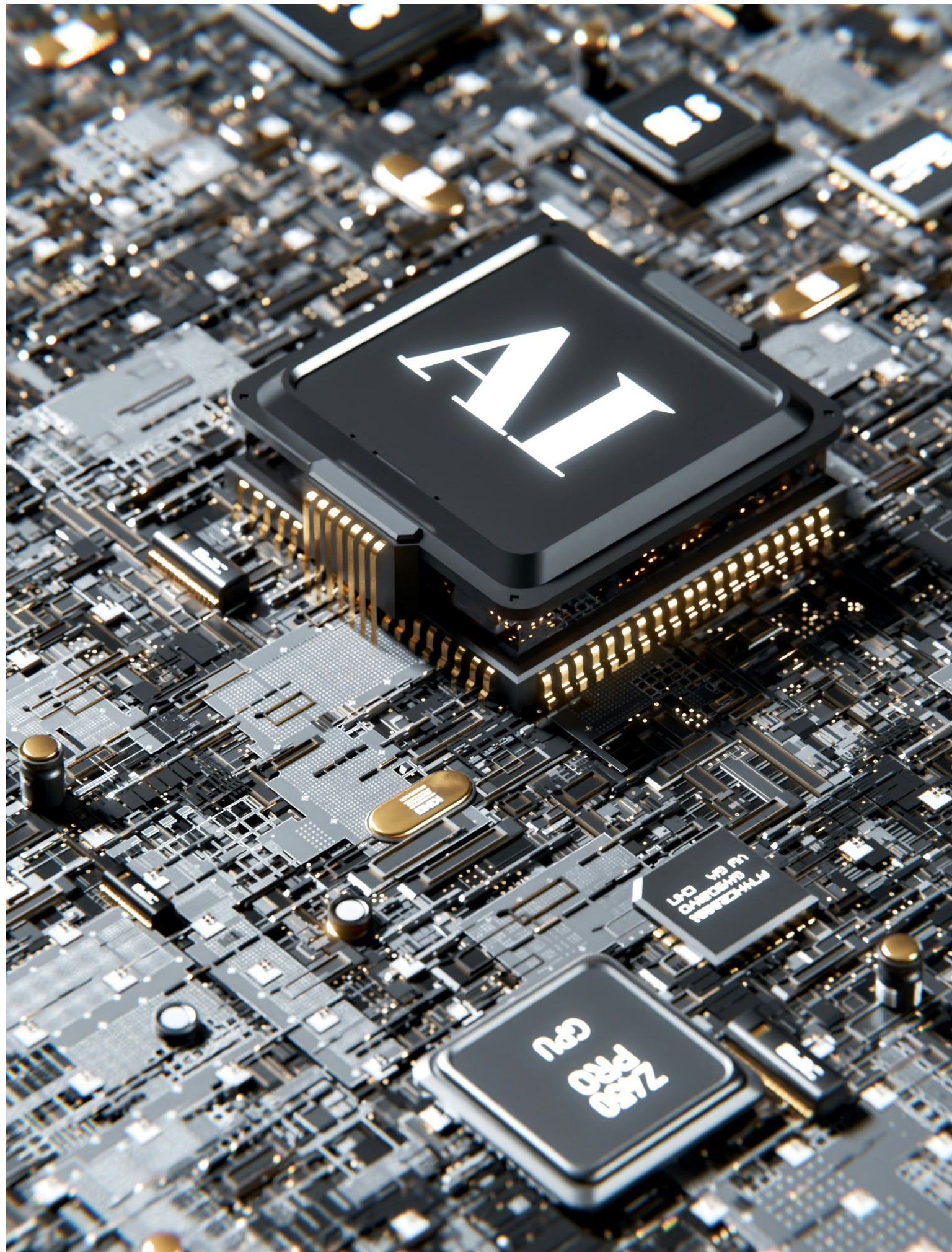


The Imperative of Responsible AI Adoption

AI is among the most powerful technology sets that has ever been deployed. We chose to tackle this topic with the conviction that organizations must develop, adopt, and implement AI solutions responsibly and ethically.

“AI imbues machines with intelligence, enabling them to learn from data, decipher complex patterns and solve problems, and ultimately replicate tasks that once relied solely on human cognition. But responsible AI requires more than technical prowess. It requires careful consideration of the problems we choose to address with AI, ensuring that our solutions enhance quality of life for both people and the planet, while actively avoiding any perpetuation of existing or potential harm,” says Salima Bhimani, PhD, principal of 10xResponsibleTech and former Chief Strategist at Google.

