Defending Democracy

A PLAINS TRUTH SPECIAL REPORT

Northern Plains chair Becky Mitchell leads participants at the Rally To Protect Our Water against the Keystone XL pipeline in Great Falls this past May.

Energy democracy at work across Montana

Energy, like water and land, is a resource essential to how we live our lives. At Northern Plains, our members have a vision for a democratized energy future – one in which Montanans are informed on the energy decisions that affect their lives, that support affordable clean energy resources, and that empower communities.

Making this democratized energy future accessible to all means we must work to make clean energy affordable for all Montanans. At a time when coal-fired power is among the most expensive electricity you can buy in Montana, Northern Plains members are pursuing solutions to make clean energy upgrades – energy efficiency and renewable energy – more affordable to more Montanans. Programs like Property Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) have the power to save Montanans money, create good-paying jobs (for contractors, installers, and suppliers), build thriving communities of character, and fight climate change.

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A t the Montana Petroleum Association annual meeting in August of 2017, a panel presented on “Environmental Activism: How Will It Play Out in Montana?” During this discussion the Montana Department of Justice stated that they were working on a package of bills for the 2019 Montana Legislature session to criminalize protest activity, similar to what’s been introduced in other states.

The American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) has produced a model bill, “Critical Infrastructure Protection Act” that states are using as a template for legislation. These bills impose large fines and prison sentences on protestors and larger fines on “conspiring groups” that impede critical infrastructure.

Note these bills to criminalize protest activity in surrounding states:

**WYOMING**

SF 0074 sought to raise potential penalties for protests near oil pipelines and other facilities by providing for the offense of “critical infrastructure trespass.” Possible punishments range from one year in jail and $1,000 fine up to 10 years in prison and a $100,000 fine. The bill also provides that an organization that “aids, abets, solicits, encourages, compensates, conspires, commands or procures "a person to commit felonious infrastructure trespass is liable to a fine of up to $1 million.”

This bill passed the Wyoming Legislature in 2018, but was vetoed by Governor Matt Mead.

**NORTH DAKOTA**

HB 1203 was titled “Liability exemption for motor vehicle driver” and it said:

*Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a driver of a motor vehicle who negligently causes injury or death to an individual obstructing vehicular traffic on a public road, street, or highway may not be held liable for any damages.*

This bill was introduced in 2017 and failed in the House.

**SOUTH DAKOTA**

SB 176 expands the governor’s authority on public land to prohibit gatherings of 20 or more people and enables the SD Department of Transportation to prohibit or restrict an individual or vehicle from stopping, standing, parking or being present on any highway if it interferes with traffic. This law also expands the crime of trespass.

This bill was passed in 2017 and signed into law by Governor Dennis Daugaard.

TransCanada started communicating with the Nebraska State Patrol back in 2011 in a campaign to characterize protestors as criminals and possible terrorists. In 2015, Bloomberg Business reported that, “Time and again, in private emails and closed-door meetings with federal, state and local law enforcement, the Canadian company characterized peaceful opponents engaged in constitutionally protected protest as dangerous radicals or worse.”

**The corporations don’t have to lobby the government because they are the government.”**

— Jim Hightower

Northern Plains believes that the people of Montana have the right and the power to make change in our lives, in our communities, and in our country. From time to time, our members organize, participate in direct actions, and hold our elected officials accountable. We have gathered in groups of 20 or more in public parks, streets, and sidewalks and follow the laws that are in place whenever we hold a rally. The right of the people to have a voice on issues that impact their lives is a foundational value of Northern Plains and of our nation.

There are just over two months until Election Day. We need to fill our legislature and Congress with people who will defend democracy and respond to the voices of the People. Vote for candidates who understand that criminalizing protest activity is a threat to our First Amendment rights.

Vote as if our democracy depends on your vote, because it does! —Becky Mitchell

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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.

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**VICE CHAIR:** vacant

**SECRETARY:** Ed Gallick, Billings

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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 - Work of the Big Sky
- $200 - Bottom Line Rider
- $100 - Rough Rider

**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.

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**Communications Coordinator:** Paula Berg

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info@northernplains.org  www.northernplains.org
Mark and Roxa Reller, a tried-and-true Montana couple, align their conservation ethic to their lifestyle. With a house powered by the sun and built on passive solar principles, and with an electric vehicle that runs on sunshine, the way the Rollers live at home is just the beginning. The two of them have a background embedded in our origin story and early issues of Northern Plains and it is a fascinating story to hear.

