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Colstrip jobs study:
Robust cleanup can secure region's future

Transferring the Coal Economy

The Colstrip Power Plant will shutter two of its four units by 2022. Layoffs will hit the regional economy hard. After the long boom, local government is asking what a post-coal economy would look like in Rosebud County.

To prepare for the transition, Northern Plains undertook a joint research effort with IBEW Local 1638 at Colstrip four months ago. Our research examined how groundwater cleanup can extend employment for local workers following the 2022 closures. Heavy metals and sulfates leaking from Colstrip’s ash ponds have polluted the region for 40 years. Northern Plains and Local 1638 feel

Continued on Page 4

Montanans stand up, speak out for clean power

As Montanans, we have a say in the energy future of our state. We can build an energy future that works for all of us, and that future is powered by clean power. This was the message of our “Clean Power to the People” Hearing in Billings where Montanans from all over the state came together in defense of the Clean Power Plan (CPP).

Finalized in 2015, the Clean Power Plan is an Obama-era rule and signature climate policy. The CPP set out to curb carbon pollution from existing power plants, set reductions targets for each state, and give states broad flexibility to reach those goals.

The Trump Administration has been working since January of 2017 to repeal the plan. In order to repeal it, the EPA must follow a formal rulemaking process, which includes soliciting public comment. The EPA has held four hearings across the country to comply with this rulemaking process – not one of these hearings took place in Montana.

Continued on Page 5
As you sit down for your next meal, look at the food on your plate. What do you know about this food? Do you know the name of the farmer or rancher who raised this food? Have you walked the land where it was raised? What was the soil like? Does the family who raised your food have children who were learning the ways of their mother and father? Was love present?

If each of us has an understanding of the impact and power of local food, as Wendell Berry states, we are "participants in agriculture."

In 1950, 70% of Montana's food needs were met by Montana family ranchers and farmers. By 2007, it was less than 10%. Today, though, Northern Plains is leading the return to the agricultural act, and how we eat determines, to a considerable extent, how the world is used. This is a simple way of describing a relationship that is inexpressibly complex. To eat responsibly is to understand and enact, so far as we can, this complex relationship. - Wendell Berry

The Yellowstone Valley Food Hub would manage the collection, processing, marketing, and distribution of food products from local producers, giving them more time to do what they do best – farm and ranch. The food hub would sell wholesale to institutions and would make local food available to individuals through a Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) program. The nutritional needs of low-income households would be met through the acceptance of SNAP and WIC vouchers.

A group of spirited ag producers, along with YVCC's Community Food Campaign, have – over the past three years – dedicated time and energy to make the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub a reality. A feasibility study was conducted, then Northern Plains hired Sustainability Ventures to complete a comprehensive business plan. Now, we're ready to launch the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub. To accomplish this, we must raise $160,000.

I present this to you as an opportunity to invest in the availability of local food in your community. Local foods are nutrient-rich and preserve biodiversity. Family farmers and ranchers are more likely to practice sustainable farming methods and water conservation, thus protecting local ecosystems. A strong, local food system gives you, the eater, the opportunity to develop a connection with the food you are putting in your body.

One of our core beliefs at Northern Plains is that a strong local food system is powered by family farm-and-ranch-based food producers. Such a system is good for Montana's economy, our environment, and our rural communities. Montana is a better place when family farms and ranches are thriving. We stand for buying local and creating strong, resilient communities. Local dollars spent locally circulate through the local economy, employing people and supporting other businesses.

Your financial investment in the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub is putting your money to work, at home, building food security and resilient communities.

A crowdfunding site for the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub is live now through May 31st. Join me by investing at:

NorthernPlains.org/FoodHub

Together we will ensure that Montana farmers and ranchers are feeding Montanans.

- Becky Mitchell
Northern Plains Chair
A bequest to Northern Plains is an investment in your own values.

Once you have provided for loved ones in your will, you can include a gift of money or stock to Northern Plains. You can even make Northern Plains a beneficiary of an insurance policy or an investment account.

A bequest is the simplest way to make a legacy gift that supports work you believe in. And it's revocable… you can change your mind if you ever need to.

If you’d like sample bequest language for your attorney to review, contact Steve Paulson at our office.

Phone: (406) 248-1154
Email: steve@northernplains.org

You don’t have to be rich to make a meaningful charitable bequest

"There is nothing I need to do alone. More and more people are coalescing around the belief that we can create a world that works for everybody, if we do it together."

- John Brown

"We firmly believe in the mission and the work accomplished by Northern Plains in protecting the land and the natural spaces of our Montana over the past 40+ years. We have been monthly sustainers for over 10 years. It is so easy, and it feels so good; a small monthly amount is much easier than writing a larger check once a year, and we know we are contributing to Montana’s conservation throughout the year."

-Jim Greene & Martha Vogt

To sign up as a monthly sustainer contact Caleb Lande: caleb@northernplains.org
Phone: (406) 248-1154
a responsible cleanup will create good-paying union jobs, secure Colstrip’s future, and protect the ranching community while holding owners accountable.

