Notice to neighbors of oil, gas proposals moves a step closer

After more than two years of discussion and consideration, the Montana Board of Oil and Gas Conservation (BOGC) voted on Aug. 10 to initiate rulemaking that, if finalized, would require notification of landowners within 2,500 feet of a proposed oil or gas well.

As outlined in the proposed rule, this notification would be required when a company applies for a drilling permit, giving neighbors time to respond before the company receives a go-ahead from the state.

Under Montana law, all citizens are considered “interested parties” when it comes to oil and gas development. What that means is, residents in the Belfry area were caught off guard in 2013 when an out-of-state oil company announced it was going to turn the Beartooth foothills into another Bakken. Carbon County Resource Council members and neighbors appealed to the Board of Oil & Gas Conservation that they were not allowed public comment on water quality issues. Rallies, protests, letter-writing campaigns and other actions ensued. One exploratory well was drilled near Belfry before the oil market crashed and the company quietly left the state.

Mark your calendar: Our 45th Annual Meeting is Nov. 18-19 at the newly renovated Northern Hotel in downtown Billings.

Nicolette Hahn Niman, an articulate defender of sustainable cattle ranching, will be the keynote speaker at the Annual Meeting. She is the author of:


In a review of Defending Beef, the Los Angeles Times said, “she's saying here that nearly everything we accept as gospel about the negative environmental effects of cattle ranching, and the ill health effects of eating red meat, is wrong…. And further, that cattle are necessary to the restoration and future health of this planet and its people.”

– Steve Paulson

Continued on Page 4
It took many to ride this rail out of valley

In late September I got to do something many of Northern Plains’ members, board officers, landowners, and allies sadly never had the chance to experience: I attended the celebration of the demise of the Tongue River Railroad. It was both a victory celebration and a bittersweet reminder of how many peoples’ lives were disrupted by the prospect of this ill-fated project.

In keeping with the unpredictable nature of the TRR fight, the weather forced us to make a last-minute change in venue. Thanks to Kelly and Cindy Radue’s generosity, we gathered more than 70 people in their large shop, where we had a grand time despite the pouring rain.

It’s difficult to put into words how it feels to finally meet allies and comrades in person, the people whose names populate the TRR history and emails flying back and forth during the long days of this protracted fight. Over roasted pork and local beer with a roaring fire keeping us cozy, we reminisced over stories. Some tales were touching, others hilarious (and some not appropriate for this family newsletter).

Mark Fix and Clint McRae reminded us that this fight was passed down from generation to generation, a sort of awful inheritance. We recognized the inherent importance of all the natural resource extraction, but rather that it is the signal of a turning point, an auspice of a new way of being. It’s difficult to put into words how it feels to pass down to their children, Jeanie Alderson talked about the toll it took on people throughout the years – that people passed away having never seen the conclusion of this terrible fight, with the cloud of this ruinous project still hanging over their heads.

The gathering reminded me that this victory is more meaningful, important, and poignant than all the money that the railroad could have ever made. I wouldn’t wish this kind of battle on anyone. But, in some ways, I see that it brought many people together, helped us to recognize the inherent importance of all landscapes, and demonstrated the power of organized people fighting for what really matters.

It is incumbent on us to ensure that this victory was not a harbinger from a historic trend of corporate control and harmful natural resource extraction, but rather that it is the signal of a turning point, an auspice of the world we will be creating for the future.

I know that with the organizing power of Northern Plains and our dedication as citizens, this is possible.

– Kate French
Northern Plains Chair

Northern Plains Resource Council is a grassroots conservation and family agriculture group. Northern Plains organizes Montana citizens to protect our water quality, family farms, and unique quality of life.

Northern Plains is a founding member of the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC), a regional network of eight grassroots community organizations that include 12,200 members in seven Western states. WORC helps its member groups succeed by providing training and coordinating regional issue campaigns. Visit WORC at www.worc.org.

Northern Plains Resource Council
220 South 27th Street, Suite A, Billings, MT 59101
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Sue was the kid that would yell at her grandmother for littering. “I always cared about the landscape, even as a little girl,” she says.

Sue Beug grew up on a farm in northeastern Colorado where she spent her days playing outside, enjoying the fresh air and the companionship of the family’s livestock.

A lifelong animal lover, Sue attended the University of Colorado and studied animal science. While at CU she met her husband, John Beug, over a dead cow in the anatomy lab. The two married and, after graduation, moved to Ipswitch, South Dakota. Sue laughs as she recounts her chagrin when they pulled into desolate Ipswitch, saying, “this can’t be it…okay this is it.” Sue’s “come what may” attitude helped her through the harsh 18 months in South Dakota.

Sue and John moved to Red Lodge 42 years ago, driving a yellow station wagon through the mountains of Montana. They raised their two sons in Red Lodge and Sue became very involved in the community. She and John built a passive solar veterinary clinic and started the large animal practice they owned just until this last year.

Gravel pit spurs action

Carbon County Resource Council (CCRC) and Northern Plains were on Sue’s radar as the organizations were in and out of the news for various campaigns. She became involved with CCRC during its fight against a proposed gravel pit in Red Lodge. This gravel pit would have been located less than a quarter mile from her house, “pretty much in my back yard” she recounts. “I’ve grown up with gravel pits,” says Sue, “I know what they look like, I know what they are, and I know what they can do to the water.” Sue joined the fight and, after the council successfully defeated the gravel pit in 2010, she stayed involved. She was elected Vice Chair of CCRC in 2013 and Chair in late 2015.