Roxa grew up around the Upper Rosebud on a small cow-calf operation in eastern Montana. As a kid growing up, she loved being outside and hoped that ranching or farming would be in her future. At school, she was very interested in earth science and how geology can be a lens to describe a landscape. A distinct memory for her was driving past the Decker mine on a high school science trip, feeling speechless about the massive impact on the land and feeling like this was no fit for ranching country. She learned about the early organizers of Northern Plains in her high school days and felt inspired and proud of the Colstrip ranchers by the way they fought for a better way of doing things. They were not afraid to ask the tough questions.

Roxa went on to earn a master’s degree in Range Science from Montana State University, and she worked on land reclamation and range vegetation monitoring.

Mark grew up in western Montana in Thompson Falls. He was drawn to water, hunting, and fishing, which translated to post-college job with DNRC’s hydro-sciences division. He worked with water users and irrigators, a place where he felt at home. He now works for the U.S. Department of Energy and is the state liaison for Bonneville Power Administration. He works closely in Colstrip energy transmission.

Mark also has a background in carpentry and passive solar design, which afforded him the opportunity to build his and Roxa’s house in a way that is efficient, affordable, and pays tribute to the old mining community’s designs that dot this region’s past.

It has been seven years since the Rollers installed their initial set of solar panels, and the investment is paying off. Mark and Roxa continue to expand their role as small-scale generators because they see it as the right thing to do. The old adage “leave it better than you found it” is a model this couple uses to think about their resource use as well as their contribution to the grid, and they try their best to live by it.

The Rollers joined Northern Plains because they knew this was a place where they could contribute something, and contribute together. Roxa became instrumental in forming an affiliate in Helena in 2009, Sleeping Giant Citizens Council. Her most memorable moment was the kickoff event for the affiliate. She loved seeing the connections and relationships that folks made with each other and, as chair of SGCC, Roxa aims to continue connecting people and their passions in the Helena valley.

I am confident that Mark and Roxa Reller are two people who will leave Montana better than they found it.

-Makenna Sellers

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

Create your own legacy ripple effect by including Northern Plains in your will

WHY AM I A MONTHLY SUSTAINER?

Natalie grew up on a farm near Plentywood and Dave grew up in Billings, spending as much time as he could in the Beartooth Mountains.

“We have been Northern Plains members for almost twenty years and feel that Northern Plains has been an important protector of Montana lands and the people who live and work on them. Being a Monthly Sustainer is beneficial for Northern Plains, so we decided to make that commitment.”

-Dave and Natalie Schneider

To sign up as a monthly sustainer contact Caleb Lande: caleb@northernplains.org 406-248-1154
In his 1991 farewell as Northern Plains' Chair, Paul Hawks reflected on the importance of democracy to our work, stating that "people here, living in Montana communities, should make the decisions that affect our lives; that decision making should be democratic."

“This is the strength of Northern Plains,” he added.

Almost fifty years in, this commitment – this strength – has remained constant. Our commitment to the true promise of democracy means pushing our decision-making bodies to be fair, transparent, and democratic.

It means the mechanisms of our government must create space for people within decision-making. This is central to who we are as Northern Plains, and core to what it means to be Americans.

But that core value faces perhaps its biggest threat yet. More than at any other time in the past half-century, we’re witnessing a multi-front assault on our ability to participate in our government. Our democracy is eroding, and there’s an enormous amount at stake.

Attacks on democracy come in many different forms. As you read at the beginning of this issue, they can take the shape of legislation that would put corporations over people and infringe upon our constitutional right to free speech. Or they can come in the form of the Trump administration censoring or withholding a record number of requests for government documents under the Freedom of Information Act.

President Trump’s open warfare on the press is a war on the right of Americans to know what’s going on in our government.

This White House and its agencies have – across the board – moved to make it impossible for Americans to find out the true science of climate change and the effects of pollution on public health.

These very public actions have been accompanied by quieter attempts to undermine our very ability to participate in public decisions. This June, Representative Liz Cheney (R-WY) introduced federal legislation (H.R. 6087) that would create a $150 filing fee for individual public comments or protests on federal oil and gas lease parcels. That’s a major barrier to participation for most people.