The full study will be released at the end of May. Below are short answers to the two main questions we set out to answer.

What is a leaking ash pond?
Ash left over from coal combustion is mixed with water and stored in tailings impoundments. The Colstrip ash ponds (there are 37 of them) cover 800 acres and are up to 100 feet deep.

Every day, the ash ponds leak 500,000 gallons into local groundwater. A contamination plume continues to expand despite a system of capture and pump-back wells. Boron, sulfates and other contaminants are present at up to 33 times drinking water standards close to the ponds. The power plant owners have yet to report on lead, chromium, arsenic, and other cancer-causing contaminants in the plume.

What does it take to clean up an ash pond?
Our study evaluated projects around the country where pollution from coal ash ponds is being remedied. Cases in Appalachia and the Carolinas reveal there are right and wrong ways to do this. When done right, ash pond cleanup creates up to 50-95% the jobs that were required to run the plant. A plant in South Carolina observed a 90% drop in arsenic levels by excavating and transporting the ash to a lined landfill.

Moving forward
We plan to continue our joint effort with the IBEW local by applying together for a $150,000 research grant from the Montana Department of Labor and Industry.

Legacy pollution is unattractive to future employers and a lingering black cloud for agricultural producers. The Colstrip community and area ranchers deserve a responsible cleanup. It is what ratepayers in the Northwest paid for in the first place and what the owners promised the local community from day one.

-Alex Cunha

Northern Plains member Clint McRae is a rancher in the Colstrip area who relies on local groundwater.

Coal ash excavation from South Carolina study site

In essence, our intitial study of coal ash sites has concluded that what is good for the environment is also good for the economic security of affected regions. A more robust cleanup effort for Colstrip involves projects that require more labor.

The current expected proposal is a minimal “cap-in-place” effort that simply covers the contaminating materials, leaving a path for toxic materials to reach groundwater. However, our study indicates that excavating the material - as well as building and operating a new water treatment facility - are not only the most environmentally sound steps toward cleanup, they also provide good-paying jobs using many of the skills that current Colstrip plant workers already have.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job-Creating Initiatives Involved in Coal Ash Clean Up</th>
<th>Cap-In-Place + No New Water Treatment (Current Expected Proposal)</th>
<th>Excavation + New Water Treatment Plant (A More Responsible Plan)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dewatering</td>
<td>DEFINITE JOBS</td>
<td>DEFINITE JOBS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Earth Moving</td>
<td>NOT IN PLAN, NO JOBS</td>
<td>DEFINITE JOBS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Landfill</td>
<td>NOT IN PLAN, NO JOBS</td>
<td>LIKELY NEEDED, JOBS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Build New H2O Treatment Plant</td>
<td>UNCERTAIN</td>
<td>DEFINITE JOBS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operate New H2O Treatment Plant</td>
<td>NOT IN PLAN, NO JOBS</td>
<td>DEFINITE JOBS</td>
</tr>
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Clean power

Continued from Page 1

“The Clean Power Plan would have created a variety of jobs for large and small Montana businesses and signaled that the U.S. would be a leader in climate change mitigation. Now the Trump Administration wants to repeal it without even coming to listen to Montanans. We’re not about to let that happen,” said Ed Gulick, Billings architect, past Northern Plains Chair, and chair of the Northern Plains Clean Energy Task Force.

A crowd of 50 gathered together to stand up for clean power. One by one, attendees approached a microphone to address an empty table with their comments in support of the Clean Power Plan. Placards on the table read “Scott Pruitt- EPA Administrator” and “Donald Trump- President of the United States,” indicating who should have shown up to hear from Montanans.

The Clean Power Plan presents Montana with opportunities to diversify our economy. “Renewable energy and related technologies create many more jobs per dollar invested or energy generated than large scale fossil fuel plants,” said Livingston resident Jim Baerg in his formal comment. The solar industry is growing 17 times faster than the rest of the U.S. economy.

For past Northern Plains Chair Mary Fitzpatrick, the Clean Power Plan is an opportunity to take meaningful action to combat climate change. “Whatever the many benefits of the fossil fuel civilization, the true costs are now becoming apparent. We need the CPP, and more, to avoid the worst effects of climate change,” stated Fitzpatrick.

In order to have comprehensive climate action, we need those in charge to hear from us. We need Montana-made solutions to the issues that threaten our clean air, water, and land. We’re working to build a brighter future for generations to come and we’re calling on those in power to do the same. Pretending that climate change doesn’t exist is not an option.

-Sydney Ausen

MEMBERS TESTIFY IN GILLETTE, WY

Majorities of Americans in all 50 states and all 435 congressional districts support setting strict limits on carbon dioxide pollution from coal-fired power plants, but EPA Director Scott Pruitt is proposing to repeal the Clean Power Plan (CPP).

While Montana did not have a formal hearing, Northern Plains members Beth Kaeding, Becky Mitchell, Ellen Pfister, and Wade Sikorski drove to Gillette, WY on March 27 to testify in support of the CPP.

