

## 2015 Annual Report

It was a busy year with positive developments on the coal, Keystone XL pipeline, and clean-energy fronts

## Homegrown Prosperity

Northern Plains' initiative to help rural communities make the transition to more resilient and diverse local economies

## Comment card insert

*Federal coal reforms*

Help stop the coal giveaway and close the loopholes in the coal leasing program

# THE PLAINS TRUTH

VOICE OF THE NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL

Volume 45, Issue 2, Spring 2016

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# Persistence pays in major victories

## Arch Coal pulls plug on Otter Creek mine

**O**n March 10, bankrupt Arch Coal announced in a press release that it “is suspending efforts to secure a mining permit for the Otter Creek coal reserves.” Arch cited “capital constraints, near-term weakness in coal markets, and an extended and uncertain permitting outlook.”

*Plains Truth* readers are well aware, by now, that the Otter Creek mine was the largest new coal strip mine proposed in the United States, and would have required construction of the Tongue River Railroad, a rail line that proposed to use the power of eminent domain to condemn 42 miles of family ranch land to serve a single coal mine.

“The writing was on the wall,” said Dawson

*Continued on Page 4*

## Board: End of line for Tongue River Railroad

**T**he Surface Transportation Board on April 26 dismissed Tongue River Railroad Company’s (TRRC) application to build the proposed coal-hauling Tongue River Railroad. The railroad would have used the power of federal eminent domain to condemn family farm and ranch land in southeastern Montana in order to haul coal from Arch Coal’s proposed Otter Creek mine to Asian export markets.

“For more than 30 years we have said that the Tongue River Railroad is a project in search of a purpose,” said Clint McRae, a Northern Plains member whose Rosebud Creek ranch would have been cut in two by the proposed rail line. “It has always been based on speculation, not need. The Surface Transportation Board

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For more than 30 years we have said that the Tongue River Railroad is a project in search of a purpose.

– Rancher Clint McRae

## Five reasons to oppose TPP trade deal



**G**ood news! The multi-national corporate trade deal, the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), has yet to be presented to Congress. Presidential primaries have elevated trade and the TPP to a national conversation, a topic that was only familiar to corporate executives, labor groups, and ag producers just a year ago.

So why are people getting behind the fight against the TPP? We’ve compiled a list of five reasons to oppose the TPP:

**1** It gives 9,200 foreign corporations the ability to bypass American laws that protect our food safety, clean environment, and good jobs. The ISDS (Investor State Dispute Settlement) clause in the TPP allows foreign companies to challenge American laws if they inhibit corporate profit. This would not be in a court of law, but before an international panel of lawyers representing corporations. This tribunal could levy huge fines against the U.S.,

*Continued on Page 4*



## Addressing coal's changing landscape

Coal country in Montana is experiencing tremendous change and, while it's a change we've seen coming, many Montana leaders are fighting to save this aging industry instead of planning for a more diverse economy.



The economic boon of extractive industry is, by nature, volatile and finite. Northern Plains leaders had the vision that coal would not always be an economic fixture in Montana, so we fought for (and won) reclamation bonds, severance taxes, and the Coal Tax Trust fund.

Wyoming was so confident about coal's infinite future that it allowed self-bonding – a disastrously bad idea – and now the companies are going bankrupt and the value of the “self-bonds” doesn't come even close to the cost of reclamation.

Members in the Colstrip area have said, “We lived through the boom. We do not look forward to the bust.”

It is misplaced energy (spent by some of our elected officials) to try to control market forces by passing laws or convincing other states to prop up our slumping coal

industry. Global economic trends are the primary force causing this shift away from coal. I recently was asked if Northern Plains believes there is a “war on coal.” My response was that, if anything is waging a war on coal, it's the free-market system.

So, how can Montana's coal-impacted communities cope with a changing commodity market in which coal's position is shrinking? It's a daunting question, and one that hangs over our entire state. I don't believe there is a simple answer – but it lies in diversification and sustainability. Northern Plains has taken that challenge by the horns in creating our new Homegrown Prosperity Task Force.

Our idea of economic development takes into account community well-being as well as employment and tax revenue. We believe that our economic development authorities should develop an approach emphasizing wealth that does not leave our state, but that is recirculated in the community. It requires developing a new economy.

We have the talent and the resources here in Montana to create our own lasting, stable economic future. The Homegrown Prosperity Task Force is working to empower communities to meet the challenge of

change by building a diverse network of resilient, local economies that bring about shared prosperity.

Ambitious goals require equally practical strategies. Our task force is looking at a multi-pronged approach for this new campaign. First is educating communities about the importance of local economies and how to create these conditions.

Identifying policy obstacles and barriers for local business owners will be another critical component of our work. Of course, we want to prove that local job creation and capacity-building for existing businesses are also possible in coal country. To that end, we are looking at ways to help local communities create sustainable jobs in clean energy, agriculture, or education.

This is new work for us, but it is also a natural extension of the sustainable policies and vision we have always had for Montana. Over the next year, I am excited to share the progress and challenges we encounter with this new task force. Northern Plains has always been an important voice in rural Montana; now is the time to prove our long-term vision for our state.

– Kate French, Northern Plains Chair



www.northernplains.org

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 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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### THE PLAINS TRUTH

The Plains Truth is published by Northern Plains Resource Council. Northern Plains members receive The Plains Truth as one of the benefits of membership.

### Membership Dues

\$500+ Riders of the Big Sky	\$50 Range Rider
\$200 Bottom Line Rider	\$40 General Member
\$100 Rough Rider	\$15-\$39 Living Lightly

### Endowment

The Northern Plains Endowment is a permanent fund established to help sustain Northern Plains' work into the future. If you want to make a donation, a memorial gift, or a bequest to this fund, please contact the Northern Plains office.

### Northern Plains Staff

Staff Director: Teresa Erickson  
Development Coordinator: Steve Paulson  
Director of Organizing and Campaigns: Olivia Stockman Splinter  
Deputy Director of Organizing: Svein Newmann  
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### Western Organization of Resource Councils

Northern Plains is a founding member of the Western Organization of Resource Councils. WORC is 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

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## Otter Creek ranch life shaped Dawson Dunning

Five generations ago, Dawson Dunning's great-great grandfather, Luther, rode a horse from Iowa to Otter Creek in search of his older brother, Grant. He didn't have a map. He fell in with a calvary troop along the way, traveling from town to town, past the dwindling bison herds and the cattle trails. Eventually he set out on his own, arrived at Otter Creek, found Grant, and started working for an Englishman raising racehorses. He was 14 years old.

The Dunnings have ranched there ever since, and Dawson is the fifth generation to call Otter Creek home. The operations changed with the times – from Thoroughbreds raised for English polo games and Eastern racetracks, to Army Remount horses to, today, cattle – but the Dunnings have raised livestock in the valley since the early 1890s.

### Crashing pickups by 5

Growing up somewhere as rural as Otter Creek, said Dawson, gives him a different perspective on the world around him. “As kids, our lives were dependent on what happened outside. The weather dictated everything we did.” Dawson grew up playing with cousins and his sister, DarAnne, catching fish and turtles in the ephemeral waterbodies of the Otter Creek drainage, hunting and tracking the local wildlife, and helping out on the ranch. He crashed two pickups before he was 5 years old, a fact his family never lets him forget.

Dawson left Otter Creek to study wildlife biology at the University of Montana, largely because of his experience growing up. “I didn't necessarily realize how diverse eastern Montana prairie streams are until I went to college,” he said. “We don't have as many



All of us in Montana are fortunate that it (the Otter Creek mine) collapsed before this gigantic mine opened up and a productive ranching valley was destroyed.

– Dawson Dunning

famous fish, but we have incredible diversity,” more so than the scientific community has recognized, and more than most Montanans would assume. Dawson lights up when he talks about eastern Montana fish and amphibians: “I mean, come on, there's sturgeon and paddlefish from the dinosaur age in the Yellowstone!”

But when he realized that a career in fish biology might keep him in a lab as much as in the field, Dawson began to pursue film. He now works as a wildlife cameraman, and spends weeks at a time tracking and filming wildlife around North America.

### Otter Creek awakening

Dawson first became actively involved in Northern Plains around the time Otter Creek Coal was securing a lease to open a mine just a few miles downstream from the Dunning family ranch. “It was DarAnne, really, who brought to my attention a lot of what was at

stake and that unlike projects before, this one was imminent,” he said.

Since then, Dawson has been central to our work to protect the Otter Creek Valley from being torn apart by the gigantic strip mine that Arch Coal had proposed there. He has reviewed the technical information gathered by Arch Coal and the Department of Environmental Quality, has accompanied professional hydrologists on Otter Creek mine-site tours, has lobbied the Legislature on water quality bills, and has provided indispensable local knowledge for Northern Plains' efforts to defend the strong salinity standards that protect Otter Creek.