Another bill (H.R. 6088) introduced by Rep. John Curtis (R-UT) intends to let oil and gas companies skip the permitting and application process for drilling entirely, and instead just submit minimal paperwork and – after a 45-day waiting period – move forward with drilling. There would simply be no opportunity for public comment.

Those in control of our national government know that public involvement can affect what happens, and have therefore gone to war against the right of citizens to have a say or to even know what’s going on.

When an out-of-state dump was planned for Custer County, Northern Plains members took to the streets, newspapers, and Capitol building in Helena to speak out against it.

They have broken faith with the people they represent.

But these attacks on our democracy aren’t limited to the federal level…. we’ve experienced echoes of the same strategies here in Montana. In June, two citizen ballot initiatives earned enough signatures to land on the November ballot – fair and square, as spelled out in Montana state law. But in an effort to thwart these citizen-led processes, several leaders in the Republican Party sought a special legislative session to preempt the initiative process. In the end, cooler heads and calmer voices prevailed, and the special session was avoided – but we expect to see more assaults on citizen participation in the weeks and months to come.

From criminalizing protests, to suppressing votes, to limiting the ability of Montanans to comment on government decisions, big energy interests and their political flunkies recognize that keeping the public in the dark and out of the process is good for the fossil fuel industry.

Preserving those things that make Montana a great place to live and work means we must hold fast and defend our ability to participate. It is our right and our responsibility, and we will not surrender our power as American citizens!

- Caitlin Cromwell & Cody Ferguson
DEFENDING DEMOCRACY

Protecting our rights

If our democracy is under attack, standing by without acting makes us complicit in stripping the rights that so many Americans have fought for since our nation’s founding. Northern Plains was formed to defend the rights and freedoms of people against attempts by corporations to walk over them.

You’re already a member of Northern Plains? That’s great! Here are a few more things you can do to help people protect their rights:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WHAT YOU CAN DO TO DEFEND OUR DEMOCRACY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>■ Sign up for the phone trees for the 2019 legislative session (coming in the Fall 2018 Plains Truth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Volunteer to host a house party on a legislative issue (contact Cody Ferguson if interested - <a href="mailto:cody@northernplains.org">cody@northernplains.org</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Register to vote, make sure your registration is up to date (go to <a href="https://sosmt.gov/elections/vote/">https://sosmt.gov/elections/vote/</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Register others to vote (print forms at <a href="https://sosmt.gov/elections/vote/">https://sosmt.gov/elections/vote/</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Write a letter to the editor about an issue you care about (like the EPA rollback of methane protections, the need for Country of Origin Labeling for beef, right to protest, etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Show up and speak out at local rallies, community meetings, city council, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Shop locally; keep your money in your neighborhood</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Share credible stories on social media (check credibility on snopes.com)</td>
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<tr>
<td>■ Listen to others who think differently (see Climate Change lessons from Spring 2018 Plains Truth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Submit a public comment on the rollback of methane protections from the EPA (contact <a href="mailto:caitlin@northernplains.org">caitlin@northernplains.org</a> with questions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>■ Submit a public comment on transparency and your right to know what chemicals are used in fracking (contact <a href="mailto:caitlin@northernplains.org">caitlin@northernplains.org</a> with questions)</td>
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-Maggie Zaback

Freedom of speech

Continued from Page 1

through Montana. Rumors of such protests have been rippling through the eastern part of the state for the better part of the past year.

For months during 2016 and 2017, Americans watched on TV or the internet as the Standing Rock protests erupted in violence as law enforcement tried to dislodge protestors. Additionally, the tragic incident at the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville last summer, in which a man ran over and killed a young woman who was counter-protesting the white supremacist event has added fuel to the fire. In response, legislatures around the country have considered and passed laws to require police to use “any force necessary” to remove protestors, criminalize the protest of “critical infrastructure,” declare certain kinds of protest “domestic terrorism,” make it illegal to conceal one’s identity by wearing masks, and punish protestors and groups that support them with financial penalties up to a million dollars! Additionally, legislatures have considered a slew of laws meant to indemnify drivers who “accidentally” strike protestors with their cars and bills that would limit the ability of colleges to prevent hate speech on campus. Many of these bills are based on model legislation written by the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC) and the conservative Goldwater Institute.