An excerpt from Mitchell’s comments encapsulates the consequences of this potential rollback:

“It is time for the Trump administration to stop fighting this transition and move forward with the Clean Power Plan. It is time to support the people of this country.”
Located on the doorstep of Yellowstone National Park, the Crevice Mine continues to move through the permitting process. Residents of Park County are increasingly feeling the threat of a gold mine in their backyard.

Last month, Crevice Mining Group obtained a road-use permit from the U.S. Forest Service that will allow the company to maintain a road accessing the property while they continue to work toward drilling permits.

It’s been nearly three years since two mining companies requested permission to explore the area in Paradise Valley for gold. The threatened area is part of the land that would be addressed by the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act (YGPA), a bill sponsored by Sen. Jon Tester that would permanently withdraw the federal mineral rights on 30,000 acres of public land in the Custer Gallatin National Forest.

These mines would pose severe threats to the livelihoods of Park County residents. Local people were hopeful that the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act would be included in the 2018 omnibus spending bill, but the spending bill was passed earlier this spring without the Act.

April 26th marked the one-year anniversary of the bill’s introduction. To become law, the YGPA will need to make it through this congressional session. Sen. Tester and Rep. Greg Gianforte both support the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act, but Senator Steve Daines has yet to step up and do the same.

You're invited to join Northern Plains Resource Council at a rally to defend our water from the Keystone XL pipeline. The rally will take place on Wednesday, May 23rd, in Great Falls. Northern Plains’ lawsuit opposing the TransCanada presidential permit is scheduled to be heard in federal court the next morning (Thursday, May 24th). By coming to Great Falls, you can help show your support for Montana's water and people, and make it clear that Montanans don't want this unnecessary and dangerous pipeline project.

The Keystone XL pipeline was approved by President Trump on March 24th, 2017. If built, the pipeline would threaten two of Montana’s most iconic and critical waterways – the Missouri and Yellowstone Rivers – along with the hundreds of smaller rivers and streams also crossed along its path.

Northern Plains members have always known that when our water is threatened, so are our communities and our ways of life. That’s why we filed suit against the pipeline’s permit on March 30th of last year, just days after the permit was issued.

In October of last year, our lawsuit withstood the Trump Administration's and TransCanada's attempts to have it dismissed. And just last month, we won the right to read and review documents the government was trying to withhold from us. The hearing on May 24th is when the merits of our claims against the pipeline will finally be heard in court.

We hope you can join us in Great Falls!

-Hannah Hostetter

The Yellowstone River in Park County, Montana

Last month, the Billings Gazette editorialized in favor of protecting the Yellowstone Gateway adding that, "So far, Daines is all talk and no action."

-Sydney Ausen

Contact Senator Daines

Phone: (202) 224-2651
Email: steve@daines.senate.gov
Did you know trees can talk? Trees communicate with each other through complex networks of roots, nutrients, bacteria, fungi, and mycelium in ways that scientists are only beginning to understand (see Suzanne Simard’s TED Talk: “How Trees Talk to Each Other”). The “nodes” are the points where information crosses and branches out to new areas, expanding the network.

Developing these points of intersection and growth is one goal of several Northern Plains members: to create a supportive network of agricultural producers who want to better understand their soil, monitor it, and develop a more resilient community as a result.

This winter, Northern Plains members hosted two initial “Soil Node” meetings to launch the first formal Soil Health Network in Montana. Farmers and ranchers attended in order to learn about soil health, share their experiences, and ask each other questions about weeds, water, and natural inputs like compost rather than chemical inputs. The excitement about storing more water in the soil and growing healthier food was palpable, despite the several feet of snow on the ground.

Getting together to share ideas seems basic, but in some ways it is foreign to modern agriculture. For a long time, agriculture has managed to put neighbors in competition with each other and make farming methods more like trade secrets than an opportunity to grow together. However, what became clear at these initial soil node meetings was the simple desire to run a better business, connect with neighbors, and have a more resilient operation.

While not everyone runs their own farm or ranch, many people are land managers in some way – perhaps a yard, a community garden space, or public parks. The advantages of connecting and managing land in a different way are becoming more apparent, even to town-dwellers. Let us know if you want to work on soil health in your community by emailing maggie@northernplains.org or calling (406) 248-1154.

-Maggie Zaback

**Members on the Move**

**Annika Charter- Williams,**  
*Shepherd*  
*Beginning Farmer Network: Train the Trainer*

“This conference provided a framework for how to support beginning ranchers and farmers in our community. The hub will be able to utilize this to help beginning ranchers and farmers plan for on-farm success.”

**Beth Williams,**  
*Bozeman*  
*Health, Environment, Agriculture, Labor (HEAL) Summit*

“As a multi-sector coalition, HEAL can teach Northern Plains a great deal about what is happening in the food movement outside of Montana and in areas outside of our typical work.”