Drilling the Beartooths

In 2013 a Billings Gazette article in which the CEO of Energy Corporation of America said he would bring the Bakken to the Beartooths outraged Sue. “That’s not what Red Lodge is,” she states. CCRC’s three-year campaign to protect landowner and water rights during oil and gas development achieved victory this summer as they persuaded the Carbon County Commission to insert oil and gas permitting requirements into the county’s development regulations.

“People from so many different walks of life came together to execute a successful campaign,” Sue recalls. She describes this campaign as a testament to the power of perseverance. All those years of attending meetings of the Board of Oil and Gas Conservation and County Commission meetings, social media pressure, and public outreach have proven that the voices of citizens can make a big difference.

In addition to perseverance, Sue attributes much of the campaign’s success to accurate and compelling information. She says that when you put forth accurate information, “people can’t always be convinced to take your side but they will at least recognize that there are two sides to an issue, that’s what we’re seeing with the Board of Oil and Gas.”

Project needs your help to save Northern Plains’ history

W e’ve launched the Northern Plains History Project this year.

But the job is mountain-sized! Our office is full of materials like news clippings, photographs, publications, artwork, and organizational records. All these materials need to be reviewed, organized and, if appropriate, incorporated into new projects that serve to tell our history.

In addition, some of you no doubt also have materials that would add to the story of Northern Plains’ work. Would you be willing to share those materials?

- Do you have any photos that we should have? If so, would you be willing to let us scan them? Or could you send us a digital jpg file?
- Do you have any relevant video footage (VHS, digital video, any recordings)?
- Do you have stories of you or your family’s efforts in Northern Plains?
- Do you have any documents that we should have? Maybe you have a copy of important testimony or correspondence on some critical issue… do you have a copy of that testimony or correspondence you would share?

Montana would be a different place today if not for our work. We have built an amazing legacy and – now in our 45th year – we know we need to preserve that legacy. In the months ahead, we will commit staff time to this project.

We will also seek donations and volunteer help to accomplish this. After all, our 50th year isn’t far off!

If you can help with any of this, please contact Steve Paulson at the Billings office. Email steve@northernplains.org or call 406-248-1154.

– Steve Paulson
Northern Plains' Oil and Gas Task Force is gearing up for another legislative year. Repeated oil-by-rail accidents across the nation have resulted in persistent concerns about the risks associated with transporting oil through our communities on rail lines.

That is why the Task Force is giving priority to finding solutions to the risks of oil-by-rail transport at the 2017 Legislature.

Transporting oil by rail poses serious risks for rail communities. The oil train “blast zone” or “oil train fire impact zone,” spans one mile on either side of a railroad track. Every day, thousands of Montanans live, work, or go to school in this blast zone. People caught in this zone during a crude oil train derailment could be exposed to toxic smoke, oil spills, and volatile fires. They may even be forced to evacuate or lose their homes.

Unfortunately, oil trains have been derailing in the United States and Canada with disturbing frequency. Since the 2013 oil train derailment in Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, that killed 47 people, 14 oil trains have derailed in North America; 10 of these caused oil fires. A derailment in Culbertson on July 15, 2015, spilled 35,000 gallons of oil.

In October 2015, a state study found Montana's railways disturbingly close to communities across the state. Air, rail communities, and downtown business district are squarely in the oil train blast zone! In Miles City, BNSF Railway has reserved the right to travel at 60 miles per hour through town. We are very concerned.

— Deborah Hanson

Our house is one block off Main Street and two blocks from the railroad tracks. Here in Miles City, our courthouse, city hall, high school, jail and downtown business district are squarely in the oil train blast zone! In Miles City, BNSF Railway has reserved the right to travel at 60 miles per hour through town. We are very concerned.

— Hannah Hostetter

Northern Plains is laying the groundwork to change this situation. The Montana Legislature and public agencies should act to reduce the risks of transporting oil by rail and to protect the safety of Montana's rail communities, air, and water.

Over the past two months, Northern Plains canvassers have gone door-to-door in Miles City, Livingston, Culbertson, Bainville, Browning, Cut Bank, Whitefish, and Billings to hear from people living in the blast zone and to get them involved in this campaign. Additionally, we are building relationships with emergency responders from rail communities across the state.

Building our base of power on the issue of oil-by-rail transportation will help us to support legislation that develops solutions to the risks of transporting oil by rail and to identify ways to improve emergency response preparedness in Montana.

— Hannah Hostetter
Moving net metering forward will be top legislative priority

The Energy and Telecommunications Interim Committee held its final meetings on Sept. 8-9, culminating 15 months of work that Northern Plains invested in the committee's net metering study. Thanks to our members’ persistence, we were able to walk away with some positive momentum leading into the 2017 Legislature, which begins Jan. 2.

The bills will codify safety regulations for electricians and linemen, protect the current rate classification for net metering customers, and quintuple the net metering cap to 250 kilowatts for all publicly owned buildings.

Now we have to roll up our sleeves and get these measures passed in the 2017 legislative session.

The following bill numbers will change when legislators introduce them in the Legislature:
- LC NET1 – Require the Public Service Commission to biennially review and update requirements for connecting solar and other electrical generation systems to the grid;
- LC NET2 – Eliminate an exemption for individuals to perform electrical work on a grid-tied generator on their property or residence without a license;
- LC NET3 – Direct the Public Service Commission to evaluate metering technologies for customers based on grid operability, reliability, and billing considerations for customer-operated electrical generators;
- LC NET4 – Grandfather existing customer-operated electrical generators under future changes to the rate classification of net metering customers, which creates a path forward for the solar industry, utilities, customer generators, and other utility customers;
- LC NET5 – Raise the net metering generating capacity cap to 250 kilowatts for all federal, state, county, municipal, and tribal government buildings.

LC NET 4 and 5 are the highest priorities for Northern Plains as we prepare for the 2017 session.