More than 60 such bills have been introduced in more than 30 states (including Montana in 2017) and we expect to see several more in the 2019 legislative session. In a speech at the Montana Petroleum Association’s annual meeting last year in Billings, a representative from the Montana Attorney General’s office candidly reported that the Department of Justice had been working with law enforcement in North Dakota and local sheriff’s offices to monitor the social media activities of protestors in Montana. An emergency preparedness meeting in Miles City focused on surveilling and countering protestors, and the Glendive police department recently committed $30,000 to purchase riot equipment in preparation for any potential protests of the Keystone XL line.

This amounts to a wholesale assault on the first amendment. The state, counties, and cities already have the power to prosecute the destruction of private property by protestors. These bills are meant to further divide Americans and squelch the lawful, constitutionally-protected rights of citizens to free speech and assembly for cynical political purposes that benefit the interests of private energy companies. It remains to be seen what kind of protests may develop on the Keystone XL route in the near future, but we must be vigilant as we look toward the 2019 legislative session to not allow private interests to subvert our freedom of speech for private gain. Read the entire “Defending Democracy” section to learn more about threats to our democracy and, most importantly, what you can do about it.

-Cody Ferguson

Rally-goers in Great Falls exercising their freedom of speech and assembly in defense of clean water.
Did you know that the chemicals used in fracking solution are hidden from the public? It’s true. In 2005, Congress passed a law that banned the federal government from requiring companies to disclose their fracking chemicals. Dick Cheney – ex-CEO of Halliburton – was vice president at the time, and he lobbied Congress to enact the secrecy law. It easily passed both the House and Senate with bipartisan support.

Today the ponds leak 200,000,000 gallons per year. Colstrip’s owners operate a system of more than 2,000 monitoring and pump-back wells to control sulfates and heavy metals leaking from the ponds.

The fight for responsible cleanup continues today. In collaboration with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 1638, we’ve released, “Doing it Right”, a study evaluating the jobs that will come to town when Colstrip’s owners address the contamination plume in coming decades. We are proud to release the study, which surveys sites around the country where coal ash cleanup has been a significant employer.

Our collaboration with Local 1638 at the Colstrip power plant underlines the overlapping interests of labor and conservation when securing jobs that protect our land and water. We both believe a worker-and-water-friendly solution is part of the way forward in Rosebud County.

The connection between conservation and cleanup should come as no surprise, for environmental cleanup (mine reclamation work and minimizing air pollution) have created jobs for years at Colstrip and other mine and plant sites.

Building on this initial research, the MT Department of Labor and Industry has committed to Northern Plains a grant to conduct a study of the engineering and hydrologic methods needed to effectively clean up the ash ponds. The study will include how much thorough cleanup can extend employment for workers at Colstrip. The grant will fund research by an engineering firm – along with an economist and hydrologist – to compare the groundwater cleanup plan submitted by the Colstrip owners to more aggressive cleanup strategies that would also employ more workers.

-Alex Cunha

What's in your water?

Did you know that the chemicals used in fracking solution are hidden from the public? It’s true. In 2005, Congress passed a law that banned the federal government from requiring companies to disclose their fracking chemicals. Dick Cheney – ex-CEO of Halliburton – was vice president at the time, and he lobbied Congress to enact the secrecy law. It easily passed both the House and Senate with bipartisan support.

However, 28 states do require disclosure of some fracking fluids—and Montana is one of them. Northern Plains lobbied long and hard in 2011 to authorize a fracking chemical disclosure rule. Many of these chemicals are very toxic, and we all wanted to know: what’s going into our water?

But the 2011 rule had two weaknesses. Right now, oil and gas companies aren’t required to share specifics about the chemicals they use until after fracking is complete. And the law allowed companies the secrecy to protect “trade secrets,” which drilling companies have routinely claimed.

Fast forward to 2018. Montana’s Board of Oil & Gas Conservation (BOGC) is revisiting their fracking chemical disclosure rules – and potentially strengthening them. Prompted by a lawsuit by Earthjustice, MEIC, and NRDC, the BOGC kicked off a formal rulemaking process on fracking chemical disclosure in June.

Northern Plains members, in partnership with organizations like Earthjustice, are helping move this rulemaking forward.

Soon, the BOGC will hold a public comment period on fracking chemical disclosure. We don’t have dates yet – but when we do, we’ll need your help! Stay tuned, and be ready to take action for clean water, corporate transparency, and the right to know what’s going into our water.

-Caitlin Cromwell
If you read the news, you’ll see it happening in our biggest cities or at high-level international conferences… conversations around climate that can feel too big, too complex, or too polarizing to tackle locally. But if you look closer to home, you may just find a rural climate movement that’s alive and well. It’s just quieter, and perhaps called something a little different.

