

2026 Natural Resources & Energy Industry Predictions



The natural resource industry is gearing up for a year defined by transformation and opportunity. Global energy demands are sharply increasing, driven in large part by an explosion in artificial intelligence (AI) and [data center development](#). Investors and developers are exploring novel distributed energy infrastructure solutions, including nuclear power, renewables, and gas, to meet these needs. Meanwhile, renewable energy companies are adapting to shifting trade policies and other supply chain disruptions. Behind it all, AI adoption is reshaping how work gets done and what kind of talent natural resource companies will need to succeed.

Here are BDO's **six natural resources and energy industry predictions** for the new year. ►



Distributed Energy Infrastructure Saves Data Centers

AI data centers require huge amounts of energy. In 2026, as developers look to meet rising computing needs, the market will move away from large-scale utility developments in favor of powering data centers with project-specific assets that are directly attached to a particular site. For facility owners and operators, this distributed energy approach can be cheaper, more secure, and logistically simpler. These projects can also decrease the **risk of costly downtime** and may even be less prone to regulatory scrutiny, reducing the pressure that data centers place on existing grids and assuaging concerns around electricity prices and availability for nearby residents or businesses.

Distributed energy can come in many forms, but many will likely feature renewable energy sources. Solar and wind power are often the most reliable and easily scalable solutions for remote regions where the majority of data center exploration is taking place, and development will be further accelerated by the planned phase-out of renewable energy tax credits by mid-2026. While other alternatives like natural gas could generate the requisite amount of power, they tend to come with longer construction lead times and more logistical bottlenecks — such as transport and pipeline maintenance — that may not be able to keep pace with data center expansions. Local conditions and constraints will ultimately decide how any individual data center is powered, but companies offering distributed energy infrastructure should prepare now to scale their offerings and capture opportunities as market interest grows.



Energy constraints are just one piece of the data center puzzle. These facilities are mission-critical infrastructure, and companies need a comprehensive continuity plan to avoid detrimental downtime and mitigate costly compliance violations.

Renewable Energy Projects Accelerate, Defying Expectations

Given recent legislation and the governmental stance on clean energy, the public may expect renewable energy to decline over the coming years. In fact, the opposite is true. [Most new capacity](#) added to the U.S. grid in 2025 came from renewables, and development is poised to pick up further in 2026.

The recent reconciliation tax bill, commonly known as the [One Big Beautiful Bill Act](#) (OBBBA), included provisions that will end favorable tax credits and incentives for renewable energy development by mid-2026. For now, those credits remain active, and the renewables industry will see a flurry of activity in 2026 and 2027 as companies whose projects count on those credits seek to move ahead before the expiry date.

Rather than pulling back, businesses and funders are likely to accelerate every project possible to make sure they qualify for the credits and do not leave money on the table.


Rushing forward with infrastructure projects may compress resources during the first half of 2026. Everything from expertise to building materials will be in high demand. Companies could experience price increases and extended delivery times as they jostle with other developers over the same resource pool. To prepare, renewables companies should verify that their project roadmaps and budgets are updated to account for quicker timelines and more competitive pricing.



3 Agentic AI Takes Over Core Operations

The natural resources industry will further mature its AI use in 2026, moving from pilot programs to full **agentic AI** implementation. Agents embedded directly into operations will impact every area of the business, from grid reliability and supply chain logistics to equipment health and on-site safety monitoring. But the transition from generative to agentic AI calls for brand new ways of working. Operating alongside autonomous systems and agents will require skills that natural resources companies may not always have in-house.

In 2026, we expect labor competition to heat up as natural resources and energy firms seek talent that can help them navigate the shift to agentic operations. The industry may experience an increase in poaching and skilled labor costs as businesses attempt to attract and retain valuable personnel. Upskilling will also emerge as a crucial path to fill the talent gap, providing a path for existing employees to take on new responsibilities and evolve skillsets alongside these new technologies. Companies that do not invest in the next generation of talent risk falling behind their peers as faster-moving organizations reap the benefits of agentic AI.