Various ideas emerge over Colstrip coal plants, workers

Northern Plains has been closely following legislation that was passed by the Energy and Telecommunications Interim Committee related to the closure of Colstrip units 1 and 2, because this will be a dominant issue throughout the 2017 legislative session.

- LC COL1 – Appropriate $100,000 so Montana can participate in rate hearings in Washington state and participate in out-of-state proceedings involving companies that own parts of the Colstrip plants;
- LC COL2 – Establish remediation requirements for companies that decommission power plants. This bill was heavily amended with suggestions proposed by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. The bill will continue to be refined until the Legislature convenes in January;
- LC COL3 – Double the transmission tax paid by utilities that transmit power out of Colstrip to 30 cents a megawatt and use the money to pay for programs that support local governments, economic development organization, and displaced workers. A bill tied to this was dropped after LC COL3 was amended. This amended version of the bill took the legislation off the table that had aimed to raid the Coal Tax Trust Fund;
- LC COL5 – Establish an impact fee that must be paid by utilities that intend to retire coal-fired plants or parts of one. Split the fee, which would be millions of dollars, between school districts, counties, worker retraining programs, and the state’s general fund;
- LC COL6 – Create a task force to look at benefits and retirement security for employees affected by the bankruptcy of any natural-resource based company in Montana.

The only draft bill not to move forward would have allowed large-scale users who currently get power from Colstrip to divert funds that go into energy efficiency programs to offset the cost of new power contracts.

Phone tree a great way to help

Your voice matters – and it makes a difference – especially during the legislative session. Now think about all the members of our organization raising their voices.

Starting in January, we need your help to not only raise our issues, but to help block bad bills – of which there’s never a shortage – from passing.

Can you volunteer to make calls a few times during the 2017 Legislature? Our phone tree is a great way for each of us to amplify our own voice!

Please take action and sign up for our legislative phone tree today!

Name: ________________________________________________________________
- □ Yes, I can make 3-5 calls
- □ Yes, I can make 2-3 calls
- □ Yes, I can make a call to my legislator

Primary phone number: __________________________

Address: ____________________________________________________________

Do you have an email address?
- □ Yes ____________________________________________________________
- □ No

Mail this completed slip to 220 S. 27th St., Billings, MT 59101.

Questions? Contact eddie@northernplains.org or call 406-248-1154.
Property-Assessed Clean Energy (PACE)

Saving money, creating good jobs, investing in local communities

Many of our homes and businesses are old, inefficient buildings in need of upgrades. Although upgrades would save us much more money on utilities than they cost in the long run, it can be challenging to afford the up-front cost. With Property-Assessed Clean Energy (PACE), you can overcome that financing gap and, as a result, save yourself money, and create local good-paying jobs.

What is PACE?

PACE is a simple and effective way to finance energy efficiency, renewable energy, and water conservation improvements to buildings. Projects are funded by private capital providers (banks, credit unions, etc.) and repayment is facilitated by the local municipality through a property assessment. PACE assessments can finance up to 100% of a project’s costs and are repaid with a property assessment of up to 20 years. Projects and terms are designed so that annual utility bill savings are greater than annual payments.

Eligible Projects are energy and water-saving upgrades that are affixed to the property, including:

- Insulation
- New heating and cooling systems
- Lighting improvements
- Solar panels and other on-site renewable energy
- Water efficient fixtures and more.

Eligible Property Types include residential, commercial, industrial, non-profit, and agricultural. The only ineligible properties are state or local government buildings, because they are associated with the entity that arranges and enforces repayment.

Why PACE?

- Adds value – Property owners across the U.S. are using PACE because it saves them money and makes their buildings more valuable. Improving buildings is an economic revitalization strategy for Main Street Montana and, over the long term, it will increase the property tax base.

- Accessible to everyone – Financing approval is simple. No credit check is necessary. You are only required to be current on your property taxes. This is possible because projects are designed so your annual utility savings exceed your annual payments.

- No up-front costs – PACE provides up to 100% financing, even covering the “soft” cost of a project such as energy audits.

- Property assessment, not a loan – PACE is NOT a loan! Projects are financed through an assessment on the property. This means that homeowners and businesses do not have to use their limited line of credit to finance property upgrades.

- Transfers to new owner upon sale – PACE financing stays with the property upon sale or foreclosure. An owner can invest in the property even if their future with the property is uncertain.

- Voluntary – PACE is voluntary, both for counties and individual property owners. Once state legislation is passed, counties and charter or “home rule” cities choose whether to create a PACE district. When a county opts in, only property owners who choose to pursue a PACE assessment will be affected.

- Solves owner-tenant “split incentive” – Few renters will invest in and improve a building they don’t own – even if it could significantly reduce their utility bills. Similarly, a property owner may not want to take out a loan to make energy upgrades. Thus there is a “split incentive.” With PACE, property owners instead finance with a property assessment that doesn’t affect their line of credit. The PACE assessment costs will be passed along to renters, who will also see utility savings greater than increases in rent.

- Financed with private capital – PACE projects are funded with private capital. PACE can attract a wide range of private market investors with low interest rates because assessment liens are a proven, strong form of credit, backed by collateral (the property).

- Tried and true – Local government assessment financing has been used effectively for decades throughout the United States to fund improvements to private property that meet a public purpose.

- Creates local jobs – When building owners can finance the up-front cost of an energy efficiency project, more projects are completed, creating more work for HVAC, lighting, insulation, electric contractors, and renewable energy installers.

How do we get PACE?

The first step to making PACE a reality in Montana is to pass PACE-enabling legislation in the state legislature. Northern Plains is building a coalition of contractors and suppliers, private financiers, counties and cities, small businesses, and affordable housing providers that support PACE and will lobby the 2017 legislature for PACE legislation.

