Which Green Matters More: The Environmental Impacts of Ohio's New Intel Fab

By Neriah Licata

On January 21, 2022, Intel announced that New Albany was selected for its first new manufacturing site in 40 years.[1] This mega project will be the largest single private sector company investment in Ohio's history.[2] The company plans on building two semiconductor factories by 2025, resulting in 20,000 jobs in Ohio.[3] These jobs will include 3,000 direct Intel jobs, 7,000 construction jobs overall, and tens of thousands of additional indirect and support jobs.[4]

While this new Intel manufacturing site is extremely beneficial for Ohio and the US semiconductor field, there is an environmental concern for New Albany and Jersey Township. Semiconductor chips permeate almost every facet of modern life, and the current shortage emphasizes the need for a new manufacturing site.[5] However, for this new site to be built, the Ohio EPA needs to grant multiple permits including a wetlands permit and a draft air permit.[6]

The Ohio EPA issued an isolated wetlands permit for Intel, determining that the lowering of water quality in the Upper Scioto River Watershed and Licking River Watershed is necessary.[7] Ten acres of isolated wetlands will be impacted by discharges from the site. In response, MBJ Holdings, a New Albany Company affiliate, will offset the impacts with more than 20 acres of wetland mitigation elsewhere. But residents question the practicality of having a needed wetland not be in the immediate area.[8]

The draft air permit identifies toxins that could cause health problems if they exceed certain limits.[9] While the toxins emitted from the site are to be expected from the semiconductor industry, those living closest to the site have concerns for their health and safety.[10] Ohio EPA has said that emissions from the site will be within state standards, with the draft air permit containing calculations done by consultants and identifying at least eight different toxins.[11]

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[1] *Silicone Heartland*, NEW ALBANY (2022), https://newalbanyohio.org/answers/new-albany-silicon-heartland/.
[2] *Id.*
[3] *Id*.
[4] *Id.*
[5] *Explained: How semiconductor industry worsens climate change,* CNBC TV18 (September 20, 2021), https://www.cnbctv18.com/environment/explained-how-semiconductor-industry-worsens-climate-change-10809741.htm.
[6] Tyler Thompson, *Intel's draft air permit lists several toxins for Ohio plants,* WOSU 89.7 NPR News (August 24, 2022), https://news.wosu.org/2022-08-23/intels-draft-air-permit-lists-several-toxins-for-ohio-plants.
[7] Kent Mallett, *Ohio EPA issues Intel wetlands permit, acknowledges it will lower water quality*, Newark Advocate (June 30, 2022), https://www.newarkadvocate.com/story/news/local/2022/06/30/intel-ohio-epa-issues-wetlands-permit-project-lower-water-quality/7765699001/.
[8] *Id.*
[9] Thompson, *supra* note 6.
[10] *Id.*
[11] *Id.*

Intel has made statements about its plan to further reduce direct and indirect greenhouse gas emissions.[12] By 2040, Intel plans to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions in its global operations and reduce climate impacts.[13] Semiconductor factories require a lot of energy, water, and toxic chemicals.[14] Although Intel is striving to make environmental progress, there is still a concern for those living closest to the new site.[15] In 2021, despite, Intel receiving 80% of its electricity from renewable sources, its total energy use went up 9.4% in the same period to 11.61 billion kilowatt hours – around twice what the city of San Francisco uses in a year.[16] With Intel making these strides to be more environmentally friendly, it seems that the company is truly putting the concerns of people at the forefront.[17] But as the Executive Director of the Portland Clean Act points out, it is not beneficial to semiconductor facilities for their chips to be exposed to pollution.[18] The concern for the environment might be genuine, or it might be a residual effect from their true motivating factor.[19]

Intel building a new semiconductor chip site in Ohio will help stimulate Ohio's economy and help the United States take a step towards being a semiconductor powerhouse. But even with all the monetary positives, keeping in mind that the residents of Jersey Township are the ones who will have to face the repercussions – good or bad – can help keep Intel in check.

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[12] Kate Siefert, *Johnstown residents look to Oregon's Intel plant for environmental impact expectations,* ABC6 (May 11, 2022), https://abc6onyourside.com/news/building-ohios-future-intel-beyond/johnstown-licking-county-ohio-residents-look-to-oregons-intel-semiconductor-plant-for-environmental-impact-expectations-5-11-2022

[13] *Id.*

[14] Ian King, *Chipmakers' $52 Billion US Bonanza Imperils Environmental Gains,* Bloomberg (August 5, 2022), https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-05/rush-to-build-more-chips-puts-environmental-progress-in-peril.

[15] *Id.*

[16] *Id.*

[17] Siefert, *supra* note 12.

[18] *Id.*

[19] *Id.*