**Joanne Berry,**  
*Lewistown*  
*Principles of Community Organizing- WORC*

“The POCO training was phenomenal. I felt engaged and interested throughout the entire three days. The trainers made me feel listened to and valued.”

**Dena Hoff,**  
*Glendive*  
*The National Family Farm Coalition*

“It is really nice to bring the expertise from Northern Plains to a bigger coalition and be able to share our organizing skills and strategies with them. These are groups from all over the country, so exchanging ideas and working together is critical. Lots of solidarity always is good.”

**Joe Stockburger,**  
*Billings*  
*Montana Local Climate Workshop*

“Seeing what communities like Missoula, and Whitefish along with the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribe are doing to push their respective climate action plans forward, I got valuable information/connections to use as we begin to craft one that is unique for the city of Billings.”

**GET INVOLVED**

We are always excited to help our members grow, learn, and teach. If you have ideas for conferences, workshops, trainings, or events you would like to attend, we would love to hear them!  
(406) 248-1154  
info@northernplains.org
We’re surely living in “interesting times.” We have an Interior Secretary who says his cabinet department is “in the energy business.” We have an Energy Secretary who says fossil fuels prevent sexual assault. We have a chief of the EPA who simply rejects the scientific basis for climate change. All of them contrive new ways for taxpayers to subsidize fossil fuels and devise new ways to keep the public out of the decision-making process.

We should remind ourselves that the people who started this organization also lived in “interesting times.” They stared into the dark jaws of the North Central Power Study 46 years ago and mobilized to make sure it never saw the light of day.

They worked together, and they wouldn’t give up. Some of them are still fighting today. The rest of us are standing on what they built.

See what a difference you make! Thank you!

Thanks for all you do to make success possible. And thank you for showing up!

- Also in January 2017, the BLM released a key report in its review of the federal coal program. Many of you testified and wrote on the need for reform, and many of our recommendations were included in the report. Unfortunately, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke ended this review and is moving to reinstate taxpayer subsidies of coal mining on public lands.

- Remember those six coal-to-Asia ports proposed in the Pacific Northwest? Only one proposal remains in play. Your testimony and comments made a big difference!

- A team of canvassers tested approaches to see what moves the needle on climate change. We used “deep canvass” techniques to identify people who don’t accept climate change to see which messages perform best in changing that position. We knocked on more than 6,500 doors.

- Northern Plains then-Chair Kate French spoke at a conference on “De-Carbonizing Our Future” in New Orleans.

When the legislature voted to replace our landowner notification rule with a less protective law, your calls persuaded the Governor to veto that bill.

After years of hearings and public testimony, BLM adopted standards in 2016 requiring drillers to limit the flaring, venting, and leaking of natural gas from federally leased oil and gas wells. We sought these standards to reduce waste of natural gas, protect the health of Montanans, and provide a fair return for U.S. taxpayers. Our coalition defeated a May 2017 congressional attempt to block the standards, and we won in federal court as well. Late in the year, however, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke – with no public hearings – mounted an attempt to delay implementation of most of these standards.

We worked with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 1638 to craft a plan to study the job and economic opportunities of cleaning up Colstrip’s leaking coal ash ponds. The state received a grant of $4.6 million in August, and this study will be one of the things funded under that grant. The partnership between Northern Plains and labor was an important factor in securing the grant.

In January 2017, the Bureau of Land Management issued an official guidance protecting the property rights of farmers and ranchers threatened with the mining of their property against their will. We worked with Senator Tester, former Interior Department officials, and others to build our case. Members traveled to DC several times to meet with the BLM, and many of you wrote them as well.

OIL & GAS/KEYSTONE XL

Your comments kept pressure on DEQ to improve oversight of (heretofore unregulated) radioactive oilfield waste disposal, and area members circulated petitions in their communities to demonstrate local support. The DEQ published draft rules in August; Northern Plains members dominated the hearings and public comment, pointing out needed improvements. Revised rules are expected soon.

Member Sue Beug traveled to D.C. to testify against a delay for an EPA methane leak rule.
The EPA also has a rule on methane leaks but is trying to institute a two-year delay in enforcing it (while looking for ways to weaken the rule). Member Sue Beug traveled to Washington, DC, to testify against such a delay.

When the Trump Administration restored the Keystone XL pipeline permit, Northern Plains joined with other state and national groups to spearhead a federal lawsuit. The suit calls for a new EIS that reflects updated understanding of the pipeline's effects and whether there is even a need for it. The case will be heard in May 2018.

GOOD NEIGHBOR AGREEMENT

We challenged Stillwater Mining Company to develop alternative plans for two new tailings impoundments, pushing them toward the safest possible alternative.

After years of negotiations, we rewrote the water protection programs of the Agreement. This important revision will improve monitoring and create more rigorous water protection standards.

SMC agreed to develop a 100 kW solar array to power support buildings to the smelter in Columbus. It’s a good first step in getting the mine to reduce its carbon impact.

CLEAN ENERGY

We introduced several clean energy bills during the 2017 legislature. With the

Legislature fixated on reviving the coal industry, our bills did not pass, though they did gain ground and build momentum for the next legislature.