Counties and charter or “home rule” cities are critical to PACE, because participation is voluntary even after PACE-enabling legislation is passed at the state level. Local governments are the entity that will choose whether to participate in PACE by establishing a PACE district.

Want to see PACE in Montana? Learn how you can help with PACE outreach in your community. Contact Alicia at alicia@northernplains.org or call 406-248-1154.

– Alicia Pettys
Rural Montanans can take back their power

For the past few years, Northern Plains Resource Council has been encouraging its rural members to get more engaged with their rural electric cooperatives. The goal of our campaign is to get Montana’s rural electric cooperatives to work more openly with their members to achieve affordable power by adopting cleaner, cheaper, and faster energy solutions. But why is this campaign needed — and why now?

From radical beginnings…

Over the last few decades, rural electric co-ops have become less innovative and less open to member participation. Co-ops were the pioneering leaders behind the electrification and modernization of rural America, and were made possible by the passage of the Rural Electrification Act in 1936.

Rural electric cooperatives were founded with the mission of bringing affordable and reliable power to rural areas. They were also founded on cooperative principles, including democratic member control, which makes them unique in that their customers are also their member-owners. A group of people got together, assumed the work of electrifying their surrounding counties, took on the collective risk of repaying financing, and got to work raising poles and wires.

Many who were alive during that time remember the great pride and sense of accomplishment that was felt when the first lightbulbs turned on in rural homes and barns.

…but to a complacent today

Today, few people feel such a connection to their rural electric cooperative. Many people interact with their co-op no differently than customers of NorthWestern Energy might—they pay their monthly bill. A select few attend their co-op’s Annual Meeting to enjoy a nice meal, but opportunities for democratic member control have become limited.

Business goes on in the board meetings, behind closed doors; members have little say in decision-making, even about decisions as important as the cooperative signing long-term 20- to 60-year power purchase contracts on members’ behalf.

Why change?

Montana electric co-ops are falling behind in development of energy efficiency and renewable energy programs. It’s high-time that our co-ops return to the principles on which they were founded and support rural economic progress by supporting clean energy.

1. Coal is no longer the least-cost power source.

The economics of energy are rapidly changing. Coal was the cheapest energy source of the last century, but natural gas-fired electricity is now less costly than coal. NorthWestern Energy’s own filings with the Public Service Commission show that coal is the most costly energy source in its portfolio, while wind farms like Judith Gap are the least costly. Many Montana cooperatives are largely coal-dependent or have even engaged in speculation in coal-fired power, creating financial headaches for the co-op and its members; we need decisive action by the co-ops to secure affordable energy alternatives for their members.

2. Cleaner, cheaper, faster energy solutions are available.

The least-cost energy is the energy we don’t use. Investing in energy efficiency measures for homes and businesses helps co-ops reduce rates and their energy load for the long term. Many co-ops nationwide are financing the up-front cost of energy efficiency upgrades for their customers and allowing them to repay on-bill, with monthly utility bill savings exceeding repayment costs.

Moreover, with the installed cost of solar power dropping over 50% since 2008, rooftop solar has now reached “grid parity.” By installing a solar array on your home, you can lock in the price of power for 25-plus years, save money on your electric bill, and become more energy independent. Many farmers and ranchers are also taking advantage of solar for stock water pumping and powering center-pivot irrigation systems.

Montana co-ops need policies that enable members to pursue their own small scale generation, rather than erecting obstacles to keep members from doing so (as some Montana co-ops have done) while also finding ways to invest in their own renewable energy generation.

3. Solar is driving job growth.

Nationally, the burgeoning solar industry already out-employs both coal and oil extraction. Solar employs more than 208,000 people and employment has been growing 20% year over year. Developing Montana’s great solar and wind potential is a forward-thinking economic development strategy.

A better way

The good news is that a handful of forward-looking electric cooperatives have already set a precedent for smarter and cleaner energy. We can look to these cooperatives to learn how to apply clean energy programs in a rural setting:

- Flathead Electric (MT)
- Roanoke Electric (AK)
- Delta Montrose Electric (CO)
- Farmers Electric (IA)
- Kit Carson Electric (NM)

In doing so, these co-ops have brought multiple long-term benefits to their communities: creating jobs and sustaining small businesses, reducing energy bills, keeping money in the community, reducing energy loads, providing greater energy independence and cleaner air. We can do the same for rural communities across Montana.

Want to bring these benefits to your co-op? Contact Alicia at alicia@northernplains.org

– Alicia Pettys
When we first started getting involved in the Tongue River Railroad issue, Jeanie Alderson and I were probably in grade school. We’re the second generation that’s been fighting this thing, and getting into the third generation now. Victory is sweet when it’s a long battle — and when you finally win at the end of it.

– Colstrip-area rancher Clint McRae

You know, in the later years, with Otter Creek tracts being the biggest coal mine in the country, and as more awareness of the Tongue River Valley came, and then the whole coal export deal, people started to know about it. But for about 25 years, really, who gave a crap about the Tongue River Valley? But you guys did, and you showed up, and – we won. So thank you.

– Birney-area rancher Jeanie Alderson

On a cold, rainy Saturday in September, more than 70 Northern Plains members and friends gathered at Kelly and Cindy Radue’s ranch outside of Miles City to celebrate the downfall of the Tongue River Railroad.

Over a barbecue dinner of local pulled pork, beans, salads, desserts, and plenty of Montana-brewed beer, members who took part in various stages of the TRR fight from the 1970s to this past spring swapped stories, sang songs, and reminisced about the decades-long fight to protect family farm and ranch land in southeastern Montana from condemnation by the coal-hauling railroad.