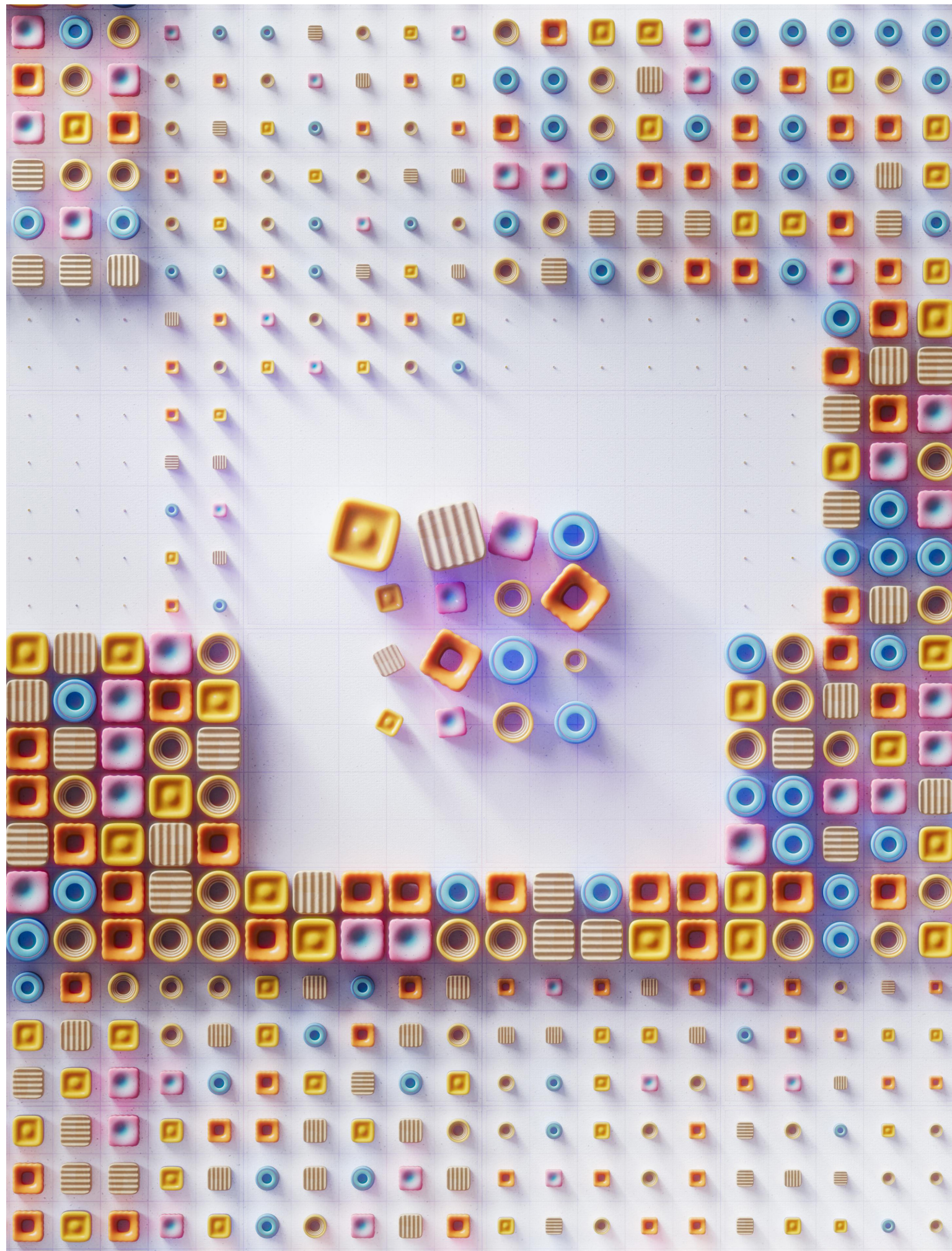
We are amid an historic convergence of scientific knowledge and social responsibility. Reflecting on this unprecedented moment, Amy White, former Chief Planning Officer at Nike, currently Senior Advisor for the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), and member of the AWESOME Advisory Board adds, “Responsible companies are demanding disclosure of AI’s planetary impact. During the industrial revolution, our burgeoning economy permeated extensive environmental harms. We’ve learned and evolved, so we should call upon AI solutions to solve business problems while doing better by our planet.”



The Race to Adopt AI

Generative AI adoption is spreading rapidly across all industries and functions. According to a January 2025 “Superagency in the Workplace” report, McKinsey sizes the long-term AI opportunity at \$4.4 trillion in added productivity growth potential from corporate use cases. The report cites that 92% of companies plan to increase their AI investments over the next three years, and only 1% say that their company is mature in its deployment.

The race for businesses to adopt and implement AI often results in its use becoming detached from overall business strategy, mission, and values. According to the Boston Consulting Group, 74% of companies that have adopted AI are still struggling to achieve its full value.¹ And in a survey conducted by Domino Data Lab, 97% of technology leaders said that while they are setting responsible AI goals, they lack the resources necessary to implement governance frameworks.²



AI Adoption Across Supply Chain Management

Global supply chains are a microcosm of the larger AI-enabled business landscape. They encompass all the complex activities involved in moving a product from raw materials to the customer, from sourcing to production, warehousing, distribution, and delivery, with the goal of optimizing efficiency, quality, and customer satisfaction throughout the process. Global supply chain leaders are constantly assessing tradeoffs and identifying efficiencies.

According to supply chain executives' responses to a questionnaire fielded by AWESOME in November 2024, AI is being deployed across nearly every function. Many organizations now consider AI a strategic initiative, yet the level of investment and stage of adoption vary widely.

AI is improving predictions, forecasting, load matching, and capacity optimization in supply chain management, according to Roquita Coleman Williams, Managing Partner, Polished Consulting and former VP of Intermodal for Coyote Logistics, now RXO. Coleman Williams, a participant in the AWESOME network, describes how one logistics company uses AI to match shippers with carriers, optimizing loads to ensure trucks are filled and routes are optimized. AI is used to analyze data from freight demand, capacity trends, and market conditions, providing shippers with predictive insights for dynamic pricing.

In some organizations, AI chatbots are assisting customers with booking loads, tracking shipments, and handling inquiries through a digital platform, improving response times and customer satisfaction. One company offers an AI-powered digital brokerage and freight marketplace to enhance load matching, real-time visibility, and capacity management, streamlining operations for shippers and carriers, adds Coleman Williams.

AI's Impact on Energy, Water, & Mineral Usage

The adoption of AI is simultaneously improving supply chain management and operations, making processes more effective and efficient, while significantly impacting energy, water, and mineral consumption.

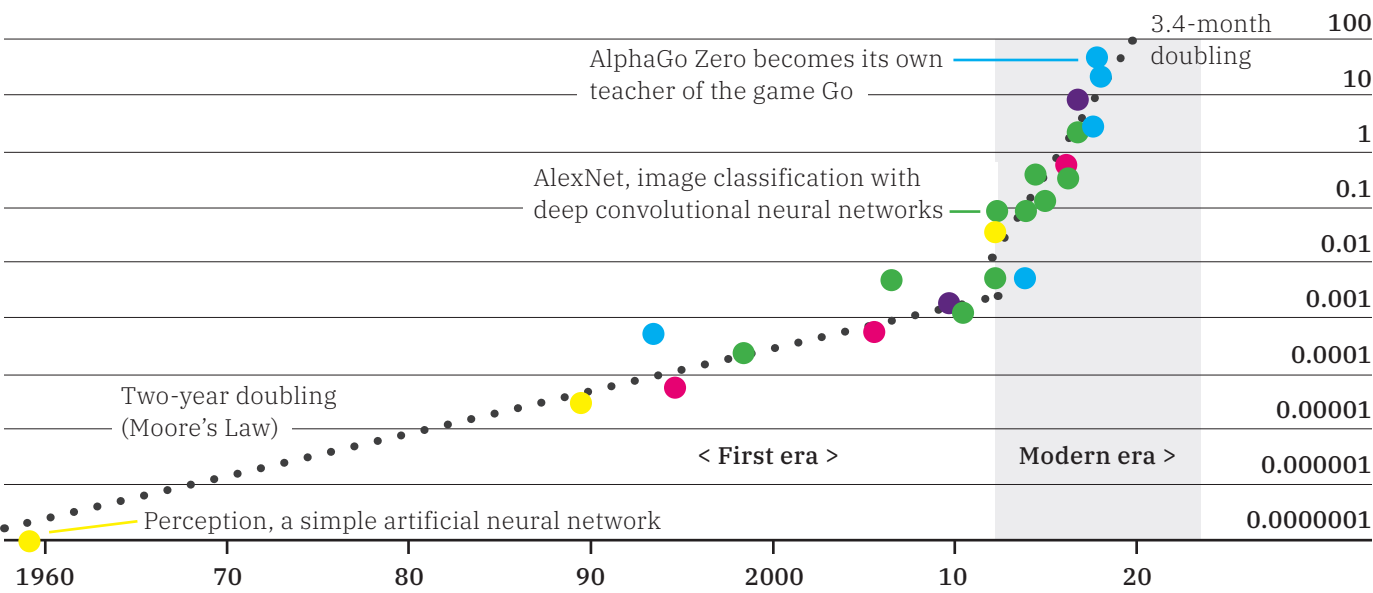
As reported in *The Economist*, the natural resources required to train AI have been doubling every 3.4 months since 2012.