We fought off an attempt in the legislature to roll back net metering for people who generate their own electricity with the sun or the wind.

57 members traveled to Helena during the legislative session to lobby and testify. Hundreds of you played a part in our phone trees during the session. You’re the best!

Several clean energy bills were introduced during the 2017 legislature. While they did not pass, important momentum has been gained heading into 2019.

Our members have been engaging the boards and management of three rural electric co-ops. Farmers and ranchers can and want to use renewable energy to increase the efficiency of their operations; the co-ops should help facilitate that transition.

The Annual Meeting was keynoted by Tyson Slocum, Director of Public Citizen’s energy program. He reviewed the amazing growth of renewable energy in recent years and reminded the audience of the role that government can play in sustaining that progress (just as it played a role in development of the coal, oil, and nuclear industries in years past).

Another Annual Meeting speaker, Tammi Agard of Eetility, described a pricing structure – “Pay As You Save” – that can save money for rural electric co-ops and electric utilities, as well as customers, by investing in energy efficiency.

Your support, energy, tenacity, and courage – even in the face of painfully “interesting times” – ensures that we have the strength, the competence, and the stamina to make Montana a better place to live and work.

-Steve Paulson
COOL's comeback
Country of Origin Labeling gains legislative support regionally

Country of Origin Labeling (COOL) was finally thrown under the bus in 2013 when Congress rescinded it in the face of a $3.1 billion threat from the World Trade Organization (for NAFTA violations). Is there a possibility of reviving COOL?

COOL has consistently maintained over 90% approval from American consumers, who want to know where their meat comes from.

NAFTA (the North American Free Trade Agreement) is being re-negotiated at this time. A key point of discussion is ISDS (Investor State Dispute Settlement), the provision of NAFTA (and other trade agreements) that gives extraordinary power to international corporations to sue national governments before a secret tribunal of three corporate “judges.” ISDS is the weapon that such corporations have used to undermine U.S. laws that protect workers, the environment, and public health.

More than anything else, the renegotiation of NAFTA should focus on the fundamental injustice of ISDS.

Because COOL is so popular, several states have in fact already started working to bring COOL back from the dead. None have yet enacted it, but legislators in Colorado, South Dakota, and Wyoming are making the case to restore it.

The opportunity to reinstate COOL in states through placarding at the store, rather than labels directly on the meat, begs to be tested. If American consumers demand the right to know where their food comes from, corporations should not be allowed to hide behind secret tribunals to overrule American law.

-Maggie Zaback

Northern Plains joins fossil fuel royalty lawsuit
Suit challenges loophole allowing companies to avoid public payments

On March 28th, Northern Plains and three allied groups moved to intervene in a lawsuit against the Trump Administration. The groups seek to join the states of New Mexico and California, which filed suit in late 2017, challenging a loophole that allows fossil fuel companies to avoid paying their fair share of royalties when they extract publicly owned minerals. The states and groups are challenging Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke’s repeal of a 2016 Office of Natural Resources Revenue rule that had aimed to protect taxpayers.

The 2016 rule had closed a loophole through which energy companies avoided paying full royalties by selling coal, oil, and gas to their own subsidiaries at below-market rates, then using those sales as the basis for royalty payments. This scheme has particularly been used to subsidize coal exports, where international prices are often higher than domestic ones.

Zinke’s actions come at the expense of state and federal budgets. In creating the 2016 rule, the Interior Department estimated that it would increase royalty collections by more than $70 million per year, a number former Montana Director of Revenue Dan Bucks has called a severe underestimate.

“Every day, our area sees the impacts of coal mining,” said Steve Charter, a Shepherd rancher and past Chair of Northern Plains, whose property is above an underground mine that produces federally owned coal. “Given the impacts on our land, water, and the climate, the least we can do is ensure that companies profiting from the mining and drilling aren’t getting a sweetheart deal. Public lands and minerals should be managed for the benefit of everyone, not just big energy companies.”

-Briefing in the royalty loophole case will begin this June, with a hearing set for October.

-Svein Newman
anchers in the Tongue River Valley do the bulk of their irrigating during a few weeks every spring when snowmelt sends a short spike in water quantity downstream. That short window is critical to flooding crop and pastureland for a productive growing season. This spring, members along the Tongue’s tributaries are capturing this window with sampling gear provided by Montana DEQ.


"That spring thaw is crucial to raising cattle and crops."

The latest? Secretary Zinke is planning to undo a set of 2016 protections that limit the waste of methane and natural gas, and replace those protections with an empty gesture – a 2018 “replacement rule” that removes every requirement deemed “too burdensome” on the oil and gas industry. If the replacement rule goes through, companies won’t have to limit the amount they flare, or replace old and faulty equipment, or install leak detection and repair programs.

We care because flaring and leaks waste a natural resource – and taxpayer dollars – in the case of minerals owned and administered by the United States. The oil and gas industry flares, vents, and leaks an estimated $330 million worth of publicly-owned natural gas each year. That’s enough to power five million homes a year.