“We were thrilled to host a seminar on central Montana’s changing weather early this summer,” said Laurie Lohrer, vice-chair of Central Montana Resource Council (CMRC), the Lewistown-area affiliate of Northern Plains.

CMRC’s seminar featured speakers Bruce Maxwell and Whitney Lonsdale from Montana State University, both of whom shared their findings from the 2017 Montana Climate Assessment. “The speakers were both fantastic,” said Lohrer. “They did a great job making something that tends to be technical and dense, tangible, straightforward, and easy to understand.”

Some of their insights? Warm winters in Kansas and Oklahoma have pushed red winter wheat north into Montana, where the crop has done remarkably well. The rise in the number of days with temperatures over 90 degrees can affect cattle with added heat stress. And, while farmers may be able to plant earlier, their crops then mature in the hottest months, which in turn means a decrease in pollination. The fire season is longer, which means we’re seeing more disease-causing insects and pathogens. The power of language to make a dense topic more accessible reflects what we learned during our “deep canvass” on climate last summer.

Northern Plains knocked on more than 6,500 doors to listen, connect, and have real discussions with people about climate change. What did we learn?

• Conversation works better than debate.
• Plain language puts it best.
• People respond best to messages that are local and personal.
• And always, always bring things back to shared values.

Creating space for thoughtful conversation—and the opportunity to ask questions—is key. In partnership with the Montana Farmers Union, Fergus County Extension, and Montana State University, CMRC did exactly that. And it showed. “We had a standing room-only audience of Central Montana ranchers, farmers, business owners, and residents,” said Lohrer.

“In my mind, the diversity of our audience that night demonstrates how the threat of drought and changing weather patterns crosses political lines—even in rural America,” she added.

-Caitlin Cromwell

**Energy democracy**

*Continued from Page 1*

Community solar panels installed by Flathead Electric Cooperative.

Many Montanans get their power from a rural electric cooperative. Member-owners at rural electric co-ops have the opportunity to work with their staff and elected boards to achieve affordable power by adopting cleaner, cheaper, and faster energy solutions.

Member-owners at several rural electric co-ops are doing just that. This July, as a result of continued interest from members, Beartooth Electric Cooperative launched their Shares Du Soleil program that enables member-owners to purchase the energy output from a community solar panel that will be erected at the Beartooth Electric office in Red Lodge.

Community solar installations like this offer an affordable way for Montanans to support (and benefit from) solar energy without installing panels on their own property. Beartooth Electric will be the fifth electric cooperative in Montana to invest in community solar.
LOCAL FOOD

Status of the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub

Many of you have already seen the letters to the editor, op-eds, and general articles in area newspapers about the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub. This project, started by the Yellowstone Valley Citizens’ Council several years ago, is beginning to take shape: a hub that will aggregate, store, and distribute local food around the region.

Several farmers and ranchers have come together to begin writing bylaws to form a growers cooperative; a business model that will allow the producers themselves to make the decisions, keep their profits, and collaborate with other cooperatives around the country.

Meanwhile, the Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council has poured many hours of service into fundraising for and promoting the Food Hub in the region. They are working alongside the producers to raise the necessary $165,000 to launch the project.

Once the $65,000 mark is reached, Northern Plains will hire and train a General Manager for the Food Hub. This general manager will continue plans to launch the food hub, and help the producers incorporate into a grower’s cooperative, similar to the Western Montana Growers’ Cooperative.

If you want more information, contact Maggie at the Northern Plains office: (406) 248-1154 or email Maggie@northernplains.org.

-Maggie Zaback

MEET THE FOOD HUB PRODUCERS

Alan Christensen, ABC Gardens
Billings, MT
Fresh garden vegetables

Annika Charter-Williams, Charter Beef
Shepherd, Montana
Nutrient-dense, pasture-raised beef

Carol Nash & Tom Tschida, Nash Farms
Bridger, Montana
Grass-fed and finished beef and lamb; fruit; sorghum syrup

Laurie & David Gano, Gano Beef
Melville, Montana
Nutrient-dense, pasture-raised beef

Lyle & Irene Strobel, Crazy Bear Farm
Absarokee, Montana
Heritage and heritage-cross pastured pork

Reed Youngbar & Jessica Hart, Swift Microgreens
Billings, Montana
Micro kale, micro broccoli, chives, purple and green daikon radish, salad mix

Rhonda Hergenrider, Silvertip Pork
Bridger, Montana
Naturally-raised beef and pork

Sara Hollenbeck, High Five Meats
Molt, Montana
Naturally-raised lamb, beef, pork, and goat

Terry Boyd, Manic Organics
Brockton, MT
Organic produce

Veronnaka Evenson, Swanky Roots
Laurel, Montana
Aquaponic, fresh greens

-The independent farmers and ranchers of the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub together at Home On the Range.