Deep and steep

Computing power used in training AI systems
Days spent calculating at one petaflop per second*, log scale

By fundamentals

● Language ● Speech ● Vision ● Game ● Other



Source: <https://www.numenta.com/blog/2022/05/24/ai-is-harming-our-planet/>

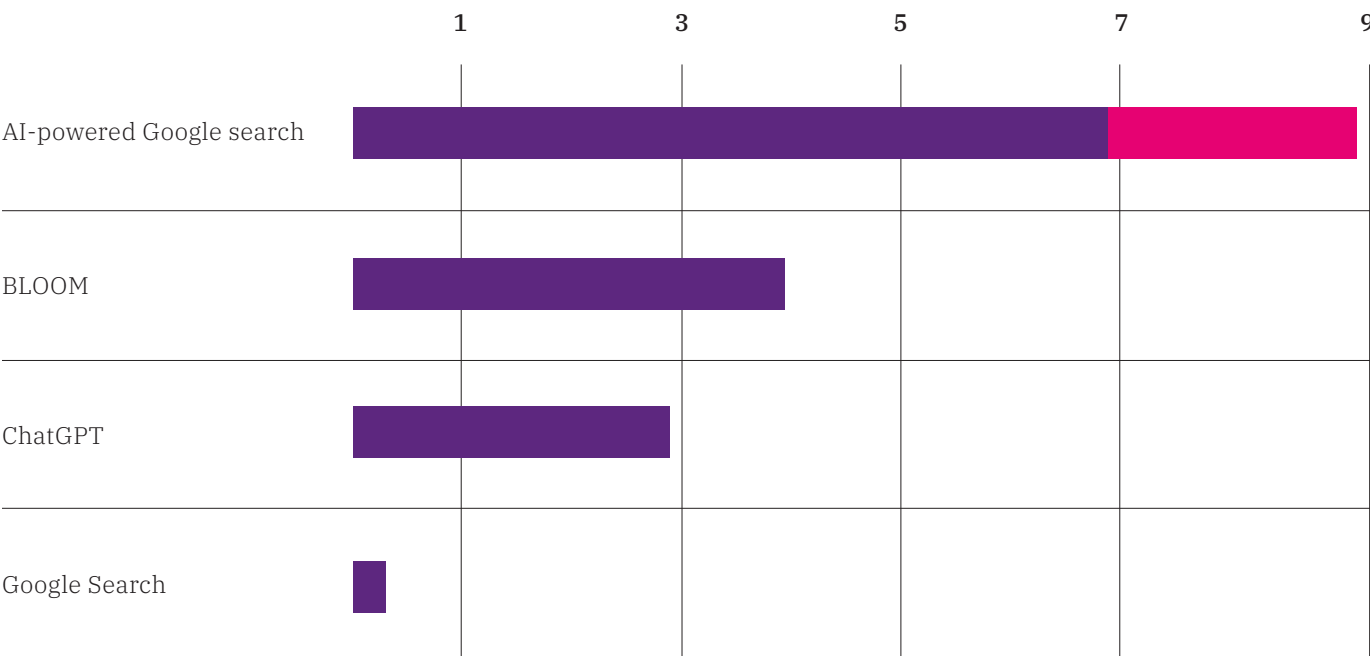
Energy Impacts

Given the vast potential of AI to solve business and society's most complex challenges, its deployment will continue to accelerate. In response, the electric grid is becoming more productive and sophisticated. Responsible AI is a tool to develop more clean energy sources to meet that critical demand.

AI-powered systems require more energy than standard Google search

Interacting with a large language model consumes 10 times the power of consumption of a standard Google search – roughly the equivalent of running a low-lumen LED light bulb for an hour

Watt-hour of electricity per request



Power consumption of AI-powered Google search assessed by research firms New Street Research, which estimated 6.9 Wh per request, and SemiAnalysis, which estimated 8.9 Wh per request.