Proposed in February 2018, Zinke’s replacement rule underwent a 60-day comment period that ended April 23. Northern Plains members from Glendive to Bozeman jumped into defending the protections we all deserve—and that we fought for in the first place, starting back in 2014.

Why? Because we believe that waste is wrong and that shoving pollution onto others is unjust. Montanans should have a say in the quality of our air, the health of our climate, and the handling of our publicly-owned resources.

"It’s also a threat to our health, in the form of:
• “smog and regional haze,”
• “hazardous air pollutants, some of which are carcinogenic,” and
• “methane, a powerful contributor to global warming.”"

(Those quotes come from the BLM’s own 2016 analysis—the same agency that now calls limits to flaring, venting, and leaking unnecessary.)

"Looking upstream at Hanging Woman Creek, a tributary of the Tongue River."

"Protecting spring thaw on the Tongue River"
Federal judge calls for stronger regional climate analysis, orders BLM to consider less coal

Northern Plains and allies win legal challenge over Resource Management Plans

In March, Northern Plains and allies won a legal challenge against the Bureau of Land Management's Miles City and Buffalo Resource Management Plans (RMPs). The BLM is required by law to develop these plans, which broadly govern the use of public lands and minerals across certain regions.

RMPs require the BLM to look at various options for public lands to balance competing uses (recreation, conservation, agriculture, development, and more). These two RMPs cover basically the entire Powder River Basin and most of eastern Montana.

Our challenge won on multiple claims. Judge Morris found that BLM’s plans were deficient because they didn’t so much as consider reducing coal leasing to balance competing land uses (the plans only envision scenarios in which BLM leases up to 11 billion tons of coal – the equivalent of more than eight Otter Creek mines – even under its “conservation alternative”). Judge Morris also ruled that BLM failed to sufficiently examine combustion impacts (air and carbon pollution) from coal, oil, and gas; and that BLM did not use adequate climate science in assessing land and resource management impacts.

“The court’s ruling rightfully declares that the impacts of energy development should be accounted and planned for,” said Mark Fix, a past chair of Northern Plains whose Miles City ranch is downstream from several coal mines. “I’ve seen the impacts of climate change firsthand, through increased fires and extreme storm events. As a rancher, I rely on nature for everything. If we don’t get a handle on climate change, we’re toast.”

Under the judge’s ruling, BLM must conduct a new review of its land management policy to take these factors into account. During that process, all new coal, oil, and gas leases must abide by Morris’s order as well (including heightened climate scrutiny, etc.).

Northern Plains was represented in the case by the Western Environmental Law Center.

-Svein Newman

Taking local action on climate change in Montana

City executives, municipal legislators, and community members across the state tackle global issue

Missoula

In June 2017, Mayor John Engen joined hundreds of mayors nationwide to meet the goals of the Paris Climate Accord. The work began in earnest in 2009, with the City’s Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory, Engen then convened the Conservation and Climate Action Plan (CCAP) Task Force to outline methods to reduce pollution. The CCAP now serves as a Sustainability road map for Missoula.

Whitefish

Mayor John Mulhfeld also chose to uphold the Paris Climate Agreement. Additionally, finishing touches have recently been made to a Climate Action Plan. After final revisions in March, the plan was officially unveiled at an Earth Day Celebration on April 21. It encompasses municipal operations, as well as Whitefish Schools, with an overarching goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 26% in the next seven years.

Helena

Published in 2009, Helena’s plan creates a framework for energy conservation efforts. In the past two years, Helena met or exceeded many established goals. A Citizen Conservation Board is now overseeing implementation of remaining recommendations. The Board is also tasked with compiling an annual report as part of the City’s budget process.

Red Lodge

With support from Carbon County Resource Council, the City has become a regional leader on energy conservation. In addition to employing an Energy Corps member to coordinate sustainability projects, Red Lodge conducted a baseline assessment of energy use, costs, and greenhouse gas pollution, and is in the process of implementing a robust energy conservation plan.

Billings

Billings Mayor Ron Tussing convened a commission on Energy and Conservation in 2006, but it was disbanded after an initial four-year term. Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council is working with City leaders to revive this commission, with a goal to conduct a baseline assessment like Red Lodge, as well as creating and implementing a comprehensive Energy Cost Savings Plan.

-Kari Boiter

QUICK CLIMATE FACTS

- Wildfire season is 2½ months longer than it was in the 1980s.
- Our state’s worst three fire seasons have occurred since 2006.
- Total fire costs in 2017 exceeded $400M, with $62M coming directly from the MT general fund.
- 2017 was one of the worst years on record for drought, though the drought took effect suddenly.
- Over 50% of our wheat crop was rated poor to very poor by the USDA last June. Average at that time is usually 5%.
- Allergens are increasing with higher atmospheric CO2 and warmer days.
- Wildfire smoke provokes respiratory and cardiac issues, causes headaches and nausea.
- West Nile virus has moved in to our state.