Longtime Northern Plains leader Beth Kaeding emceed the party and set the mood early on.

“For more than 30 years,” she said, “Northern Plains members and others have joined together to oppose the speculative schemes proposed by those wanting to make a fast buck and get out, leaving the land, water, wildlife, and agricultural economy of this peaceful rural valley destroyed.

“It is through the love of place, shared determination, deep conviction, tenacity, grit, and willingness to stay the course that we – together – have KILLED this railroad!”

Kelly Radue pointed out from the front door of his heated shop directly at the path of the original proposed Tongue River Railroad, which would have passed right next to his house at the edge of his driveway.

– Svein Newman

After fighting the proposed coal-hauling Tongue River Railroad for 38 years, Northern Plains members and friends gather for a group photo at Kelly and Cindy Radue’s place south of Miles City during a Sept. 24 victory celebration.
Hey, gang: There’s a hole in the wall

Staff Director Teresa Erickson got a phone call in the middle of the night Sept. 27 to inform her that an SUV had crashed into the north wall of the large conference room in our Home on the Range building at high speed. When she arrived at the building, the Dodge Durango was still sitting inside the conference room. Police are still looking for the driver who fled on foot.

Teresa and Tim Ennis (of WORC) worked until 3 a.m., putting boards over the hole to secure the space until repairs can be made. It was cleaned up enough for the Board of Directors’ meeting Oct. 8.

We count our blessings that this happened when no one was in the room.
Homegrown Prosperity: ‘We ARE the economy’

Conference sparks ideas, opportunities for local action

In early September, more than 70 people gathered in Billings for the Homegrown Prosperity Conference to explore the audacious goal of building stronger local economies that create prosperity for all Montanans.

As speaker Kimber Lanning of Local First Arizona reminded the crowd, “The economy is not something far away that somebody else is going to fix for us. We ARE the economy.”

At the conference we joined together to realize the collective strength we have, as citizens, to drive the conversation about the economy, challenge the “way it’s always been done” by the economic development establishment, and learn to vote with our dollars in support of our local economies.

We believe that our local economies can become more diverse and resilient, in order to better weather the booms and busts of Montana’s volatile natural resource economy and create meaningful work for rural and young people in the place they call home.

Thus the conference explored four sectors we believe can be instrumental in creating a more prosperous, homegrown economy.

Four opportunities include:

1. Rebuild our regional food system, including value-added processing, distribution, and purchasing by major public and private institutions, so that Montana producers receive a greater share of the food dollar, consumers have access to more Montana-grown food, and more of our food dollars circulate within our local economy. This includes the campaign coming out of Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council for a “food hub” serving Billings and the surrounding region.

2. Enable innovative financing tools for the up-front costs of energy efficiency and clean energy for homes and businesses to make the savings more accessible to everyone. In turn, we can increase the use of clean energy, create local jobs, save consumers money and increase business profitability. This includes our campaigns to enable Property-Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) and on-bill financing of energy efficiency at rural electric cooperatives.

3. Rethink local economies to see local, independent businesses as the backbone of our economy. Support and retain local independent businesses, historic buildings, and walkable neighborhoods with a sense of character and place, rather than using our resources to attract large industries and big box stores.

4. Create local business networks to support local, independent businesses and create collective power so they can lobby for their common interests. Encourage local businesses to source from other local businesses, engage consumers as “localists” or “friends of downtown,” and invest in community banks and credit unions that lend in the local community.

Looking back at the conference, two additional themes stand out that are worth exploring in more depth.

Justice and inclusivity

Chris Woolery of How $martKY and Miya Yoshitani from Asian Pacific Environmental Network (APEN) challenged us to always ask first and foremost, “Who benefits?”

As we build out the clean energy economy, are jobs being created in the places that need them most? And while the least-cost energy is the energy we don’t use, how can we ensure that everyone can access the cost-saving opportunities of energy efficiency and rooftop solar?

APEN works to organize Asian Pacific Islander (API) communities in the East Bay area of San Francisco. They seek a just transition away from the polluting refineries in the area and to create a clean energy economy in California that includes Asian Pacific Islanders and other people of color.

As Yoshitani said, “Our objective [for our communities] is health, wealth, and self-determination.” She went on to say, “We must change the energy system to meet the needs of the people” and ensure that “the wealth and profits from renewable energy go to the communities that need it.”

Marci McLean of Western Native Voice raised the imperative to engage and empower Montana’s native communities — especially in voting and civic life — after decades of sanctioned cultural genocide by the U.S. government that has created isolation, historic underinvestment, and limited, sub-par services.

Continued on Page 11
McLean offered the positive example of the successful effort to pass Medicaid expansion in 2014. Native students and community leaders overcame racist remarks from legislators and “allies” that encouraged them to stay home rather than hurt the cause. These people made their voices heard in a historic show of strength at the Montana Capitol.

Megan Jessee from the Culinary Arts Program at Passages, a transitional facility for women coming out of the prison system, offered a similar message from a different perspective. “The restaurant industry is an extremely forgiving industry. They’ll give these girls a second chance,” Jessee said. Thus, Passages has built a culinary training program that graduates young women through a Department of Labor-certified program and into jobs at top area restaurants making $10-$15 an hour. Moreover, their recidivism rate is 9 percent compared to the average of 28 percent in Montana.

Pushing ourselves to ask who will benefit and to create inclusive solutions is a truly life-changing decision for our communities.

Rethinking local economies

Kimber Lanning of Local First Arizona challenged us to think about the place we love most in the world, and compare that to the big-box-store economic development we see taking place in our communities.

“If this isn’t what we envision when we think of great places, then why are we building it?” said Lanning.