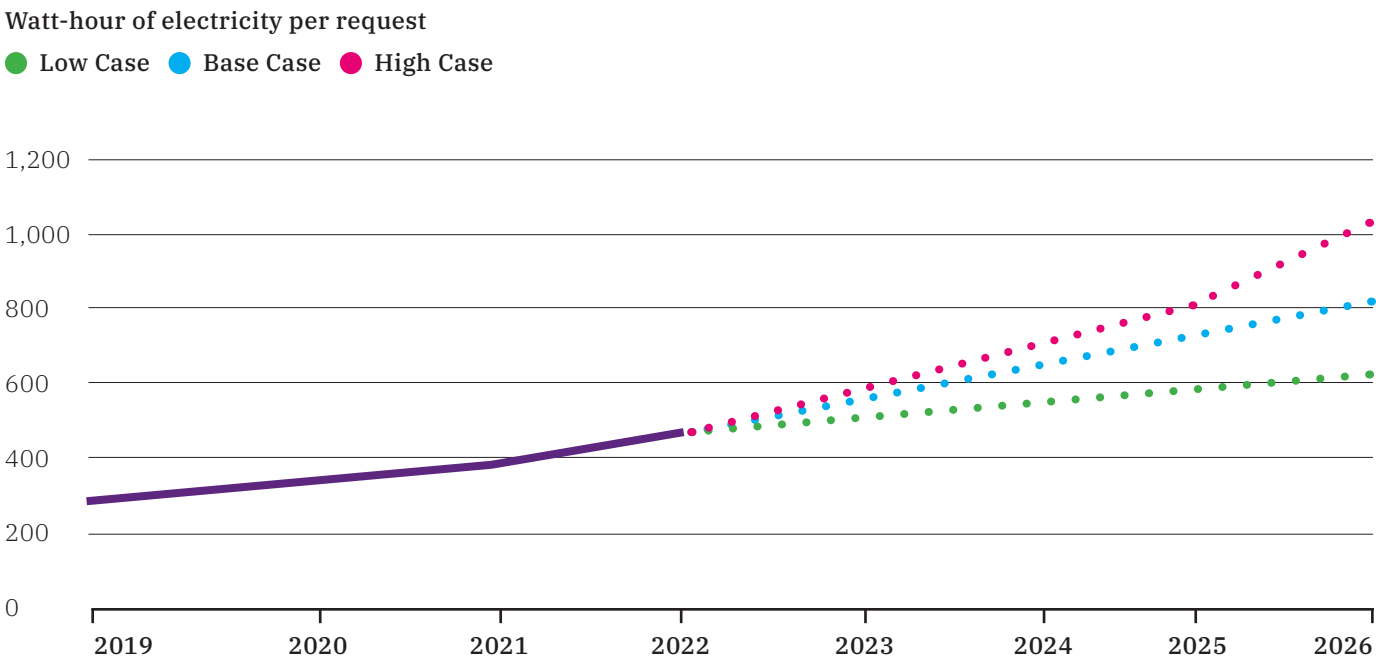
Alex de Vries

Phi Do Los Angeles Times

Source: <https://www.latimes.com/environment/story/2024-08-26/tech-firms-conceal-water-and-power-demands-of-ai-computing>

By 2026, AI data centers’ electricity consumption is projected to reach the equivalent of Japan’s total consumption of electrical energy, according to Yale’s School of the Environment (Berreby 2024).³ Since the electric grid isn’t fully powered by clean sources today, some of the increased energy demand for AI is met by burning more fossil fuels like coal and gas, accelerating global greenhouse gas emissions. The exponential increases in adoption of AI make future electricity demand and energy grid infrastructure challenging to plan, finance, and build.

Global electricity demand from data centres, AI, and cryptocurrencies, 2019-2026



Notes: Includes traditional data centres, dedicated AI data centres, and cryptocurrency consumption; excludes demand from data transmission networks. The base case scenario has been used in the overall forecast in this report. Low and high case scenarios reflect the uncertainties in the pace of deployment and efficiency gains amid future technological developments

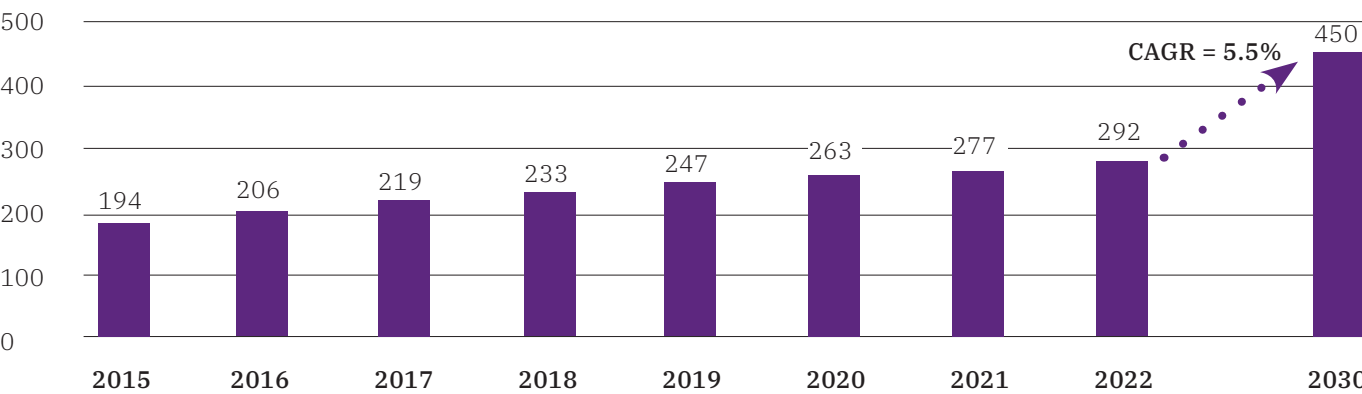
Sources: Joule (2023) de Vries, The growing energy footprint of AI; CCRI Indices (carbon0-ratings.com); The Guardian, Use of AI to reduce data centre energy use; Motors in data centres; The Royal Society, The future of computing beyond Moore’s Law; Ireland Central Statistics Office, Data Centres electricity consumption 2022; and Danish Energy Agency Denmark’s energy and climate outlook 2018

Source: <https://www.sustainabilitybynumbers.com/p/ai-energy-demand>

Water Impacts

AI also requires significant water to cool the equipment in data centers. According to the World Economic Forum, by 2027, global AI demand is expected to account for 1.1 to 1.7 trillion gallons of water withdrawal, more than four to six times the total annual water withdrawal of Denmark.⁴