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What we learned talking to Montanans about climate change

Last summer, our canvass team hit the streets of Billings to talk to Montanans about climate change. We knocked on more than 6,500 doors, speaking with people from a broad range of the political spectrum, and learned some important takeaways. This process challenged our own assumptions - now we want to share that information with you!

This project was a big departure from the usual political campaign-style canvassing. Standard practice is a quick pitch followed by an “ask” for a voter’s support. For a topic like climate change, there was no way to open a person's mind without a real discussion.

Here is what we learned:

**Conversation works better than debate.**

The quickest way to close off a person’s mind is to immediately try to persuade them. A good conversation on climate change is a discussion of shared values. Try to understand the other person’s values first, then connect to them, and finally express why you care about climate change.

**Use plain language to explain climate change.**

A dissertation on infrared radiation may reach some people but, for most, understanding climate change is best explained by plain language or analogy. Here’s an example using weather patterns vs. climate change:

> Climate change doesn’t mean it’s going to stop snowing in January. Think of it this way – The New York Giants went 3-13 last year. When they beat the Broncos in week 6, no one said, “Hey, this team could win the Super Bowl!” You don’t just look at one game. You look at the whole season. It’s the same way with our climate. You have to look at the big picture.

**People respond best to messages that are local and personal.**

While the impacts of climate change are global, it can feel far away unless we highlight the effects we are feeling here. Climate change is an issue affecting people and our families now, not just penguins in the Antarctic in 30 years.

**Highlight solutions that are consistent to a person’s values.**

People reject climate change when it seems impossible to solve. There are real solutions to climate change, and many that will also benefit our state! For example, renewable energy development appeals to 90% of Montanans, but whether you discuss energy independence, new jobs, or clean power may depend on the person you’re speaking with. That means getting to know the person first.

**Changing opinions takes time.**

People are loyal to many groups they identify with, but are generally not well-informed about climate change. Changing opinions on climate change doesn't happen right away, but it can happen. Your friendly conversation about why climate change matters to you could be the starting point in moving someone to believe we should take action.

**Don’t be afraid to talk to people!**

In all our conversations about climate change, we found people to be open, friendly, and genuine. It’s not as bad as you might think. But, we won’t make climate change a movable issue in Montana unless we’re willing to talk about it.

– Cameron Clevidence

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**SUMMER EVENTS**

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<tr>
<th>May</th>
<th>June</th>
<th>July</th>
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<tr>
<td>Food Hub crowdfunding lasts all of May!</td>
<td>June 6 – CMRC MT climate assessment event</td>
<td>Northern Plains’ Online Auction (all month)</td>
<td>Local Food Challenge (all month)</td>
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<td>May 22 - Green Drinks, Home on the Range (Northern Plains office), 5-7 PM</td>
<td>YVCC summer solstice event (specifics TBD)</td>
<td>CRC annual event (specifics TBD)</td>
<td>YBCC Senior Center Solar Celebration, Livingston (time TBD)</td>
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<td>May 23 – Keystone XL Lawsuit Rally, Great Falls, gathering begins 4:30pm</td>
<td>June 26 - Green Drinks, Montana Audubon Center, 5-7 PM</td>
<td>July 31st - Green Drinks, YVCC hosts at Home on the Range (Northern Plains office), 5-7 PM</td>
<td>August 28 - Green Drinks, 5-7 PM (location TBD)</td>
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From clean energy financing tools to Montana climate lectures, Sleeping Giant is actively improving community access to sustainable energy, starting with education! After the most recent membership meeting in January with City Commissioner Rob Farris-Olsen, SGCC began to identify ways we can advance the clean energy conversation. In April, SGCC held a seminar with rural development specialist Donna Andreassi of the USDA, partnered with Carroll College for an Earth Day Early Action lecture, and hosted a Homegrown Energy Film Fest. Each of these educational tools made headway in launching Sleeping Giant’s clean energy city policy campaign for 2018.

-Makenna Sellers

Central Montana Resource Council is making solar power mainstream! Equipped with a video series about solar projects in the Fergus County area, members are sharing the message of solar with community groups, government, and schools around town. CMRC sponsored the attendance of member Joanne Berry to the Principles of Community Organizing (POCO) training by the Western Organization of Resource Councils this March, Joanne participated in sessions on campaign strategy, membership recruitment, public speaking, and more.

On May 10, CMRC held its Annual Meeting at St. James Episcopal Church. Keynote speakers Steve Charter, Shepherd-area rancher, and Paul Hawks, Melville-area rancher - both past chairs of Northern Plains - gave us an inspiring look at the history and early days of Northern Plains.

-Caitlin Cromwell

Fifty people attended Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council’s Spring Membership Meeting on April 8. Councilwoman Penny Ronning offered her perspective on an Energy Cost Savings Plan for the City of Billings. The panel discussion also featured Kathryn Eklund, Sustainability Coordinator in Red Lodge and YVCC Sustainability Co-Chair Joe Stockburger.