Agentic AI implementation sounds exciting, but success will require leaders to develop a comprehensive roadmap that identifies impactful use cases specific to their company.

Renewables Companies Stick with Suppliers Despite FOEC Rules

4

In addition to sunsetting certain renewable energy tax credits and incentives, the OBBBA also introduced new [foreign entity of concern \(FEOC\) rules](#) that will affect renewables companies' ability to claim tax credits and incentives. The updated rules are designed to incentivize firms to prioritize domestic manufacturers, but they may have the opposite effect.

Foreign manufacturers who fall under the FEOC rules are often one of the only — if not the only — reliable sources of components like solar panels, battery modules, and other essential facets of clean energy builds. Some of these suppliers have a proven track record extending back as much as 10 – 20 years.

In 2026, renewable energy firms whose business involves companies that fall under the FEOC rules will have to weigh the risk of switching to an unproven manufacturer against the cost savings they may have received via the tax credits. Many companies will likely decide to stick with their existing suppliers, even if that means foregoing certain credits or incentives, as the risk of switching could prove even more costly. Defective or unreliable storage batteries, for example, could throw an entire project into jeopardy.



Deciding whether to maintain a relationship with an existing manufacturer or opt for a new supplier is a high-stakes process. Firms with upcoming or in-progress clean energy projects should proactively assess their best path forward. They should ask key questions like:

- ▶ Is there a vetted and viable alternative, should they elect to change supplier?
- ▶ To what degree are a project's economics currently reliant upon tax credits? What alternative funding sources, if any, exist?
- ▶ What communications or inputs from stakeholders should inform the final decision?

Nuclear Energy Powers Up

5

Nuclear construction within the U.S. has been extremely muted over the past decade. In 2026, that will begin to change.

Historically, the Department of Energy (DOE) provided grant funding to help de-risk nuclear energy projects, and investors have proven reluctant to fund nuclear power without such a cushion. But as new technologies, energy demands, and business models arise, private capital now appears ready to fill the gap. Private investment in nuclear energy, driven in large part by the same data center construction boom that is increasing demand for distributed energy infrastructure, is rising.

Large technology companies, for example, are seeking access to nuclear power generation in the form of small modular reactors (SMRs). SMRs could provide substantial long-term power solutions that comfortably offset the energy draw that data centers might otherwise pull from public utilities infrastructure.

But these projects are expensive and come with significant lead times — costing billions and taking up to five or even ten years to complete. This timescale still leaves plenty of room for quicker solutions, like solar facilities, to spring up in the meantime.

Even though it is still early, we expect companies to make concrete steps forward on nuclear energy projects in 2026. This push will in turn create new opportunities up and down the supply chain, especially for uranium mining companies, who should begin positioning themselves for new investment now. They will need to scale up their operations and start building new relationships as SMRs proliferate over the next decade.



Strategic Resilience and Agility Become Non-Negotiable

In 2026, volatility will become a natural resources industry norm. As geopolitical tensions heighten and regulatory shifts and technological disruption demand new ways of working, adaptability will represent the ultimate competitive advantage. Natural resources and energy companies that can pivot quickly, absorb shocks, and prioritize operational continuity are likely to outperform their more rigid peers.

6

Companies that fail to embed resilience into their core business strategy risk exposing themselves to risks like supply chain breakdowns, compliance penalties, and talent shortages. Conversely, organizations that embrace agility as a foundational requirement stand to unlock new growth opportunities, even in uncertain conditions.

As they navigate new and resurgent challenges in 2026, natural resources companies must not view resilience as a solely defensive posture. It will also be a core offensive strategy. Companies that institutionalize agility will position themselves to thrive amid continued disruption in it, marking themselves as leaders in a rapidly evolving global energy landscape.



Are You Ready for the Year Ahead?

Even the most diligent organizations can't predict every shift in industry and market trends. The key to success lies in building resilience and agility, enabling your business to adapt to unexpected changes with confidence. Explore our curated resources to learn how strategic resilience can position you for a successful year.



An Agile Framework for Navigating Economic Shifts



Activate Resilience in Your Organization



How AI Drives Strategic Resilience and Business ROI



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