“My priority,” said Dawson, “is to keep the operation going into the future.” After 125 years of Dunnings ranching on Otter Creek, there's no reason to stop now.

– Colin Lauderdale

## Why I'm a Monthly Sustainer

### I am proud to see Northern Plains grow in strength

Carolyn Walker has been a Northern Plains member since the early '70s. She's an active leader in much of Northern Plains' work and a member of the Coal and Tongue River Railroad Task Force.



Carolyn Walker

“I am a Sustainer to Northern Plains because for several years it was the main hope for combating coal strip mining and other coal horrors,” she said. “Since then, and since moving to Missoula, I have seen Northern Plains grow in strength, valuable information, and other good resources, and I am proud of having been in on the beginning of this

wonderful organization.”

Many of our Monthly Sustainers share similar sentiments on giving regular support to a truly grassroots organization. Many of these members also appreciate the ease and convenience of monthly giving.

On our end, monthly giving reduces the number of renewal letters we have to send, and evens out our cash flow to ensure we can respond quickly as new challenges arise. Monthly Sustainers sure do make things easier around here!

Join Carolyn as a Monthly Sustainer! Just contact Karen at karen@northernplains.org or 406-248-1154 and she can set it up for you.

– Julia Kehoe

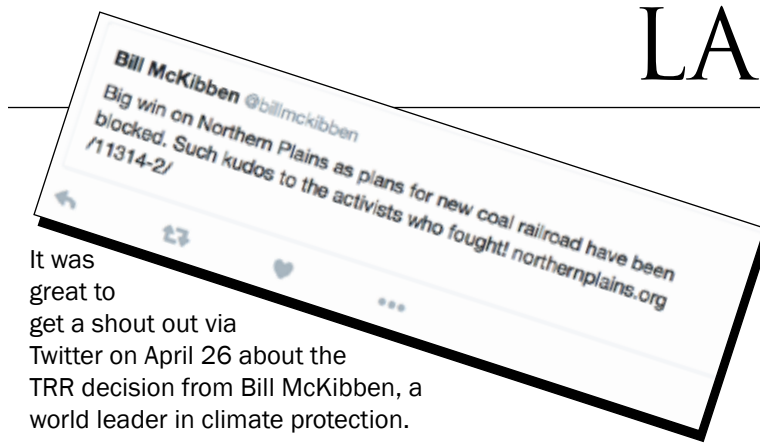
## What will your legacy be?

Pyramids rising in the desert ... paintings on a cave wall ... great works of science and literature ... all reflect people's common yearning to say, “I was here; my life was important. I made a difference.”

A permanent endowment fund can continue to make a difference – in your name – for Northern Plains Resource Council and the people we serve.

We would be glad to give you more information about charitable gifts and the most advantageous ways to make them.

Please call Steve Paulson at 406-248-1154.



It was great to get a shout out via Twitter on April 26 about the TRR decision from Bill McKibben, a world leader in climate protection.

## Otter Creek

*Continued from Page 1*

Dunning, whose family has ranched on Otter Creek for over a century.

“It was only a matter of time before this project collapsed,” he said. “All of us in Montana are fortunate that it collapsed before this gigantic mine opened up and a productive ranching valley was destroyed.”

In 2010, an Arch Coal subsidiary secured a lease from the State of Montana for half of the Otter Creek coal tracts. Around the same time, Arch obtained a lease for the other half of the Otter Creek tracts from Great Northern Properties – the largest private coal owner in the United States.

### Application deficiencies

Otter Creek Coal, an Arch subsidiary, has been working since then to obtain a mine permit. The company submitted applications for a mine permit in 2012 and in 2014, both of which were found to be deficient by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). The agency has been awaiting a revised permit application for approximately one year.

Northern Plains’ long opposition to the



Map courtesy of Billings Gazette



Northern Plains members visit the site of Arch Coal’s proposed Otter Creek strip mine.

Otter Creek mine has taken place on several fronts. We opposed the mine’s permit on the grounds that mining would threaten the quality and quantity of precious water resources in the semi-arid Otter Creek Valley. And we have long opposed the proposed Tongue River Railroad because the threat of federal eminent domain for a private rail line is a violation of private property rights.

“This proves what we have said all along: that the Otter Creek mine and the Tongue River Railroad are pure speculation and were never a public need,” said Clint McRae of Arch’s decision to walk away from the Otter Creek project. McRae’s ranch lies in the path of the Tongue River Railroad, which, he said, “has forced us to live under the threat of federal condemnation for more than 30 years.”

### Coal export plans

Shortly after the 2010 lease sale, it became clear that Arch’s plans for Otter Creek coal

included export of the coal to Asia via export terminals in the Pacific Northwest. Arch continues to own a 38% interest in the proposed Millennium Bulk Terminal, a coal export facility in Longview, Washington. Given the state of domestic coal markets, the prospect for export to Asia remains the coal industry’s best hope. Millennium remains a viable coal export project; its draft environmental impact statement was released April 29.

In the meantime, though, Montanans can rest easy knowing that the Otter Creek Valley won’t be mined anytime soon.

“Montana has a long history of mining companies walking away,” said Northern Plains Chair Kate French of Bozeman. “We should thank our lucky stars that Arch Coal walked away before this project was built, and before it wrecked the Otter Creek Valley.”

– Colin Lauderdale

**3** It would encourage more fracking, and roll back American environmental laws. Currently the U.S. is protected by the Natural Gas Act (laws that require environmental and economic review for gas wells), but the TPP waives that law for all TPP countries, incentivizing more unregulated fracking to storm through rural communities. Not only that, but the TPP doesn’t even mention climate change, has worse environmental protections than past trade agreements, and does nothing to address illegal practices.

**4** It would kill millions of manufacturing jobs. We witnessed the 1,385 Montana manufacturing jobs that were exported after NAFTA [US Bureau of Labor Statistics]. The TPP would not only lower labor standards and make us compete with 65¢/day workers in

Vietnam, it will all but pay companies to leave the U.S. and headquarter elsewhere. (Heck, if they move, they can sue us too!)

**5** It will disregard property rights, the U.S. Constitution, and America’s sovereignty. Currently, TransCanada is suing the U.S. for denying the Keystone XL, an action which was taken to protect American property rights. The TPP would make these kinds of challenges the new “normal.” Going above and beyond the law means that TPP could supersede the U.S. Constitution, and our sovereignty as a country altogether.

– Maggie Zaback

Information for this article gathered from David Moberg, *In These Times*.

## Arch lost coal tracts months ago

Arch Coal’s bankruptcy proceeding brought to light still more reasons why the Otter Creek coal mine and the Tongue River Railroad will never be constructed. As it turns out, Arch Coal lost half the lease to the Otter Creek tracts back in November, before entering Chapter 11 bankruptcy.

The demise of the Otter Creek mine has been accelerating lately. Here is a review:

■ January 2016 – Arch Coal declared bankruptcy, leaving us to wonder what would become of both the Otter Creek mine and the Tongue River Railroad.

■ Also January 2016 – The Montana Department of Environmental Quality told the *Billings Gazette* that Arch owes the state \$67,000 for work completed on the Otter Creek permit application.

■ March 2016 – Arch, in a press release, announced that the company “is suspending efforts to secure a mining permit for the Otter Creek coal reserves,” citing “capital constraints, near-term weaknesses in coal markets, and an extended and uncertain permitting outlook.”

Despite this mounting evidence to the contrary, Tongue River Railroad Company (TRRC) had stubbornly continued to claim in its legal filings with the Surface Transportation Board (STB), as recently as early April, that “the Otter Creek mine... (has) not been abandoned and Arch has merely suspended its permitting efforts” and that “an economic case for mining at Otter Creek... remains viable over the medium and long term” because “what is now a weak market for coal can become a stronger one over time.”

But a week later, we found out that Great Northern Properties (GNP), the

landholding company that had leased Arch Coal half the Otter Creek coal tracts, terminated Arch’s lease in November 2015 because Arch had stopped making its monthly lease payments. The coal Arch leased from the State of Montana is checkerboarded with the GNP coal, and neither reserve can be economically mined without the other.

TRRC, though, omitted this fact in its repeated filings with the STB, claiming that “Arch still holds a valuable lease” for the Otter Creek coal tracts, “for which it paid millions of dollars.” While technically true – Arch still holds the State lease for 616 million tons of coal – that coal can’t be mined without the adjoining private lease.

Prior to the STB decision to kill the TRR, termination of the GNP lease was just the latest in a growing litany of reasons why the Tongue River Railroad would never be built.