On April 11th, Northern Plains submitted detailed technical comments challenging the federal government’s findings that a massive expansion of Signal Peak Energy’s underground coal mine in the Bull Mountains would have no significant impact.

The proposed expansion would make Signal Peak the largest underground coal mine in the U.S. Mining causes cracks in surface lands above the mine (called subsidence) when coal is removed. Some of these cracks have been as wide as 15 feet and as deep as 19 feet, though even narrow cracks can pose safety risks to livestock and wildlife.

Area ranchers are particularly concerned when these cracks drain or damage waters they depend on, as when cliff-side cracks lead to rock slides and slope failure.

-Svein Newman

On May 10, YVCC held its Annual Meeting at St. James Episcopal Church. Keynote speakers Steve Charter, Shepherd-area rancher, and Paul Hawks, Melville-area rancher - both past chairs of Northern Plains - gave us an inspiring look at the history and early days of Northern Plains.

-YVCC members Barbara Gulick and Simon Cecil at Moss Mansion hosting a community event to prepare for the Food Hub kickoff.

"Speak your mind, even if your voice shakes." -Maggie Kuhn

SGCC brings clean energy dialogue to the capital city

After two years of using a blow-up screen for the Wild and Scenic Film festival in Gardiner, Bear Creek Council has funded the installation of and electronics for a retractable theater-size screen that was donated by generous-member Bob Landis last year. Now Bear Creek Council members are requesting resort tax funds for a projector to complement the sound system donated by the Electric Peak Arts Council a few years earlier.

The 31st Annual Jardine Ski Run brought out the whole community in top fashion. Thank you to the Gardiner Market, Dino Lube, Wonderland Café, and Xanterra for sponsoring the event!

-Maggie Zaback

Bear Creek Council funds audio/visual setup for Gardiner

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Helping Beartooth Electric go solar

SPA members have taken up the cause in helping their local rural electric co-op, Beartooth Electric, develop a community solar project. Community solar projects have been popping up in rural electric cooperatives across the state, and Beartooth Electric had shown serious interest, so SPA members met with members of Carbon County Resource Council to develop a plan to help Beartooth Electric pursue clean energy.

So far things are looking good! Beartooth Electric leadership has been very responsive to member enthusiasm, and we are planning to help host community events that educate Beartooth Electric members about solar projects and provide them an opportunity to invest in a new community solar array!

– Cameron Clevidence

CCRC explores community composting

CCRC continues to generate support of community composting in Red Lodge! This spring, CCRC held a public meeting to assess public interest in a community composting system. CCRC members educated Red Lodge residents about the importance of soil health and composting at the Earth Day celebration in Red Lodge in April. CCRC members are reaching out to public, private, and nonprofit community composting programs in Montana to help inform what shape a program in Red Lodge might take.

– Sydney Ausen

YBCC gathers community support for clean energy

YBCC’s campaign to get specific solar projects permitted, financed, and installed has turned its sights on the Park County Senior Center! In addition to being a beloved community building, the Park County Senior Center is home to 24 low-income seniors, whom will benefit lower utility bills as a result of the solar installation! To reach our fundraising goal and push the project over the finish line, YBCC will be hosting a pint night at our local Katabatic Brewery and presenting the project to various community partners and potential donors.

– Sydney Ausen

DRC hosts recycling seminar

In February, Dawson Resource Council members advanced the conversation on recycling by hosting a Recycling Seminar at the Glendive Agricultural Trade Expo. Recycling experts from around the state explored what Glendive can do locally to support recycling, and they shared success stories from other rural communities.

Ideas from the seminar were then expanded upon during a May 5th Recycling Town Hall organized by DRC.

DRC members Rachel Torres and Millie Robinson delivered petitions to Senator Jon Tester’s Glendive Field Office as part of Northern Plains’ statewide call for a public hearing on Interior Secretary Zinke’s plan to undo protections that limit the flaring

– Caitlin Cromwell

Beartooth Alliance summer meetings set

Beartooth Alliance will meet on July 12 at the Range Rider Lodge in Silver Gate. Nathan Varley, Wildlife Guide and owner of the Wild Side Wildlife Tours and Treks, and president of Bear Creek Council, will talk about wolves in Yellowstone and about their challenges in the region.

BA’s second meeting will be in August and feature a speaker from Xanterra to talk about sustainability and recycling in Yellowstone National Park. More details will be announced later in the summer.

– Maggie Zaback

MAPO works to protect agriculture from oil & gas

McCone Agricultural Protection Organization members from throughout the vast region of McCone County gathered at Chuck and Peggy Nerud’s house for a meeting in late January. They discussed protecting the ag economy in the face of the Keystone XL pipeline and oil and gas development. Darrell Garoutte was elected Chairman and Helen Waller Secretary-Treasurer for another term. The ladies all made too much food, as per usual, but no one was complaining.

– Olivia Stockman
Local Food Challenge
Visit: northernplains.org/foodhub
TO SUPPORT local prosperity for ranchers, farmers, businesses, and families