It’s more than a feeling, though. Lanning also shared the economics that back it up, to prove that local, independent businesses create a stronger local economy than corporate chains and franchises.

Compare six Starbucks (which pays its employees well and even offers benefits) to six local coffee shops. While they may seem similar on the surface, the local coffee shops each employed a graphic designer and an accountant, who in turn have cleaning staff who maintain their offices, keeping your latte money recirculating through the community multiple times to create secondary and tertiary impacts. Starbucks, however, only has one graphic designer and one accounting firm for all the thousands of stores nationwide, and they are not in Montana.

There is, too, the impact of attracting new corporate chains and displacing local businesses. Lanning added, “You can’t take credit for the two jobs you attracted if you don’t also take responsibility for the three jobs that you eliminated.”

Moreover, local and independent businesses in dense downtowns are proven to be more economically efficient than urban sprawl. Lanning shared statistics about the significantly greater number of jobs per square feet in a historic redevelopment compared to new box store construction. Lisa Harmon of the Downtown Billings Alliance reinforced this by comparing the property taxes per square foot for Shiloh Crossing (which average 26¢) compared to downtown Billings (which averages $6 or more.)

Harmon added, “Don’t think for a moment that you’re not subsidizing the sprawl on the West End.” Taxpayers foot the bill for everything from new road construction to expansion of services like sewer, water, and fire protection. Added together, this equals a drastically different value proposition than many citizens and decision makers realize.

What next?

Northern Plains will now move forward to organize, network, educate, and lobby to create these stronger and more diverse local economies. If you would like to be part of the effort in your community, please contact Alicia at alicia@northernplains.org – Alicia Pettys
State looking at rules on radioactive oilfield waste

After more than three years of pressuring the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to develop formal rules to govern the transportation and disposal of solid waste from oil and gas operations, the DEQ has finally indicated its intention to finalize rules by the end of 2017.

To keep up the pressure on DEQ, Northern Plains launched a multi-week exposé on our blog, Plains Speaking, to give members a comprehensive look at the complicated history of oilfield waste disposal in Montana (a history the industry is more than happy to keep in the shadows).

The first post in the series, “Out of sight, out of mind?” featured Seth Newton of Glendive, and provided a background of what oil and gas solid waste is, what risks it poses to agriculture and human health, and what agencies do (and do not do) to monitor its safe disposal.

Seth lives on the road to Oaks Disposal, Montana's only facility currently accepting and disposing of radioactive, solid oilfield waste. He and his neighbors have consistently had difficulty getting state agencies to take their concerns seriously and act with immediacy.

‐ Hannah Hostetter

Army Corps releases coal port study

On September 30, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers released its Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Millennium Bulk Terminals’ proposed coal export facility.

This is the second DEIS for this project, following one conducted by the Washington Department of Ecology.

The Longview, Wash., export port would be the largest coal export terminal in North America, transporting up to 44 million tons of coal daily across Montana, through the Pacific Northwest, and on to Asia.

The Army Corps’ review ignores the broader impacts beyond the footprint of the terminal, including possible impacts in Montana and a majority of the project's climate impacts. If this facility is approved, it would add 16 coal trains a day (full and empty) crossing Montana from the Powder River Basin.

The Northern Plains Coal Task Force will be submitting substantive comments to the Army Corps. If you would like to comment on the DEIS, you can do so by checking your email for an action alert from us. That alert will give you a few key points that need to be made about this proposed project.

Your voice does make a difference. Informed citizens have had tremendous success against these destructive project proposals. Make yourself heard on this one, too!

‐ Ella Smith

240,000 comments submitted on coal leasing reform

The federal Bureau of Land Management announced in late September that it had received more than 240,000 comments on coal leasing reform during the scoping period for the agency's Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS).

The PEIS took a thorough look at the federal coal leasing system to identify potential reforms. More than 15 studies found that the BLM was subsidizing coal by selling it below market value.

More than 91% of commenters called for closing loopholes in the federal coal leasing system – making sure taxpayers get their fair share from coal sales, that companies mining publicly owned coal do more to reclaim land and water, and calling for the BLM to transition away from coal to help meet the nation's goals of averting climate change.

Northern Plains members traveled out of state to testify at four of five official national hearings (none in Montana). Members also testified at an unofficial hearing by Sen. Steve Daines in Billings.

Thanks to all of you who sent in comments.

‐ Svein Newman
Northern Hotel a new venue this year for Northern Plains’ annual gathering

It’s been a noteworthy year for all of us in Northern Plains. Now we’re coming up on our 45th Annual Meeting, and we invite you to celebrate the year’s successes and help us to look forward.

The 2016 Annual Meeting will be the weekend before Thanksgiving – Nov. 18-19 – at a new location, the Northern Hotel in downtown Billings.

We hope you can come!

Our bylaws define the Annual Meeting as a time to conduct Northern Plains’ business. It’s your best opportunity to help steer Northern Plains through the coming year, and to adopt resolutions on important public policy questions.

The Annual Meeting is also a time to get to know one another better, learning together from our speakers and programs, and socializing with fellow members.

Locally produced food will once again be a major part of our meal menus.

Our silent auction is one of the best around! We already have donations coming in, and you are guaranteed to find things you like.

Make plans now to attend the 2016 Annual Meeting!

– Steve Paulson

Other Annual Meeting particulars you need to know

Annual Meeting schedule
See listing at left.

Meeting of the Membership
Being a member means you have the right to vote on policy resolutions that help guide Northern Plains’ work in the year ahead.

Because policy resolutions undergo many changes during the course of debate, you must be present at the Meeting of the Membership (business meeting) in order to vote on resolutions.