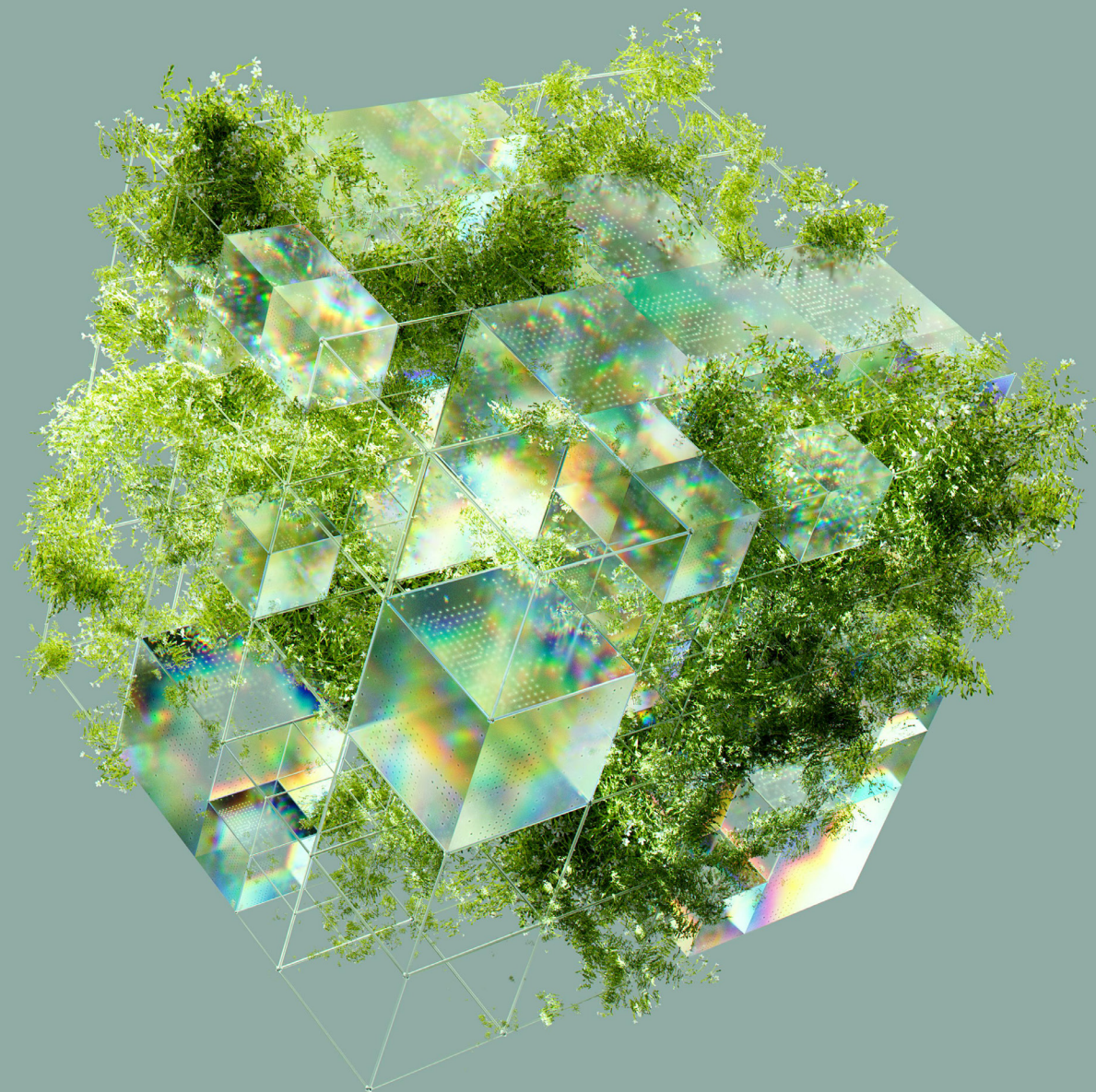
Global data center water consumption Million gallons per day



Source: <https://www.1ai.net/en/11256.html>

Mineral Impacts

Additionally, AI infrastructure development, including all the hardware, GPUs, and CPUs, depend on other natural resources, including rare earth metals like lithium, cobalt, and nickel, explains renowned futurist, author, and professor Mariana Todorova, a former member of the Bulgarian Parliament and currently a representative to UNESCO and the Millennium Project which are creating ethical AI frameworks. She points out, “The need for these metals requires an expansion of the mining industry, which also raises geopolitical issues because many of these rare earth materials are extracted under exploitative conditions in countries from the developing world, deepening the environmental, economic, and social problems there.”



Addressing AI's Environmental Impact

As AI adoption accelerates, companies are taking proactive steps to address energy loads required for AI and data centers, according to Regenia Sanders, Managing Partner of the Atlanta office for professional services firm EY and an AWESOME Advisor. As EY advises clients on AI strategies, Sanders notes that big tech companies like Microsoft are demanding plentiful, clean, and renewable energy sources when choosing sites for their data centers.

Noelle Walsh, Corporate Vice President, Cloud Operations & Innovation, Microsoft and 2019 AWESOME ALL (AWESOME Legendary Leadership) Award winner, describes how Microsoft is meeting this challenge. “With more than 350 data centers globally across more than 30 countries in the world, we take sustainability very seriously. There is a demand right now for AI, and that is causing an increase in demand for data centers and compute power going forward. So that is on us to ensure that that power is green. We aim to be in balance with the ecosystem – from algae bricks to large batteries, hydrogen fuel cells, and hopefully someday fusion technology. Imagine sustainable data centers of the future, which are powered 100% of the time by zero carbon power sources. We are a part of this tremendous AI journey right now where the demand is very significant, which does necessitate more data centers to be built, but our sustainability bar has not changed. If anything, it is even more motivating for us to ensure that we build AI for the future through sustainable ways.”⁵

Limits on the energy grid will require stronger cross-sector coordination. “There’s a need for better communication between tech companies and regulated utilities. There’s often a disconnect in understanding each other’s operational needs and constraints,”

says Sanders of EY. She recommends a comprehensive, collaborative approach to addressing the impacts of AI tools on the environment. This includes focusing on long-term decision making, facilitating conversations between utilities and AI companies about energy needs, and involving multiple stakeholders, from government officials to investment bankers, in future discussions about AI and sustainability.

Jennifer Veilleux, former Director of Sustainability for PHI Aviation, agrees. “There’s a need for greater sharing of solutions across companies and industries to reduce the overall environmental impact of AI. We need to include diverse perspectives from academia, industry partners, and nonpartisan third parties to develop innovative solutions and a comprehensive approach that considers environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors.” Veilleux acknowledges that the competitive nature of business can erect barriers to sharing sustainability solutions across companies.