■ There is no market for Otter Creek coal.

■ Even with a market, the hydrology of the Otter Creek valley makes this mine difficult (maybe impossible) to permit under the strip mine law.

■ The company that wants to open the Otter Creek mine is in bankruptcy and, what’s more, no longer intends to pursue a mine permit.

■ Arch no longer possesses a lease – and hasn’t since November – to half the coal in the proposed mine.

Thanks to the hard work of Northern Plains members, these factors stacked up against the TRR. Finally, the landowners who have faced condemnation of their property for nearly 40 years can breathe easy.

– Colin Lauderdale

## Longview coal-export activist to speak at Montana meetings

On April 29, the Washington Department of Ecology released the draft environmental impact statement (EIS) for one of the last remaining pieces of Pacific Northwest coal export infrastructure: the Millennium Bulk Terminal in Longview, Washington.

The port would move 44 million tons of coal per year through Montana rail towns on the way to the West Coast from Powder River Basin mines. That’s 18 additional coal trains per day.

This draft EIS is our chance to tell Washington not to let coal companies export Montana coal to Asia. To get the word out, we’re bringing Les Anderson, Vice President of Landowners and Citizens for a Safe Community, a watchdog organization in Longview, to speak about how the proposed port would affect his community.

Les and Northern Plains members will travel across Montana (see box at right) to raise the alarm and generate comments about the impacts



Les Anderson

### SAY NO TO COAL EXPORTS!

**Missoula People’s Hearing**  
Monday, May 9  
7 p.m.  
MCT Center for the Performing Arts  
200 N. Adams Street

**Helena Forum/Luncheon**  
Tuesday, May 10  
12 p.m.  
Lewis and Clark Library  
120 S. Last Chance Gulch  
Lunch provided!

**Livingston Forum**  
Tuesday, May 10  
5:30 p.m.  
Elk River Books  
120 N. Main Street

**Billings People’s Hearing**  
Wednesday, May 11  
6 p.m.  
Home on the Range  
220 South 27th Street

\*\*Please join our bus trip to testify at a Washington State hearing in Spokane on May 26. We’ll pick you up along the way. If interested, email [ella@northernplains.org](mailto:ella@northernplains.org) or 406-248-1154.

of coal export on Montana communities. Come join us!

Washington State’s draft EIS for the Millennium Bulk Terminal is available here: <http://www.millenniumbulkeisw.gov/sepa-draft-eis.html>

– Ella Smith

## TRR

*Continued from Page 1*

has made the right decision to dismiss this project.”

McRae also points out that, in its decision, “the Board has given the railroad ample opportunity to prove any justification for the use of federal eminent domain to condemn private land.”

The Surface Transportation Board’s (STB) ruling comes in response to filings from both Northern Plains and TRRC, which is jointly owned by Arch Coal, Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway, and candy billionaire Forrest Mars Jr. Last November,

TRRC asked the STB to put a stay on its application indefinitely.

Northern Plains requested in December that the Board dismiss TRRC’s application, pointing out that TRRC’s real reason for requesting a stay is to put off a decision in a weak coal market. Since that time, Arch has voluntarily entered Chapter 11 bankruptcy, later declared that it is no longer pursuing a permit for the Otter Creek mine, and revealed that it lost the lease to half the Otter Creek coal months ago.

“It’s a historic day when a federal agency recognizes there’s no foreseeable future for coal,” said Ken Rumelt, an attorney at the Environmental and Natural Resources Law Clinic at the Vermont Law School, who

represented Northern Plains before the STB.

Under Ken’s supervision, dozens of students from Vermont Law poured thousands of hours of loegal research into the years of Northern Plains filings before the STB.

“It’s a great day for southeastern Montana landowners,” said Mark Fix, who ranches on the Tongue River, and whose operation was threatened by several variations of the railroad. “The threat of eminent domain has been hanging over my head ever since I bought my ranch. It’s a huge relief to know I can get back to raising cattle and wheat without the threat of condemnation hanging over my head.”

– Colin Lauderdale



## RURAL POWER

### Electric co-ops a work in progress

When rural electric cooperatives were created in 1935 to serve rural communities that the utilities would not, they were founded on forward-thinking democratic cooperative principles and were the catalysts of the electrification and modernization of rural America. Today, rather than being champions of renewable energy and member involvement, many co-ops have instead become inaccessible and slow to embrace advancements in sustainable energy.

Fortunately, cooperatives are intended for member participation and transparency and can be held accountable. Northern Plains members already have started work in several area co-ops:

- **Yellowstone Valley Electric Co-op:** YVEC held its annual meeting on March 24, days after it completed installation of its first solar pilot project at its Huntley headquarters. General Manager Brandon Wittman mentioned that the co-op would be willing to expand the effort to a community solar project if there was enough interest.
- **Park Electric Co-op:** Members of Cottonwood Resource Council, Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council, and Bear Creek Council have formed a committee with the goal of increasing transparency, member involvement, and openness to renewables, such as solar and wind, in their common co-op.
- **Tongue River Electric Co-op:** TRECO members will be hosting a solar seminar in Miles City in late May or early June. TRECO's annual meeting is coming up in July, and a Northern Plains member will be running for the board. Keep an eye out for your ballot in the mail!
- **Beartooth Electric Co-op:** BEC, working with Northern Plains member Ben Reed, recently became the first co-op in Montana to pass a policy allowing any five or more members who want to build a community renewable system to do so, laying out the framework for member and renewable energy installers to develop projects together.
- **Fergus Electric Co-op:** Members of Central Montana Resource Council have kicked off a clean energy campaign, and begun working with their area co-op to start a conversation around renewable energy interest in the co-op.

Please call Julia at 406-248-1154 if you are a member of one of these co-ops and want to get involved. The progress we've seen is encouraging, and we see exciting opportunities ahead for member engagement! Let's work together to bring renewable energy to rural Montana!

– Julia Kehoe

## COAL BRIEFS

### Federal coal-lease hearing in Casper May 17

This spring, the Department of the Interior took the next step in its review of the federal coal leasing system. In a document published in the Federal Register on March 24, Interior announced the initiation of the “scoping” period for the review, as well as the locations of six public hearings to be held across the country.

“Scoping” is the public’s initial opportunity to provide input for the programmatic EIS. The intent of the scoping period is to gain the public’s perspective in defining the breadth of Interior’s review.

Northern Plains and the Western Organization of Resource Councils have been working for decades to reform the federal coal leasing system. The first step toward this reform came in January, when Interior Secretary Sally Jewell announced that Interior would undertake a programmatic EIS that studies, from top to bottom, the way publicly owned coal is leased to private mining companies.

Northern Plains will be traveling en masse to the Casper scoping hearing on May 17. If you can go, contact Colin at 406-248-1154 or colin@northernplains.org

#### WHAT'S NEXT?

The Department of the Interior is holding six public meetings on the federal coal leasing programmatic EIS. They will take place in:

- Casper, Wyo. – May 17
- Salt Lake City, Utah – May 19
- Knoxville, Tenn. – May 26
- Pittsburgh, Pa. – June 16
- Seattle, Wash. – June TBD
- Grand Junction, Colo. – June 23

Unfortunately, there is no public scoping meeting in Montana. Casper is the closest location to Montana coal country.

– Colin Lauderdale

### Whistle-stop tour focuses on coal leasing

In late March, the Department of the Interior (DOI) announced plans to hold six hearings on the federal coal leasing program. The hearings are an opportunity for the public to comment as the agency reviews the controversial program. Numerous reports have criticized federal coal management in recent years.



Dan Bucks

The Western Organization of Resource Councils and Northern Plains set the groundwork in Montana for informed news coverage and robust participation during DOI’s review by conducting a Whistle-Stop Tour of Montana media and policy-makers. The tour featured presentations by Dan Bucks, a former Director of Revenue for Montana.

The tour visited editorial boards in Billings and Butte and met with more than 50 public officials, Northern Plains members, and allies in briefings in Helena and Billings. Bucks explained why the current federal coal program has failed taxpayers and how it has effectively served as a subsidy to the coal industry. Bucks also participated in three radio talk show interviews.

– Kevin Dowling, WORC

### World’s largest coal giant, Peabody, falls

On April 13, the world’s largest private sector coal company, Peabody Energy, filed for bankruptcy. Peabody joins a long line of more than 50 U.S. coal companies to go that route.

In 2011, America’s four largest coal companies (Peabody, Cloud Peak Energy, Alpha Natural Resources, and Arch Coal) had a shareholder value of more than \$34 billion. Of these, Cloud Peak is the only company not in bankruptcy proceedings.