-Caroline Canarios
The Business Plan

A 4-phase growth model for the Food Hub

This winter we completed a formal business plan with Sustainability Ventures of Vancouver, Canada. They developed a four-phase growth plan for the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub that could occur over several years. While this plan will change depending on the food hub’s success, we are moving forward and focusing our efforts on Phase 1.

**PHASE 1**

Begin trading without any formal warehouse. Establish an online sales platform, hire a hub manager, and arrange for access to a small space in or near Billings where producers could drop off their products and have them re-packed into customer orders. A contract driver or third-party shipper could then deliver these orders.

**PHASE 2**

Rent a permanent warehouse space. Once the volume of business reaches a certain level the hub would begin leasing a dedicated warehouse space and install a walk-in cooler and a freezer. The Food Hub would aim to sell to larger institutions such as hospitals and schools in this region.

**PHASE 3**

Add a retail presence and processing facility. Once the food hub has reached the next level in sales, it could then add small retail and processing components, washing stations, and other essential services.

**PHASE 4**

Expand the food retail options and add food dining. At this next level of sales, the hub could consider opening a small public market with a restaurant/brew pub where virtually all of the products are grown or made by local, artisan producers and even a “farmers’ store.”

-Maggie Zaback

The Third Annual Montana Local Food Challenge is well under way and people across Montana are eating up local food! Don’t fret, there’s still time to sign up online at mtlocalfoodchallenge.org. By participating, you will be entered in the drawing for our $250 gift card to your favorite local food market, restaurant, or producer! Also, each week, we’re challenging you to do something creative with local food for the chance to win one of our weekly $50 local food gift cards.

For the final week of the Challenge, we’re asking you to submit a recipe using local food!

Planning your meals to include local food simplifies shopping and makes for a delicious meal! Montana produces a wide variety of scrumptious local ingredients, and inventing recipes can motivate others to try something new. At the end of each week, we’ll share all the recipes on our site with other Local Food Challengers.

If you post a picture of your recipe with #MTLocalFood on Instagram, we’ll throw your name in the hat a second time for the week’s $50 gift card.

Need some inspiration? Check out this recipe submitted during last year’s Challenge:

**Sweet Pepper Salad, By Janet McMillan**

**Ingredients:**
- 1 each sweet red and green peppers, cut in strips
- 3 or 4 good sized cremini mushrooms, sliced
- 2 or 3 cloves of fresh garlic, minced
- 1 medium-sized sweet onion, sliced thin
- 3-4 tablespoons olive oil
- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- Salt, pepper, and cumin seeds to taste

**Instructions:**
Heat olive oil in sauté pan, sizzle garlic and cumin seeds in the oil, then stir in vegetables to coat with oil. Fry gently, only until crisp-tender. Pour in the vinegar and cover with lid. Let cool for a few minutes and salt and pepper to your liking. Great warm or chilled!

-Maggie Zaback

-Maggie Zaback

The Third Annual Montana Local Food Challenge is well under way and people across Montana are eating up local food! Don’t fret, there’s still time to sign up online at mtlocalfoodchallenge.org. By participating, you will be entered in the drawing for our $250 gift card to your favorite local food market, restaurant, or producer! Also, each week, we’re challenging you to do something creative with local food for the chance to win one of our weekly $50 local food gift cards.

For the final week of the Challenge, we’re asking you to submit a recipe using local food!

Planning your meals to include local food simplifies shopping and makes for a delicious meal! Montana produces a wide variety of scrumptious local ingredients, and inventing recipes can motivate others to try something new. At the end of each week, we’ll share all the recipes on our site with other Local Food Challengers.

If you post a picture of your recipe with #MTLocalFood on Instagram, we’ll throw your name in the hat a second time for the week’s $50 gift card.