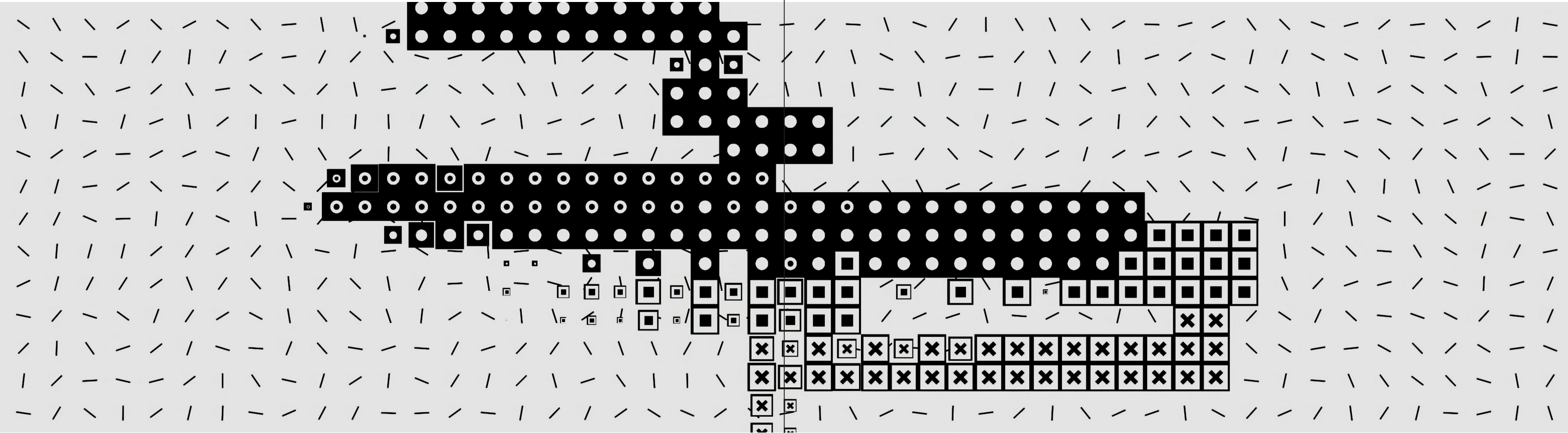
Meghan Busse, Associate Professor, Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University asserts, “We need to move climate and sustainability out of a silo and advocate for the long run, pushing for policies and investments with a longer view.” Busse advocates

for more subsidies in the form of direct funding and tax credits to accelerate adoption of sustainable practices. “Public investment moves markets,” she states. Busse stresses that in order to make the biggest impact on greenhouse gas reduction, we need to focus on the sources, including AI.

Duke University is a microcosm of AI use. They use AI in their research and education – and contend with tensions between AI use and energy use. “I need to ensure we are serving our research community in making the breakthroughs the world needs, while also balancing the energy demands that come from increased compute needed to service these research demands,” says Toddi Steelman, Vice President and Vice Provost for Climate and Sustainability at Duke.

Additionally, Duke is working with nearby colleges and universities to address regional data center needs and innovate in how this could be done more efficiently. The goal is to co-locate data centers in areas that serve the larger region and enable heat, water, and waste to be captured and reused. By publishing its climate commitment,⁶ Duke hopes to inspire and serve as a model for other academic institutions.





The Challenges of Tracking Impact while Leveraging the Benefits of AI

Harnessing AI to improve environmental outcomes is the most promising path to progress on reduced carbon emissions, just as many large companies are preparing to report on their climate impact. For many large U.S.-based firms operating globally, the first reporting year under European Union (EU) regulations will be 2026.

Veilleux, formerly of PHI Aviation, emphasizes the importance of having board members that understand and guide how to account for AI’s impact within mandated climate-related reporting and disclosures. “Companies need to consider how AI implementation might affect their emissions across all scopes,” said Veilleux, “particularly the potential increase in Scope 2 emissions due to higher electricity consumption. Companies should also look at ways to offset increased electricity consumption from AI by finding efficiencies in other areas of their operations and exploring clean energy sources to power data centers.”

Despite potential increased power consumption, many large public companies are taking the initiative to balance adopting AI for competitive advantage while meeting their sustainability goals and ultimately reducing Scope 2 emissions. For example, Sarah Langeliers, Director of Environment, Health, and Safety at Keurig Dr Pepper, noted that AI can be leveraged to pursue opportunities for carbon reduction incentives and quickly run energy cost simulations for decarbonization alternatives. Additionally, AI can optimize heating, ventilation, air conditioning (HVAC), and lighting via Smart Building Management Systems (BMS). These systems utilize AI algorithms to predict energy needs based on occupancy and weather patterns. They can automatically adjust temperature settings and lighting when rooms are unoccupied, saving considerable energy.

Bhimani of 10xResponsibleTech comments that many businesses are realizing that weaving environmental, sustainability, and governance considerations into overarching business strategy is central to reducing risk and increasing positive impact and revenues. “This is a hopeful trend,” contends Bhimani, advocating for greater alignment of climate considerations and the technology innovation process, as part of a more comprehensive approach to responsible AI development and deployment.