Bankruptcy does not mean Peabody is out of business. Rather, bankruptcy is an opportunity for the company to reorganize and shed debt. It’s important that we all watch closely to make sure that the debts Peabody tries to get rid of aren’t their obligations to coal workers, retiree pensions and health benefits, or obligations to reclaim mined lands.

– Svein Newman

## Rally reminds Daines about fast-growing renewable energy

When Senator Steve Daines announced he was holding the Montana Energy Conference in Billings and touted an “all of the above” energy strategy for Montana, we were skeptical because – so far – he has used his time in Congress to promote fossil fuels at the expense of clean, renewable energy.

As Daines proceeded to pack the agenda with nearly 50 fossil fuel industry representatives, we were disappointed in our senator. Moreover, Daines sent out anti-Clean Power Plan literature the week before the conference.

Northern Plains members began organizing to call attention to the glaring omission in Daines’ energy conference. On March 29 (the opening day of the Daines energy conference), nearly 70 members braved cold rain turning to snow, and gathered on the Yellowstone County Courthouse lawn in Billings to demand that Daines take seriously the real costs of a changing climate.

“With the way extracted energy sources destroy ecosystems, how can this be our future? With the way extracted energy sources act in boom and bust, how can this be our future?” questioned Billings First Church pastor, the Rev. Mike Mulberry.

Ben Reed, a solar business owner in Billings, said, “Senator Daines, let’s sit down and have a conversation about real job growth and



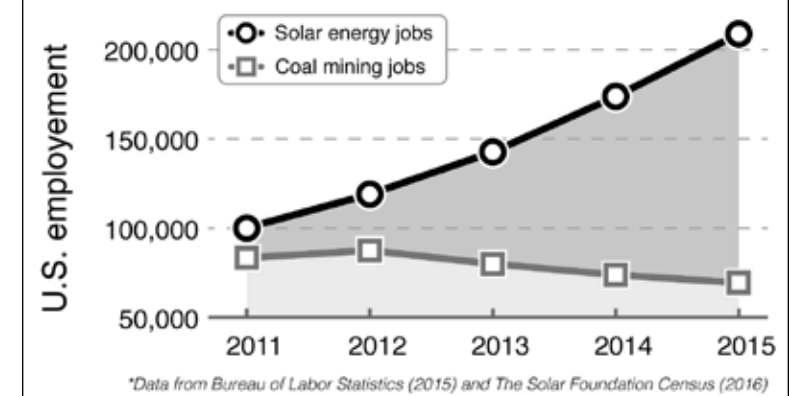
Wade Williams of Billings braves rain, cold, and snow in March to rally with nearly 70 other people to tell Senator Daines to include renewable energy, such as solar, in his portfolio of future energy needs.

energy independence for this country... We did not have a policy fight to stay with the horse and buggy; nor were there policy fights over staying with the typewriter and the slide rule instead of the computer and calculator.”

The rally featured other inspiring leaders from our community, including Northern Cheyenne Sundance priest Ken Medicine Bull; Arlo Skari, wheat farmer from Chester,

#### THE DECLINE OF COAL (a series)

##### Solar jobs surpass coal jobs



and Gabriel Aponte, president of Rocky Mountain College’s Environmental Club. Each gave a powerful testimony to why we simply cannot wait any longer to pursue and secure clean energy solutions.

The energy conference featured speakers from NorthWestern Energy, Cloud Peak Energy, ConocoPhillips, and a host of other oil and coal representatives, but did not feature any speakers on solar energy – the fastest-growing energy sector – and only one session about renewables.

We can be sure we were heard that afternoon, but know we must persevere in demanding clean energy for America’s future.

– Julia Kehoe

## Take our Local Food Challenge online or by mail beginning in July

Do you eat local food? Could you eat more?

Starting in July, Northern Plains will launch our first Local Food Challenge. We will challenge you and your family or business to think about how you can support Montana’s agricultural economy in a bigger, more direct way. Whether that means eating more local food, supporting the businesses

that sell local food, or just asking for local food where there is none, this challenge is for eaters in every Montana community.

Starting in June, check out MTLocalFoodChallenge.org for help in how to increase the proportion of local food in your life.

– Maggie Zaback



Laurie Gano has donated one of her landscape tapestries, *Pilot Butte*.

### Another Freedom from Coal online auction under way

Our popular online auction featuring a variety of items including art, food, travel, and more is now online!

Highlighting the auction is a fine hand-woven tapestry, *Pilot Butte*, from Laurie Gano of Big Timber, half of a

Wagyu Beef from Omega Beef, and a private hunt along the Tongue River.

To place your bids, visit our auction at [www.northernplains.org/auction-page](http://www.northernplains.org/auction-page).

Contact Caleb at 406-248-1154 or [caleb@northernplains.org](mailto:caleb@northernplains.org) if you have any questions.

Want to participate but don't have Internet? Return this form and we'll make sure to send you the Local Food Challenge in the mail.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Town \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to: Local Food Challenge  
Northern Plains Resource Council  
220 S. 27th St, Suite A  
Billings, MT 59101

Or call: Maggie at 406-248-1154.



## Planning under way for Billings food hub



### What's next?

Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council will continue to meet with producers and institutions, and will begin presenting to area school boards to encourage them to use local food. Please contact us if your children attend an area school and you would like to help!

This summer, we will host meetings with meat producers and processors, and with growers, to discuss initial findings and possible business models. In the fall, we will explore funding prospects to cover part of the cost of a building and equipment.

Interested in learning more? Contact Cori Hart, Northern Plains Food Hub Organizer, at cori@northernplains.org or call 406-248-1154.

The Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council (YVCC) has a dream that one day in the greater Yellowstone Valley, family farms and ranches will recapture the market share they once held before out-of-state producers came to dominate the food scene.

No longer will meat and produce from other states and countries comprise over 70% of our food consumption, but instead a diverse array of vegetables, grains, and grazing animals raised by our friends and neighbors will make its way onto our plates.

YVCC is in the midst of a feasibility study to determine whether the greater Yellowstone Valley could support a regional food processing and storage center, or "food hub," located in Billings, to help distribute local products to area institutions (e.g. restaurants, schools, hospitals, nursing homes, and grocers).

Northern Plains members and staff have been meeting with producers within a two-hour radius of Billings. We have also met with restaurants that currently serve local food and with existing food distributors such as Sysco and Quality Foods Distributing.

A consumer survey on food purchasing habits is under way. Take it at [www.surveymonkey.com/r/yvfoodhub](http://www.surveymonkey.com/r/yvfoodhub)

for a chance to win a \$50 gift card to a local Billings restaurant!

### What have we learned so far?

- Producers are interested in diversifying but need to know their products will find a market before expanding or investing in new equipment.
- Rural producers struggle to successfully connect with institutional markets in larger cities like Billings without the help of a third party.
- Producers would benefit from a drop-off point in Billings to be used as a staging area for later distribution.
- Restaurants would likewise benefit from a centralized pick-up point instead of having to coordinate with multiple growers.
- Restaurants and food distributors are highly interested in local foods and will buy whatever local food producers can supply.
- Producers and restaurants alike would benefit from additional cold/freezer storage and food processing space in Billings.

— Alicia Pettys

## Support the soil by supporting growers



Even moderately degraded soil will hold less than half of the water than healthy soil in the same location.

— John Crawford, University of Sydney

The Dust Bowl was a hard lesson in American agriculture about the importance of healthy topsoil to our existence, and that our agricultural practices were destroying it. As a result of the Dust Bowl, conservation districts were born, policies put in place, and "no-till" entered farming vernacular. Yet, nearly 90 years later, soil is still degrading, blowing away, and being forgotten by many.

Topsoil is being depleted faster than it can be replenished: around 83 billion tons of it is lost every year. On top of that, over 70% of it is degraded. Incidentally, those numbers have vastly improved from the 1930s. Although some soil erosion is just the nature of ag, science is finding that much of that



soil erosion is simply preventable.

The good news is that some producers have always seen the soil as their lifeline, and have found ways to work with the vast web of life underground. Many more are learning about tested methods for restoring life to soil, and building it from dead dirt, so it stays in place and doesn't blow away.

Building soil depends on bacteria,

fungi, plants, and animals. The strategic use of livestock, in fact, can speed up healthy soil growth at rates previously thought to be impossible. Not only is cow, goat, bison, sheep, or chicken manure an important contribution to underground microbial activity, but these animals can also help mat down plants to cover soil and keep it in place while they graze.

These practices can be time- and energy-intensive, but provide substantial long term benefits.