New location this year
The historic Northern Hotel is recently renovated and is a first-rate facility. We have a limited number of rooms available at a discounted price – a king or queen bed for $99/night, other rooms also at discounted rates. The number of discounted rooms is limited, so reserve your room early!

Call for award nominations
Bob Tully Spirit Award
Named after one of Northern Plains’ founding members, the Bob Tully Spirit Award recognizes an exemplary leader who has displayed courage, strategic thinking, and a sense of humor in longtime service to Northern Plains.

Mary Donohoe “Tell It Like It Is” Award
Mary Donohoe was a longtime member who was well-known for her spirited determination and her willingness to speak up for Northern Plains. This award recognizes a member who, in the past year, wasn’t afraid to tell it like it is.

Nominations for both awards must be received in the Northern Plains office by Oct. 24. Email nominations to caleb@northernplains.org or call 406-248-1154.

Brochure and election ballot
The slate of candidates put forward by the Nominations Committee will appear on a ballot mailed to each member whose dues are current. (The ballot will be enclosed in your Annual Meeting brochure.) There is also space for write-ins. The seats you can vote on include officers and at-large delegates. BALLOTS WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE AT THE ANNUAL MEETING.

The Board has determined that ballots must be received in the Northern Plains office by the close of business on Nov. 17.

Silent auction items
The auction’s success depends on you!
Your donations and your participation make the Annual Meeting auctions special for everyone.

Can you contribute to the Annual Meeting auction?
■ Homemade foodstuffs…Mmmmmm!
■ Products or services from your business!
■ Items you’ve made with your own hands!
■ Any kind of cool stuff!

If you can donate an item, it helps us a lot if we know the particulars ahead of time. Even if you can’t get the item here until the Annual Meeting, please give us advance notice. (Nov. 13 would be real nice!) Thank you!

And be sure to bid on something! You’re guaranteed to find good stuff that you would like.

Remember that the whole point of our auction is to strengthen Northern Plains’ work in the year ahead. We all appreciate whatever help you can give to make it a success!

If you have something to donate, please call Karen Olson at 406-248-1154, or email karen@northernplains.org.

ANNUAL MEETING DEADLINES

Resolutions
NOTE: The deadline to submit resolutions to the Resolutions Committee has passed. If you wish to introduce a resolution at the Annual Meeting, the members present must vote to add it to the meeting agenda. You also need to bring enough copies of your draft resolution so everyone can have one to refer to during debate.

Awards
Oct. 24 – Nominations due for Bob Tully and Mary Donohoe awards. Call Caleb at 406-248-1154 or email caleb@northernplains.org.

Hotel rooms
Nov. 1 – Make your reduced-rate room reservation ($99 for king or queen bed, more for other rooms) at the Northern Hotel, 406-867-6767. There are a limited number of low-priced rooms available, so reserve early!

Early registration
Nov. 11 – Early-bird registration ends. SAVE MONEY, REGISTER EARLY!
■ Call Northern Plains at 406-248-1154
■ Or email karen@northernplains.org
■ Or register online at www.northernplains.org

Ballots
5 p.m. Nov. 17 – Election ballots must be returned to Northern Plains office. BALLOTS WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE AT THE ANNUAL MEETING.
Getting hands dirty at Soil Summit

Healthy soil is goal of Oct. 15 gathering

A s this edition of The Plains Truth was being mailed, farmers and ranchers from across Montana prepared to gather in Billings for Montana’s first-ever Soil Summit.

The Oct. 15 event is part of Northern Plains’ Soil Campaign, which works to empower Montana farmers, ranchers, and consumers with the ideas and tools they need to build a vibrant and sustainable Montana food system. We start from the premise that healthy soil is the foundation of viable farms and ranches, communities, and rural economies.

The Soil Summit represents a major step in elevating and disseminating this effort, and building support for farmers and ranchers looking to raise healthy food, keep their operations profitable, and do right by the land and the climate.

The Soil Summit is a chance for producers and the general public to learn about soil health and contribute to the conversation about how we can best put soil-focused management to work for Montana ag operations.

“The Soil Summit is a response to the needs of Montana producers as they look for ways to build soil carbon, monitor progress, and explore opportunities for getting rewarded for carbon sequestration to combat climate change,” said Northern Plains member/rancher Steve Charter.

The Summit also offers a chance for producers to share their experience and insights, success stories, available information about carbon farming, the possibility of forming regional soil monitoring networks, and policy priorities for more climate-friendly agriculture.

– Eamon Heberlein

BMLA asks for coal protections

I n early September, members of the Bull Mountain Land Alliance traveled to Helena to meet with Tom Livers, the Director of Montana’s Department of Environmental Quality, and senior members of his staff.

They drove to Helena to advocate for better protection for their land and water in the face of underground (longwall) coal mining.

As longwall mining progresses in the Bulls and underground coal seams are removed, it creates subsidence cracks in the earth’s surface. These cracks can cause significant damage to vital water resources, draining springs and wells that ranchers and wildlife depend on.

BMLA members are pushing for a mutual agreement on the quantity and quality of water in the Bulls before mining continues, so that the coal company can be held accountable for replacing that water if/when they damage it.

– Svein Newman

GNA seeks use for mine waste

O ver the past few months, the Good Neighbor Agreement Task Force has been working to find use for excess rock coming out of the new mine development outside of Dean, Montana. Rather than allowing the material to pile up and require large-scale reclamation later, we’ve agreed to use a large portion of the rock to fix a mangled Forest Service access road up to Chrome Lake.

This project saves the need for waste storage and finds a productive use for the mining byproduct. This serves as another positive example of the Good Neighbor Agreement in action.