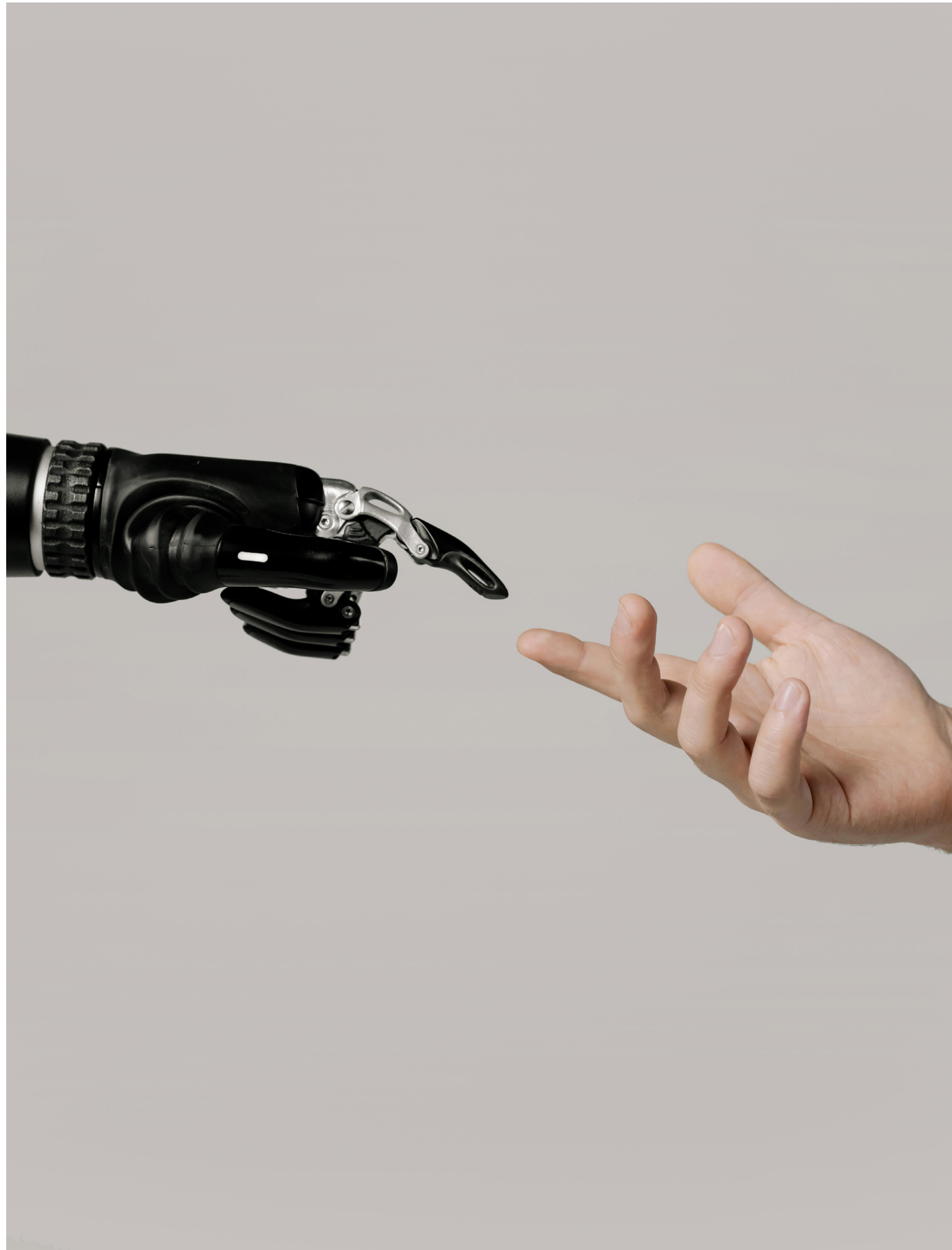
AI as a Promising and Powerful New Tool in Addressing the Climate Crisis

While AI is responsible for a large increase in energy and water consumption, it is simultaneously a promising and powerful tool to help address greenhouse gas emissions, extreme weather, and other climate-related threats.

One example is Flood Hub, an early warning system for flood alerts, developed through a partnership between Google and the World Meteorological Organization (WMO). Flood Hub is now available in more than 80 countries. By combining hydrological models with the technologies that drive Google's research in AI, it can predict riverine floods up to seven days in advance, according to Google's Global Director of Sustainability and Partnerships, Antonia Gawel.⁷

Another dynamic example is Earth Knowledge, a data infrastructure and analytics company specializing in both climate and nature. Earth Knowledge has built a "digital twin" of our planet which integrates authoritative data and models of Earth's interconnected systems. Its twin contains more than six trillion discrete data points. Through their partnership with Microsoft, Earth Knowledge works with AI experts to leverage machine learning capabilities to enrich the functionality of their authoritative models and provide richer insights into the cascading and inter-related impacts of critical global systems.

Co-founder and CEO Julia Armstrong D'Agnese explains that Earth Knowledge empowers customers to harness opportunities and mitigate operational, supply chain, and investment risks. Governments (such as the State of California) and the private sector (including Eaton and Grainger) rely on Earth Knowledge's data and analyses, resulting in better outcomes for their organizations and for the planet.⁸



Achieving Equilibrium at the Convergence of Science, Technology, Innovation, and Social Responsibility

In this AI era, one maxim remains unchanged: there is no substitute for human agency in decision making. AI is but a tool. “AI is not magic,” Dr. Alondra Nelson, Harold F. Linder Professor at the Institute for Advanced Study⁹ reminds us. Nelson, who has served in the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, cautions, “The potential beneficial uses of AI tools and systems must be stewarded through innovative AI governance including regulations, laws, standards, and norms. This is how we govern the future.”¹⁰

As an economist, Busse of the Kellogg School at Northwestern University believes business leaders have the tools to radically transform our economic activities, from fresh transportation solutions for rail, freight, and air, to the electrification of manufacturing. “Everyone needs to see this transition as a business opportunity. Leading requires developing a climate-capable mindset, which includes perceiving the situation accurately and mobilizing to respond to threats and opportunities,” notes Busse.

“We have to see this as an ecosystem of actors that need to grapple with this question together, building the capacity and capability to address the opportunities of AI to address climate problems, while we address the climate impacts of AI,” concludes Bhimani. “Responsible AI can be your strategic advantage if you build, integrate, and adopt AI in a way that benefits your employees, customers, users, humanity, and the planet as a whole.”

We must simultaneously leverage this powerful new technology and achieve environmental gains. Attaining this balance will yield benefits to both economic and human health while opening new avenues to innovation and growth.

Balancing the Benefits of AI & the Health of Our Planet

Balancing AI's benefits and environmental challenges requires governance, responsible investment, and strategic integration. Perspectives from featured experts yield the following **Six Recommendations for Action** with practical steps on incorporating a balanced approach to AI.

1

Corporate Strategy. Ground corporate strategy and decision-making in the **responsible implementation of AI** and its sustainability impacts. Consider both short-term efficiency and productivity gains and long-term ripple effects on corporate, human, and planetary health.

2

Tracking & Reporting. Communicate the commitments from the executive team and board on **how AI impacts will be measured and reported**. This should include energy and water sources, usage trends, emissions, and offsets in other areas of operations.

3

Systems Innovation. Deploy AI to **accelerate internal** innovation in electrified manufacturing processes, optimized supply chain routes, evaluation of alternative transportation modes, and preferences for “clean” investment portfolios.

4

Sustainability Across Suppliers. Demand the same level of **sustainability commitments and disclosures by external suppliers, vendors, and partners** to ensure alignment and continual progress toward strategic and sustainability goals.

5

Federal Advocacy. Join with peers and industry associations to **advocate for incentives**, such as the extension and expansion of federal tax credits to accelerate and fund the widespread adoption of sustainable manufacturing and logistics practices.

6

Cross-Industry Networks. Engage in diverse and multi-disciplinary forums to broker explicit commitments that humans will drive the training of AI. Leaders across industries, utilities, governments, NGOs, and academics are best positioned to develop innovative solutions and a comprehensive approach that balances environmental, social, and governance (ESG) factors.