Current ag practices (high pesticide, herbicide, fungicide and fertilizer use, along with tilling and grazing) will lead to a reduction of 30% of our food

Continued on Page 10

## Members travel to North Dakota to support federal methane rule

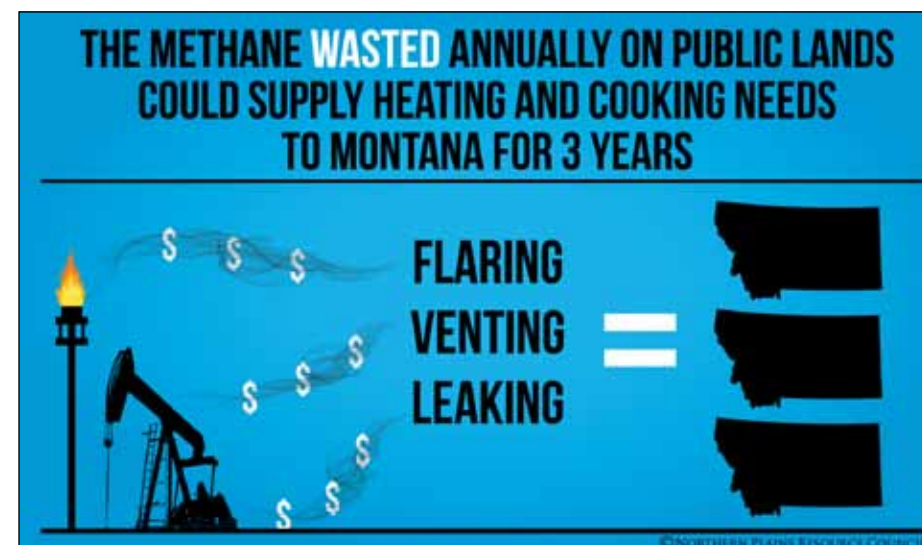
A contingency of Northern Plains members took a road trip to Dickinson, North Dakota, on March 3 to attend a hearing on the BLM's proposed Rule on Waste Prevention, Production Subject to Royalties, and Resource Conservation.

Called the "methane rule" for short, the proposal would cut back on the amount of publicly owned methane gas (that is, taxpayer-owned) being spewed into the atmosphere during oil and gas extraction.

Northern Plains members teamed up with members of Dakota Resource Council and others from across the region to dominate the hearing. It was a strong show of support for a strong rule that promotes a responsible use of our resources, reduces pollution, and fights climate change.

The proposed rule focuses on the three primary ways methane can escape during oil and gas production:

- Flaring is the intentional burning of natural gas deemed "uneconomical" for a company to collect via pipeline or on-site compressing unit; it's often burned in a pit or from an elevated pipe on an oil pad.
- Venting occurs when methane gas is released directly into the air during operations (such as well completion, system maintenance, or occasionally



### WHAT'S NEXT?

The public comment period for the proposed BLM methane rule closed on April 22. The BLM has now begun reviewing the public's comments and may make changes to the rule based on comments received. A final rule is expected this summer.

The BLM will continue to need public support to finalize a strong rule, so spread the word and consider writing a letter to the editor in support of the rule.

during mechanical failures).

- Leaks occur at pipe seams, storage containers, etc., when gas escapes the system unnecessarily at faulty connections.

Together, these three problems contribute to an estimated \$330 million worth of taxpayer-owned



Becky Grey delivers comment cards at a BLM hearing in Dickinson. Northern Plains members submitted a large number of postcards in support of the methane rule.

resources being wasted every year. The fixes proposed in the rule could save enough gas to supply almost 760,000 American households every day.

Even beyond fiscal responsibility, the rule as written will reduce methane pollution, which means less air pollution for communities and people living near well sites. On a global scale, reducing methane pollution means hope for maintaining a stable global climate. Methane is a highly potent greenhouse gas, packing more than 80 times the warming power of carbon dioxide in the near term.

During the hearing in Dickinson, the testimony of Northern Plains members highlighted the many practical and far-reaching benefits that the rule, if implemented, would provide.

Wade Sikorski, a farmer whose family has been farming and ranching for over a century outside of Baker, Montana, was one of those supporting voices. "I am old enough now, at 60, to know that global warming is already happening and causing damage to my family's farming operation," Wade testified. "I am convinced that allowing business as usual to continue will have disastrous consequences on agriculture which, in turn, would risk everyone's food security."

Sue Beug of Red Lodge urged the BLM to implement the rule and be a leader in demanding the highest and best management practices from oil and gas development operations. "Public lands should be a model for responsible development," she testified.

— Hannah Hostetter

### NORTHERN PLAINS METHANE COMMENTS



We are currently in the process of negotiating a land use agreement.... There will be no flaring and no methane release on our farm because the infrastructure to capture gases is part of the overall development plan. This type of predrilling planning is essential to the best use of our public resources, like planning for any type of development, a subdivision, a city, a water plant, anything. These rule changes provide incentives for more efficient recovery of natural resources, less environmental impact, and greater profits.

— Sue Beug



Flaring, venting, and leaks near my home would expose me to all of the volatile organic compounds that caused the people near the major natural gas leak in California to evacuate their homes. I would be forced to sell my home as well because of my intolerance to pollutants.

— Becky Grey



I have nieces and nephews at home on Fort Berthold (Reservation) suffering from asthma. Imagine the trauma and pain caused when rushing a 7-year-old to the hospital because she can't breathe. I hate being at home on Fort Berthold for fear that the same will happen to my 2-year-old daughter as I pass by flare after flare after flare feeling like I'm in a war zone.

— Kandi Mossett (also from the Indigenous Environmental Network)

# You took action, and our part of the world was transformed

## Thank you!

Over the years, Northern Plains Chairs have often spoken of the tenacity of our members, of how good it feels to know that our members stand behind them.

Truth be told, few organizations have shown the sheer determination that we see year in and year out from Northern Plains members. The successes we have accomplished in recent months were built on many years of work by many of you. You deserve to lift a toast to yourself and your fellow members.

If you hadn't taken action, the Tongue River Railroad would have been a "done deal." So would the massive strip mine proposed on Otter Creek. The fact that both of these projects are off the tracks speaks to your willingness to take action and to your perseverance.

Your perseverance and your willingness to act have shown up time and again across our work. This report, therefore, comes with a big "thank you!"

### COAL TONGUE RIVER RAILROAD COAL EXPORTS

- Late in November 2015, the Tongue River Railroad Company (TRRC) requested that the federal Surface Transportation Board suspend work on the TRRC permit application. The speculators were nervous about the state of coal markets and the imminent bankruptcy of Arch Coal, and they knew full well that you and many other people would never stop fighting this destructive proposal.

- Northern Plains responded to the TRRC's request by formally petitioning the Surface Transportation Board to deny TRRC's application outright. Our petition was part of our extensive legal and technical efforts which led to the STB to deny the TRRC's permit application in April 2016.

- The draft EIS for the Tongue River Railroad was released in April 2015. Northern Plains – building on our work against the TRR since 1977 – organized a broad spectrum of landowners, Northern Cheyenne tribal members, conservationists, and people fighting the Pacific Northwest coal ports to join in the fight. We assisted testifiers, printed postcards to send to the STB, and produced briefings, factsheets, and action alerts.



In December 2015, Mark Fix and Dan Cohn inspect the Lummi-carved totem pole that Mark delivered to Billings for eventual raising at Home on the Range. The Lummi Nation gave the totem pole to the Northern Cheyenne in solidarity for fighting the Tongue River Railroad and coal exports. It stands at Northern Plains temporarily until a suitable site can be found on Northern Cheyenne land.

- In total, our work together generated 122,000 comments to the Surface Transportation Board asking for the "no action alternative."

*Continued on Page 11*



Northern Plains and Northern Cheyenne member Alaina Buffalo Spirit testifies against the Tongue River Railroad at a Surface Transportation Board hearing in Ashland last June.

## Soil

*Continued from Page 8*

supply in the next 20 to 50 years according to John Crawford, University of Sidney. These practices will also put water at a crisis point, Crawford warns. "Even moderately degraded soil will hold less than half of the water than healthy soil in the same location." Water run-off from degraded soils adds to sea level rise and drought.

By paying attention to soil, we can increase productivity, store water, and store excess

carbon from the atmosphere. So why aren't we doing it?

Current policy incentivizes monocultures. Chemical companies make it easy to use their products. We are repeatedly told that this is the only way to produce large amounts of food, and it's hard to think that anything else is possible.

But, everyone can be an important player in helping the land, air, and water. While the current farm policy incentivizes overproduction of certain crops, which requires chemicals to meet demand, the USDA is paying farmers millions of dollars

to fix the problems that those practices create. The Farm Bill has many weaknesses, and this is another critical piece that must be fixed.

Producers are beginning to see the writing on the wall but, as usual, consumers must demand change.