– Cameron Clevidence
Bear Creek opposes grizzly hunts in basin

Bear Creek Council hosted the second annual Wild & Scenic Film Festival in Gardiner in mid-September. This year’s event attracted nearly 100 guests to the Gardiner School and featured a short Northern Plains film starring Steve Charter.

Bear Creek Council is also working with the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce and local businesses to oppose grizzly bear dellisting and trophy hunting in the Gardiner basin. Grizzly bears are one of the largest attractions to visitors in the Yellowstone region, and many biologists argue that they are not fully recovered in the ecosystem.

– Maggie Zaback

Yellowstone Bend fetes solar on library

Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council hosted the Here Comes the Sun party at the Livingston-Park County Public Library. This celebration marked the unveiling of the solar array installed on the library as a result of a grant provided by NorthWestern Energy and obtained through the hard work of YBCC.

Orion Thornton, owner of OnSite Energy, gave a presentation on solar capacity and affordability in Montana. Attendees enjoyed refreshments and looked over a solar display provided by Park High School.

– Sydney Ausen

YVCC elects pair to fill vacancies

Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council elected two new officers at its Annual Meeting in late August. Bobby Carmody was elected Treasurer and Jennifer Merecki was elected Secretary. Both were elected to fill out the remaining year of a two-year term.

They join existing Steering Committee members Larry Bean (Chair), Emily Hannaman (Vice Chair), and Stuart Shay (Northern Plains Board Representative).

– Alicia Petrys

SPA enlists notaries for zoning petition

Stillwater Protective Association members are working on the next steps to pass a citizen-initiated zone to protect landowners from impacts associated with oil and gas drilling.

After turning in a petition of more than 360 landowners to create a zoning district in November 2015, Stillwater County informed SPA in July that many of the signatures for trusts and business entities will require notarized signatures. Despite not being informed of this when they inquired at the beginning of the signature collection process, SPA members are moving forward with renewed signature-gathering. SPA’s ranks now include three new notary publics and members will collect notarized signatures over the coming months.

– Cameron Clevidence

CMRC keeps up local foods work

It has been a busy summer for Central Montana Resource Council and we’re gearing up for an active fall. In August, CMRC held its annual Dinner in the Garden to raise money for the Green Share garden. The garden has delivered 900 pounds of produce to Meals On Wheels and the Community Cupboard. The Local Foods Task Force raised $1,481 to purchase next year’s supplies and seeds.

On Sept. 9, CMRC’s water task force kicked off its annual gun raffle at the Cheokey Festival. The raffle has already raised over $1,000; the drawing will be held Oct. 19.

CMRC continues working to make a community solar installation accessible for Fergus Rural Electric Cooperative members and will be holding an educational seminar in Lewistown during November to educate co-op customers about this opportunity.

– Adam Haight

Cottonwood teaches solar in Big Timber

Cottonwood Resource Council hosted a Put the Sun to Work for You solar energy workshop in September in Big Timber.

Kyle MacVean of Harvest Solar in Bozeman gave the audience an overview of residential solar installation.

– Hannah Hostetter

CCRC celebrates water, setback rules

Carbon County Resource Council held a victory party in August to celebrate its recent organizing success.

After three years of hard campaign work, CCRC has made solid improvements in protections for water resources and property rights during oil and gas development.

The citizen-initiated regulations, approved by the Carbon County Commission in July, give landowners the right to receive baseline water testing and require a 750-foot minimum setback of oil and gas development from homes.

Additionally, oil and gas companies must now seek approval from the County as well as the state Board of Oil and Gas Conservation before a permit can be issued.

The potluck celebration was held at the home of Deb and Steve Muth. CCRC members and guests ate, drank, and were merry!

– Sydney Ausen

Sleeping Giant solarizing Helena

Sleeping Giant Citizens Council is continuing its crusade to blanket downtown Helena with solar arrays.

On Sept. 15, Sleeping Giant hosted the second annual Sun Run with the goal of raising the funds for a solar array on the Holter Museum in downtown Helena. More than 100 people ran in the race, and Sleeping Giant expects the panel will go up on the museum in the spring.

Last year, Sleeping Giant raised money for a 44 kW solar system on the Lewis and Clark Library. That array should be installed before Thanksgiving, and a big unveiling event is in the planning stages.

– Ella Smith

Enjoying this Plains Truth? Don’t toss it; share it with a friend and tell them it’s one of the benefits of belonging to Northern Plains. You also can find a full-color .pdf version on the northernplains.org website.
Northern Plains backs Standing Rock protest

The leadership of Northern Plains Resource Council recently came out in support of the ongoing protest of the Dakota Access Pipeline by the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe in North Dakota and all other Indian nations that have taken action against the pipeline. Here is the statement:

“Northern Plains Resource Council is a grassroots conservation and family agriculture group.

“We organize Montanans to protect our water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life.

“We strongly support the people of the Standing Rock Nation and their historic effort to stop the Dakota Access Pipeline from endangering their tribal lands, sacred sites, and the health of the Missouri River. Montanans have lived through the two massive oil pipeline breaks in the Yellowstone River in the past five years alone; we appreciate the courage of the Standing Rock Sioux as they protect future generations from this project.

“We are inspired by the courage of the Standing Rock Sioux Nation and all other tribes who have converged on the Standing Rock Sioux Reservation to offer powerful, peaceful, and prayerful resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline and the immense political and economic power of the multinational corporations backing it.

“We are grateful to all nations and peoples who stand together in unity and solidarity to protect the water, land, and cultures that are so vital to the Native peoples of the Great Plains, as well as to all Americans.

“We believe that all who care about land, water, and a livable future need to listen to the words and actions of the Standing Rock Sioux as they protect their home. We thank the tribe for reminding us and the whole world that ‘water is life,’ and for demanding that their rights, wisdom, and traditions be respected.”

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