Additional Reading & Resources

This white paper adds to a growing body of work that examines the benefits of AI and the impacts on energy, water, and emissions. Notable women have contributed this understanding through academic publications, industry reports, and thought pieces. The insights, perspectives, and bold ideas gathered from our interviews plus these sources have enriched the key themes and recommendations presented in this paper.

“Could AI Revolutionize Climate Action?”
International Telecommunication Union (ITU),
the UN Agency for Digital Technologies
November 11, 2024

<https://www.itu.int/hub/2024/11/could-ai-revolutionize-climate-action/>

Along with reshaping social and economic life, artificial intelligence (AI) could become a decisive factor in global efforts against climate change.

“Expert Insight: How Women Are Shaping the Future of Responsible AI,” Charlotte El Sheikh and Shauna Blackmon, Pioneers Post,
November 8, 2024

<https://www.pioneerspost.com/business-school/20241108/expert-insight-how-women-are-shaping-the-future-of-responsible-ai>

Founded by tech entrepreneur Dr Julia Stamm, Women Shaping the Future of Responsible AI (WSFR.AI) is a global competition to highlight the pioneering work of women who are committed to developing and using AI responsibly and ethically.

“Good Leaders Podcast Episode 17: Julia Stamm and Olivia Gambelin, The Women Driving AI for Good,”
October 7, 2024

<https://www.pioneerspost.com/podcasts/20241007/good-leaders-podcast-episode-17-julia-stamm-and-olivia-gambelin-the-women-driving>

Founding editor Tim West interviews Julia Stamm and Olivia Gambelin on responsible AI.

“C-Suite Leaders Say AI Drives Sustainability But They Are Unsure How To Use It,”
Oludolapo Makinde, Forbes,
September 25, 2024

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/oludolapomakinde/2024/09/25/c-suite-leaders-say-ai-drives-sustainability-but-they-are-unsure-how-to-use-it/>

edX and Workplace Intelligence surveyed employees and C-suite leaders about their use of AI. 96% of C-suite respondents report that AI has improved their progress toward sustainability goals, and 75% believe that their company cannot achieve its sustainability goals without AI. However, 65% of executives are unsure how to use AI to improve sustainability.

AI and the Environment: International Standards for AI and the Environment

International Telecommunication Union (ITU),
the UN Agency for Digital Technologies
2024

https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-t/opb/env/T-ENV-ENV-2024-1-PDF-E.pdf

This report summarizes standards available or under development. It highlights the importance of a coordinated, international approach to standardization and the need for continued cooperation across all sectors.

Aligning Artificial Intelligence with Climate Change Mitigation,”

Nature Climate Change, Vol. 12
June 2022

This paper introduces a systematic framework for describing the effects of machine learning on GHG emissions and identifies priorities for impact assessment and scenario analysis. It suggests policy levers to shape the effects of ML on climate change mitigation.

“Tackling Climate Change with Machine Learning”

Association for Computing Machinery
February 7, 2022

Machine learning can be a powerful tool in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and helping society adapt to a changing climate. Recommendations encompass research questions and business opportunities.

“How Machine Learning Can Help Tackle Climate Change,”

Donti, Priya, Association for Computing Machinery
December 17, 2020

(<https://dl.acm.org/doi/10.1145/3433142>)

This academic paper posits that machine learning can be a potentially useful tool for addressing climate change, when applied in coordination with policy, engineering, and other areas of action.

This paper was published by:

The Women’s Leadership Center at Williams Bay. Located on the stunning shores of Geneva Lake in southeastern Wisconsin, the Center will be a unique destination for high impact convenings starting in 2026. Designed by Studio Gang, the award-winning architecture and urban design practice led by MacArthur Fellow Jeanne Gang, it will foster high levels of creativity, collaboration, and contribution, where accomplished women will come together to incubate fresh approaches to complex challenges to change the world. The Center’s five focus areas are global supply chain; engineering + technology; infrastructure + design; space + astrophysics; and public and private enterprise. For more information: [womensleadershipcenter.org](https://www.womensleadershipcenter.org).

AWESOME Leaders (Advancing Women’s Excellence in Supply Chain Operations, Management, and Education). A professional community for senior women leaders in supply chain, AWESOME’s mission is to advance and transform the future of supply chain leadership by bringing women leaders together for connecting, learning, collaboration, inspiration, and recognition. The AWESOME network is comprised of more than 1,500 women in diverse senior supply chain leadership roles across a broad spectrum of organizations. For more information: [awesomeleaders.org](https://www.awesomeleaders.org).

AWESOME and the Women’s Leadership Center at Williams Bay believe in the power of multi-disciplinary convenings to solve global challenges. This white paper is an early example of facilitating this impact, as we prepare to host one-of-a-kind convenings at the Women’s Leadership Center beginning in 2026.

For more information, contact MarySue Barrett at MarySue@lincoln-road.com

Acknowledgements

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Amy White, Senior Advisor, BCG; former Chief Planning Officer, Nike Inc.

Endnotes

1 Boston Consulting Group <https://www.bcg.com/press/24october2024-ai-adoption-in-2024-74-of-companies-struggle-to-achieve-and-scale-value>

2 Domino Data Lab <https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/97-of-ai-leaders-commit-to-responsible-ai-yet-nearly-half-lack-resources-to-achieve-the-necessary-governance-302252621.html>

3 Source: <https://scet.berkeley.edu/reducing-ais-climate-impact-everything-you-always-wanted-to-know-but-were-afraid-to-ask/>

4 Source: <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/11/circular-water-solutions-sustainable-data-centres/>

5 Source: <https://unlocked.microsoft.com/datacenters/>

6 Source: <https://climate.duke.edu/>

7 Source: <https://www.itu.int/hub/2024/11/could-ai-revolutionize-climate-action/>

8 Source: <https://earthknowledge.com/>

9 Source: AI Ethics Symposium: From Policy to Practice | Keynote Address: How to Govern the Future, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WXTsdPTR6QQ>

10 Source: <https://bostonglobalforum.org/news/innovating-with-integrity-dr-alondra-nelsons-distinguished-speech-at-governing-the-future-ai-public-policy-and-democracy/>

It will take all of us working together, from leaders in global supply chain management, to decision makers in business, technology, transportation, utilities, government, NGOs, and academia—worldwide. Through committed collaboration on innovative solutions to address the risks and rewards associated with AI, we will realize the benefits of artificial intelligence and unleash its positive impact for our planet and people.

At Williams Bay