When consumers connect with trusted producers and advocate for healthy soil practices, producers will have the support they need to keep building their soil, storing water, and stopping erosion.

– Maggie Zaback

## Action

*Continued from Page 10*

Many of you wrote "substantive" comments of original thought. (Thanks, everybody! You're the best!)

- Northern Plains submitted detailed, cited, and thorough comments that – with supporting documentation – exceeded 700 pages. Thanks to all of you who contributed, with a special tip of the hat to Beth Kaeding, who did most of the writing!

- Many of you turned out to testify in the 10 "official" TRR hearings in eastern Montana. Since these hearings on the EIS were limited to southeast Montana, we organized "People's Hearings" in railroad towns, where many more of you gave testimony that we transcribed and submitted to the official record.

- We commissioned two videos profiling ranch families who stand to be affected by the TRR and promoted the videos on Facebook and other channels. You can view the videos on Northern Plains' website: <https://www.northernplains.org/issues/tongue-river-railroad>.

- In collaboration with the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC), we won a federal court case against the Department of the Interior for its failure to adequately assess the environmental impacts of granting a mine expansion to Cloud Peak Energy's Spring Creek mine in southeast Montana, especially for its failure to reclaim.

- Thanks to your support and encouragement, we persisted with legal work, technical experts, and public pressure against the Otter Creek strip mine. This project remains a pipe dream. Early in 2016, Arch Coal declared bankruptcy and later suspended work on its permit application for the mine. We also discovered that, months earlier, Arch had lost half of its Otter Creek coal leases but hid the fact from the public.

- In collaboration with WORC, we have long argued that the federal Office of Natural Resource Revenue (ONRR) needs to make changes in the royalty system for federal coal leasing. ONRR released a draft rule in 2015 that would go far to eliminate false pricing (and evasion of royalty payments) by companies selling to subsidiaries of themselves.

- After years of sustained citizen pressure, the Department of the Interior decided to hold "listening sessions" on the



Rancher and Northern Plains member Steve Charter leads a rally at the Bureau of Land Management office in Billings last August. Members testified for reform of the federal coal leasing policy. In January 2016, the Department of the Interior put a pause on future federal coal leases and began a program-wide study of coal royalties, competitive bidding, and reclamation.

federal coal leasing program last summer. Billings was selected for one of five hearings nationwide, and more than 150 of our members and allies showed up. (Thank you!) Our speakers heavily dominated the four-and-half-hour hearing. Northern Plains and WORC also sent Steve Charter to testify at the hearing in Washington, D.C. The DOI announced this January that, based on the testimony and comments received, the federal coal program will be reviewed in a three-year process resulting in a programmatic EIS. That work begins soon.

### OIL AND GAS

- The Legislature formally confirmed the appointment of Northern Plains member Peggy Ames-Nerud to the Board of Oil and Gas Conservation.



Peggy Ames-Nerud

- Our people campaigned for setback requirements on oil and gas wells to establish minimum distances between wells and inhabited buildings. (Montana is the only state in the region without setback requirements.) The BOGC held a special session at our request to take testimony, and 180 of you sent in substantive written comments. The BOGC created a subcommittee to recommend rulemaking and/or

procedural changes on setbacks and adjacent landowner notification.

- Our 2015 legislative work helped enact a state law that makes more information available to the public about the location of oil and gas pipelines in Montana. Thanks to all of you who took part in our phone trees!

- We introduced four oil and gas bills (aimed at protecting landowners) into the 2015 Legislature (on baseline water testing, setback requirements, increased bonding for oil and gas wells, and reform of liquid waste disposal). The Legislature – inclined to always support fossil fuels – rejected these landowner protections.

- We sustained our 2014 lawsuit against the BOGC for violating citizens' constitutional right to meaningfully participate in government with its rule that requires only a 48-hour notice (to the state, not the public) when a wildcat well is going to be fracked. The state district judge ruled against us this fall, and we have appealed to the Montana Supreme Court.

- The Board of Oil and Gas Conservation is hearing our message – and has become steadily more open. The public now has access to electronic and compiled spill reports and flaring reports; previously this data was only available in hard copy in the Billings office. This electronic data enabled a cartography firm to create an interactive spill map.

*Continued on Page 12*



Northern Plains members Bill Hand, center, and Wade Sikorski, right, talk with Rep. George Kipp, D-Heart Butte, about net metering during one of our Lobby Days at the Montana Legislature in February 2015.

## Action

*Continued from Page 11*

- Members of affiliate Dawson Resource Council pressured the DEQ to write rules on disposal of oil and gas solid waste, and have been assured a seat at the table during this process. By working with the DNRC and the local conservation district, DRC has also been able to secure baseline water testing for landowners who live near the site.
- Members of affiliate Carbon County Resource Council are working with the Carbon County Planning Board to update conditional-use permits to cover aspects of oil and gas development (setbacks, bonding, water impacts, and effects on county infrastructure).
- Members of affiliate Stillwater Protective Association sustained a campaign for a citizen-initiated zoning district in Stillwater County to establish protections for water, air, and landowner rights in the areas most likely to be developed.
- Members of affiliate Central Montana Resource Council worked with their Conservation District to gain a state grant for baseline water testing in areas that could be targeted by oil and gas drilling.
- CMRC co-sponsored a seminar to help landowners better understand their rights when mineral rights are severed from surface ownership.

## GOOD NEIGHBOR AGREEMENT

The members of our Good Neighbor Agreement Task Force volunteer tremendous amounts of time to ensure that Montana's

largest mine is operated responsibly and that natural resources are protected. In 2015, these Northern Plains members:

- Prompted the use of a systematic method for analyzing any potential failures in the waste rock pile at Nye to inform future planning and engineering of a liner for the site;
- Began negotiations for a Nye groundwater monitoring and protection plan;
- Established a mitigation plan for new construction at the Benbow portal in Stillwater County;
- Developed a timeline for the involvement of Northern Plains and affiliates Stillwater Protective Association and Cottonwood Resource Council as the mine moves to expand tailings and waste rock facilities in both counties;
- Took part in developing an under-drain nitrogen capture system at the East Boulder waste rock/tailings impoundment.

## AGRICULTURE

- Members of our Agriculture Task Force brought in food systems expert Ken Meter (of the Crossroads Resource Center) and many of you attended his Billings presentation on the economic value of increasing access to locally produced food.
- We sponsored a half-day field seminar on soil health with New Zealand agro-ecologist Nicole Masters (followed by a ranch barbecue). The seminar demonstrated that well-managed soil and grasslands could store enormous amounts of carbon.
- Affiliate Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council hosted a Billings event featuring Liz Carlisle, author of *Lentil Underground: Renegade Farmers and the Future of Food in America*, joined by David Oien, a Montana farmer who is featured in her book.
- Members lobbied our congressional delegation to support country-of-origin labeling and anti-monopoly legislation on behalf of poultry producers, and to vote against the pending Trans-Pacific Partnership trade deal.
- We worked with ally organizations to pass a Cottage Foods bill in the 2015 Legislature. This new law cuts away some of the red tape that has hobbled small producers and processors and allows people to produce certain food

products at home and sell them directly to customers. Thanks to everyone who worked on this!

## CLEAN ENERGY

- Several of our members led the push in the Legislature for bills to remove policy barriers to small-scale renewable energy – specifically removing the cap for net metering and allowing one renewable energy system to offset multiple electrical meters. We introduced five renewable energy bills in the 2015 Montana Legislature, all with bipartisan sponsorship. Our bills were defeated after NorthWestern Energy mounted a furious (and spurious) lobbying campaign against net metering. However, we gained an interim study in the Legislature, giving us 18 months to convince the lawmakers that net metering is a net benefit.
- We produced a traveling road show program making the case for community-based wind and solar electricity projects, including net metering reforms. Our member-leaders presented the program in nine communities.
- In partnership with the Clean Energy Task Force, CMRC hosted a solar seminar focused on rural applications of renewable energy in which 80 people attended including staff from Fergus Electric Cooperative.

## BUILDING OUR STRENGTH

- Thanks to you, our membership is steadily growing across the state, and Northern Plains has more members today than we have ever had.
- We stationed an organizer to work full-time in Missoula.
- We developed an Enhanced Affiliate Services to make accounting services available to affiliates that desire it.

All the work we did in 2015 was only possible because of you.

You have advanced this work in many ways – giving public testimony, writing comments and letters to the editor, lobbying legislators, serving on committees and task forces, meeting with public officials, attending events, making phone calls, donating to our work, and so much more. The things you do are what strengthen our heart and our legs! Thanks for everything you did in 2015.

– Steve Paulson



The goal of the Homegrown Prosperity campaign is to empower Montana communities to meet the challenge of change by building a diverse, resilient economy of shared prosperity.

## Homegrown Prosperity Conference scheduled for September in Billings

Northern Plains will hold a one-day conference on September 10 as part of our campaign to build Homegrown Prosperity in Montana.

From copper to coal to timber to monoculture crops, Montana has long been a resource economy tied to extraction of natural resources for consumption elsewhere. Montana wealth and resources have been drained from our communities by corporations that are not accountable to them. The legacy of this economy is degraded water and diminished topsoil, stark economic inequality, and a cyclical history of uncontrolled booms and painful busts in rural towns.

For 44 years, Northern Plains has worked

to protect Montana's water, land, and family farms and ranches from extractive industries and industrial agriculture, while advocating for local energy and food systems that create prosperity without endangering our vital ecosystems.

With the Homegrown Prosperity Conference, Northern Plains intends to continue seeking paths to shared prosperity for all Montanans. The conference will bring together innovative economic leaders and entrepreneurs from across Montana, as well as leaders and activists from other regions of the United States who, in the face of extractive industries, have worked to transition to a more diversified and resilient economy.

Mark your calendar today! Come to Billings

## Poll finds Montanans ready for energy transition

A recent scientific poll commissioned by Northern Plains found that Montanans are ready for an economy powered by new energy sources and promoting regional agriculture.

Only 15% of Montanans believe that the transition to renewable energy will have a negative effect on jobs, while 77% believe it will have a positive or neutral effect.

“Despite posturing to the contrary by Montana’s investor owned utilities, fossil fuel companies, and some politicians, Montanans know that renewable energy is one of the fastest growing sectors of our nation’s economy and that it can benefit Montana too,” said Ed Gulick, former Chair of the Northern Plains Resource Council and an architect at High Plains Architects in Billings.

“Solar employment has grown at 20 times the national average for the past few years. These good-paying jobs await hard-working people all across the state if we open up more opportunities for distributed solar and wind energy.”

Additionally, Montanans are broadly

supportive of increasing our consumption of Montana-grown food and believe it is a way to support the local economy.

At 94%, almost all Montanans support their local school district buying at least 20% of their food from Montana farmers and ranchers, even if it is more expensive or seasonal.

When asked why they try to purchase local food, respondents’ top two reasons were knowing more about their food and supporting the local economy.

“We’re an agricultural state. Rather than importing food to eat and sending our food dollars out of state, we can keep Montana food dollars in-state by buying products from Montana farmers and ranchers.” said Jean Lemire Dahlman, a Northern Plains member who ranches outside Forsyth.

“Those dollars will have a multiplier effect as they circulate throughout Montana communities,” said Jean. “Creating additional, local markets for Montana producers to sell into is critical to strengthening the economy of our rural communities – besides, its fresher and probably tastes better.”

for the Wild and Scenic Film Fest (Sept. 9) and stay for Saturday’s conference on Sept. 10. We promise you’ll leave inspired!

– Alicia Pettys

## SAVE THE DATE

**Homegrown Prosperity Conference**  
Saturday, Sept. 10  
Billings

- Featuring:
- National leaders in economic justice;
  - Montanans leading the way in creating more prosperous local communities.
  - Story-telling and videos.
  - Networking lunch and reception.
  - Friday, Sept. 9: Billings Wild & Scenic Film Festival.
  - Sunday, Sept. 11: Local Homegrown Prosperity tours.

Northern Plains Resource Council and its Billings affiliate, Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council, are actively working to increase consumption of locally produced food in Eastern Montana’s schools, hospitals, restaurants and other institutions.

The two organizations are completing a feasibility study to determine whether Billings can support a regional food hub for processing, storage, marketing, and distribution of Montana-grown food to institutional markets throughout eastern Montana.

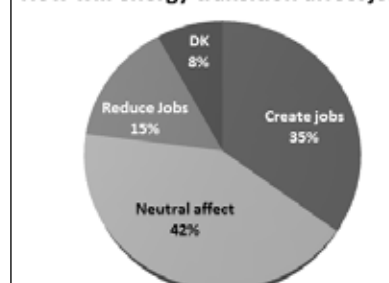
About 77% of Montanans polled believe the transition to renewables – solar and wind – will have a positive or neutral effect on jobs.

Regional food hubs are a proven nationwide model for creating the infrastructure necessary to increase consumption of local food. One successful example in Montana is the Mission Mountain Food Enterprise Center in Ronan.

The survey was created by Professor Michael Aklon of the University of Pittsburgh, Department of Political Science. From January 7-17, 2016, 705 randomly selected registered voters in Montana were polled.

– Alicia Pettys

How will energy transition affect jobs?





Wally McRae and Stephanie Davis will perform a public concert July 23 at the Cottonwood Resource Council's Summer Picnic at Hobbie Diamond Ranch near Greycliff. They are shown performing in 2008 at *Poetry for the Plains* in Joliet.

## SUMMER EVENTS

**Month of May** – *Freedom from Coal* online auction

**May 9** – Missoula Coal Export People's Hearing (7 p.m., MCT Center for the Performing Arts, 200 N. Adams St.)

**May 10** – Helena Coal Export Forum/Luncheon (12 p.m., Lewis and Clark Library, lunch provided)

**May 10** – Livingston Coal Export Forum (5:30 p.m., Elk River Books, 120 N. Main Street)

**May 11** – Billings Coal Export People's Hearing (6 p.m., Home on the Range, 220 S. 27th Street)

**Late May/early June** – Solar seminar in Miles City (Details TBD)

**June 18** – YVCC Summer Solstice Celebration (5-9 p.m. Hannaman Ranch, Laurel)

**June 25** – Home on the Range 10-Year Anniversary Celebration, 10 a.m.-noon, 220 S. 27th Street

**June** – Sun Run Thank-You Party (Helena, details TBD)

**June or July** – YBCC Solar Panel Plug-in Party (details TBD)

**June or July** – DRC Summer Picnic (details TBD)

**Month of July** – Montana Local Food Challenge

**July 16** – SPA Summer Picnic (details TBD)

**July 23** – CRC Summer Picnic and Stephanie Davis/Wally McRae public concert (3 p.m. picnic, 5 p.m. concert, Hobbie Diamond Ranch near Greycliff)

**September 9** – Billings Wild & Scenic Film Festival (7 p.m., Babcock Theatre)

**September** – Gardiner Wild & Scenic Film Festival (details TBD)

**September 10** – Homegrown Prosperity Conference (Billings, details TBD)

**September 17** – Second annual Helena Sun Run (9 a.m., Lewis and Clark Library, Helena)

## Miles City Leap Day party focuses on gains

Northern Plains took advantage of the extra day in 2016 to throw a benefit in Miles City for our eastern Montana supporters to mix, mingle, and hear the latest on our campaign to derail the Tongue River Railroad.

The party, held at the Elks Lodge in downtown Miles City, featured local band Wood-N Wire, video profiles of Northern Plains members, lots of

delicious food provided by Debbie Fix, and a bountiful silent auction and raffle.

Clint McRae emceed the event, and both Clint and Jeanie Alderson spoke about our ongoing efforts to protect eastern Montana from boom-and-bust energy development, especially the continuing threat of the Tongue River Railroad.

– Colin Lauderdale

## YVCC, allies make plans for riverfront site

On March 19, Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council held a community visioning session for the former Corette Power Plant site with seven other community partners.

More than 85 people attended to generate ideas for future uses of the site that would benefit the community, as well as strategies to reduce the impacts of any future industrial uses.

The site is currently owned by Talen Energy and is for sale with a buy-sell contract; the new owner is expected to be announced soon. Our coalition believes that we can work collaboratively with the new owner to achieve the community's vision, creating jobs and vital public use areas in the process.

YVCC and the Billings Public Library celebrated the library's LEED Platinum certification on April 23. Speakers touched on the sustainable design elements, as well



YVCC's Ed Gulick, right, presents Billings Public Library Director Bill Cochran with the LEED Platinum award on April 23.

as the ways the new library benefits Billings' economy and livability. The event included library tours and "demonstration stations" on photovoltaic solar, insulation, and water-wise landscaping.

Don't forget to take our consumer food survey for the chance to win a \$50 gift card to a Billings restaurant! Access it online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/yvfoodhub>

– Alicia Pettys

## GNA evaluating new tailings technology

At both of its sites (in the Stillwater Valley and the East Boulder Valley), the Stillwater Mining Company is reaching its capacity to store waste rock from mining operations.

Members of our Good Neighbor Agreement Task Force are looking into ways to develop new storage facilities to have the least impact to water quality

## Dawson County promotes local foods

Dawson Resource Council members took a significant step forward in their local foods campaign in March when the Dawson County Commission passed a resolution in support of local foods in Dawson County.

The resolution language was supplied by DRC and submitted along with

and the surrounding communities.

The Task Force has been pushing for full consideration of "filtered tailings," which is a method of dewatering the sand and clay waste from mining, and storing it as a hard solid. This would save space and create a smaller footprint for any new waste storage site.

– Cameron Clevidence

more than 80 signatures on a petition supporting it.

Members remain vigilant in pursuing rulemaking for radioactive oil waste disposal, the primary waste disposal facility of this type in Montana being Oaks Disposal in Dawson County.

– Olivia Stockman Splinter

## CCRC wins backing for oil, gas zoning

After 15 months of working with the Carbon County Planning Board, Carbon County Resource Council has ensured the inclusion of landowner protections from oil and gas development in the newest County Development Regulations.

These new regulations include setbacks from homes, baseline water testing, and dust control, and will be recommended for passage to the County Commissioners this month.

CCRC helped sponsor and volunteer at the Red Lodge Earth Week events in conjunction with the Red Lodge High School and the City of Red Lodge. Red Lodge High's Green Team is raising matching funds for a Northwestern Energy USB grant for solar panels on the high school. The week's events included a kids' educational movie, a community solar discussion, a "Composting 101" seminar, business sustainability workshop, and a park clean-up.

– Maggie Zaback

## Yellowstone Bend holds solar workshop

In early April, Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council collaborated with Montana Department of Environmental Quality and USDA Rural Development to host a Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) workshop for business owners in Livingston and the surrounding area.

About 40 people attended the workshop. The audience included small business owners, ranchers, renewable energy installers, contractors, and even a few banks.

The program included an overview of several grant and loan programs specialized to support small businesses in their attempt to incorporate renewable energy installations or energy efficiency upgrades to help save money in their businesses.

Now that these businesses know about the vast opportunities available to them, there's plenty more work to do to put what we learned at the workshop into practice!

– Colin Lauderdale



## Garden cleanup

Richard Cornelius helps trim bushes and clean up the Home on the Range gardens. About a dozen volunteers helped out with the semi-annual event on a blustery Saturday in March.

## CRC sees opening with electric co-op

This spring, Cottonwood Resource Council members began promoting solar power in Sweet Grass County.

In addition to forming a Solar Working Group, CRC members are participating in meetings with other Park Electric Co-op members to develop a campaign to increase Park Electric's transparency and openness to renewable energy.

CRC also set a date for its annual summer picnic – July 23 (mark your calendars now!) – which will be a collaboration with Northern Plains' Coal/Tongue River Railroad Task Force. The picnic will feature cowboy poet Wally McRae and singer-songwriter Stephanie Davis.

– Hannah Hostetter

## Sleeping Giant plans for hearing, Sun Run

Both committees of the Sleeping Giant Citizens Council – Clean Energy and Fossil Fuel Transport – are gearing up for important events.

On May 10, Sleeping Giant will host a people's hearing at the Lewis and Clark Library to collect comments on the draft Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Millennium Bulk Terminal in Longview, Washington. This port is a huge and speculative project that could bring 18 additional coal trains through Montana every day.

The Clean Energy Committee is getting ready to host Helena's second annual Sun Run, which will take place

on September 17 in conjunction with the Montana Renewable Energy Association's Clean Energy Fair. Sleeping Giant hopes to see the installation of solar collectors on the Lewis and Clark Library early this summer.

– Ella Smith

## SPA seeks members for ag committee

Stillwater Protective Association is beginning efforts to change the foodscape in Stillwater County, and will be convening an Ag committee for the first time.

If you have any interest in joining the committee and helping improve Stillwater County for consumers and producers, please come to the meeting or email [cameron@northernplains.org](mailto:cameron@northernplains.org).

In our efforts to protect ag land, SPA members submitted a citizen-initiated zoning petition to the county commission last November, with signatures exceeding the required number. However, Stillwater County developed signature requirements after receiving the petition, and those rules will require the team to make revisions to what they've collected so far.

– Cameron Clevidence

## Beartooth Alliance becomes bear aware

Beartooth Alliance will host its annual meeting at Range Rider Lodge in Silver Gate at 7 p.m. July 14.

Bob Gibson from Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks will discuss bear awareness and how Cooke City and Silver Gate can prevent bear activity in town.

– Maggie Zaback

## Bear Creek Council throws Solar Social

Bear Creek Council members Rick Lamplugh and Mary Strickroth hosted a Solar Social at their home on April 24 as part of Gardiner's Earth Day celebrations. Orion Thornton, of OnSite Energy, spoke about opportunities for residential solar in Montana, and recently installed panels on Rick and Mary's house.

Bear Creek Council has submitted comments opposing the proposed Crevice Mine in Jardine, and also commented on the bison quarantine outside of Yellowstone National Park. The bison hunt has created a safety issue for Gardiner residents.

– Maggie Zaback

## CMRC prepares for its annual meeting

The Central Montana Resource Council's annual meeting is rapidly approaching.

The event will be 6 p.m. Thursday, May 19, at First Presbyterian Church. Rising Trout will provide pizza, and CMRC members will bring side dishes. We will review our past year's work, and there will be a guest speaker. Be sure to attend to learn about exciting volunteer opportunities and to catch up with fellow CMRC members.

CMRC's clean energy work is beginning to build momentum. At the March CMRC meeting, members met with staff from the Fergus Electric Co-op to discuss community solar possibilities. CMRC will continue to work with Fergus Electric to bring about more clean energy opportunities for central Montana.

– Adam Haight



**WINNER:** Claire Cantrell of Bozeman won the beautiful king-size quilt crafted and donated by Barb Berg of Lewistown. Proceeds benefited the Ag Task Force.



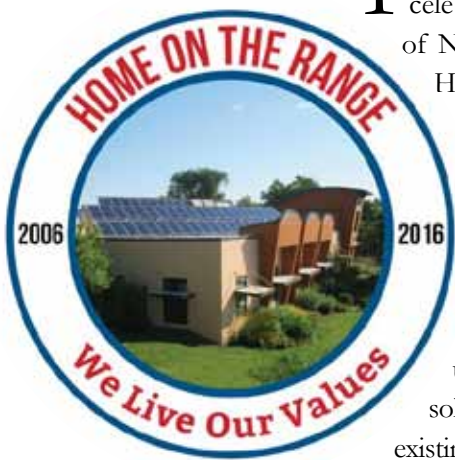
Check the date at the upper right of your address label to see when your membership is due for renewal. Remember, we rely on your support. Thank you!




# THE PLAINS TRUTH


VOICE OF THE NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL

## Home on the Range to celebrate 10th anniversary on June 25



You're invited to come and celebrate the 10th anniversary of Northern Plains' office – Home on the Range. Please mark Saturday, June 25, from 10 a.m. to noon on your calendar. Join us for coffee and pastries, speakers, celebration, and the unveiling of our new 25kW solar array, which with our existing 10kW array should

provide us ample electricity for our needs. Renovating a long-empty grocery store into Montana's first LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) Platinum building was an intense project. Many of you pitched in with dollars and volunteer labor to make it possible. In the past decade, Home on the Range has blazed the trail for green building in the Billings area. Since we completed this project, five other downtown Billings buildings are certified LEED Platinum by

the U.S. Green Building Council. Home on the Range received numerous awards and has been recognized in national publications. This project which you supported put green building on the map in Montana, so come to Billings on June 25 and help us celebrate! More details of the day's events will be announced soon. – Steve Paulson 

## Help us in Growing Our Membership, win \$500!

This summer, you have the opportunity to make a big difference for Northern Plains, and help us in *Growing Our Membership*. Beginning June 1, an intrepid group of Northern Plains members will kick off a membership drive, and one lucky winner will come out of it \$500 richer! Thanks to the support of a

generous donor, everyone who recruits at least one brand-new Northern Plains member during the *Growing Our Membership* campaign will be entered into a drawing for the \$500 cash prize. Here's how it will work:

- Recruit 1-5 new members to Northern Plains: you get 1 drawing entry per new member.

- Recruit 6-plus new members to Northern Plains: you get 2 drawing entries per new member.

For example, if you recruit 4 new members, you will receive 4 entries in the cash prize drawing. If you recruit 7 new members, you will receive 14 entries in the drawing. This work is all about building power to achieve Northern Plains'

goals. More members make us a stronger organization! If you would like to participate, please call the Northern Plains office at 406-248-1154 or go to [www.northernplains.org/growing-our-membership](http://www.northernplains.org/growing-our-membership) to sign up. We will provide all participants with helpful information, more detailed campaign guidelines, membership brochures, and lots of support. – Caleb Lande 