Need some inspiration? Check out this recipe submitted during last year’s Challenge:

**Sweet Pepper Salad, By Janet McMillan**

**Ingredients:**
- 1 each sweet red and green peppers, cut in strips
- 3 or 4 good sized cremini mushrooms, sliced
- 2 or 3 cloves of fresh garlic, minced
- 1 medium-sized sweet onion, sliced thin
- 3-4 tablespoons olive oil
- ¼ cup balsamic vinegar
- Salt, pepper, and cumin seeds to taste

**Instructions:**
Heat olive oil in sauté pan, sizzle garlic and cumin seeds in the oil, then stir in vegetables to coat with oil. Fry gently, only until crisp-tender. Pour in the vinegar and cover with lid. Let cool for a few minutes and salt and pepper to your liking. Great warm or chilled!

-Maggie Zaback
After trade tariffs and market downturns, one more curve ball is coming farmers’ way: the 2018 Farm Bill. The Farm Bill is on a trajectory to pass in 2019, but this trajectory could be complicated by a standoff between the two wildly different bills in the two houses of Congress. The House of Representatives and Senate each passed a version of a Farm Bill this summer, but the bills were contradictory with one another. Now the bills must go through conference committee. The committee, assigned in July, will meet to make compromises and come up with a bill that the House and Senate can agree on. However, the task of the conference committee may be nearly impossible considering the difference of opinions coming to the room to compromise.

The Senate version of the bill, although not perfect, contains improvements in some Farm Bill programs. It maintains funding for conservation programs and nutrition assistance (SNAP), includes some soil health provisions (allowing intensive grazing on some CRP land), and attempts basic policy reforms to make other programs work more smoothly. Additionally, it would close loopholes that allow ag subsidies to go to non-farmers.

On the other hand, the House version of the bill cuts conservation programs by almost $1 billion, cuts food assistance to more than 2 million people, defunds local food funding and marketing programs, and opens more loopholes for non-farmers to receive farmer subsidies.

While the Senate’s Farm Bill is far from perfect, there are numerous reasons to make sure that the House version does prevail in the conference committee. The Senate version of the bill, although not perfect, contains improvements in some Farm Bill programs. It maintains funding for conservation programs and nutrition assistance (SNAP), includes some soil health provisions (allowing intensive grazing on some CRP land), and attempts basic policy reforms to make other programs work more smoothly. Additionally, it would close loopholes that allow ag subsidies to go to non-farmers.

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While the Senate’s Farm Bill is far from perfect, there are numerous reasons to make sure that the House version does prevail in the conference committee.

While no Montana delegates are on the conference committee, Northern Plains will let you know when there are hearings and other opportunities to speak out for a Farm Bill that preserves conservation, nutrition assistance, and local market development.

-Maggie Zaback

Farmers and fisherman share plight

Did you know that Atlantic fishermen aren’t allowed to hold a few fish aside to feed their families, even if they catch the fish on their own boats? Fishing contracts require that every fish caught go to the fish processors to be counted. Fishermen never own their catch.

While Montana is far from the oceans, the battles of Montana farmers and ranchers are not far from those of fisherman. In fact, fishing is facing the same corporate takeover as agriculture.

Northern Plains welcomed Niaz Dorry to Montana in June to talk about the issues that farmers and fishermen have in common. A staff member at the National Family Farm Coalition (NFFC), Dorry took a road trip across the country to meet with NFFC’s member organizations like Northern Plains.

NFFC is a longtime ally of Northern Plains and has long fought for family farmers and ranchers in Washington, D.C. Dorry is also the director of NAMA (the Northwest Atlantic Marine Alliance), who similarly works with fisherpeople around the country on policy change.

Northern Plains held a public conversation with Dorry to discuss the threats to fishing communities and fishing policy that farmers and ranchers are also facing through the farm bill. She brought stories of the battles over corporate ownership of the ocean, of genetic modification that contaminates native fish stocks, and the battle to develop local markets to sell their fish. Sound familiar?

Dorry imparted the importance of including fisheries in our discussions about farm policy. Farmers use fish products as fertilizer, consumers eat fish, and we all have a lot to gain by working together. See more about the cross-country road trip at: americathebountiful.org/blog.

-Maggie Zaback

National Family Farm Coalition staffer Niaz Dorry visits Nash Farms in Bridger, MT.
Fifteen months and counting – that’s the wait time since the introduction of a bipartisan Senate bill to protect the public lands around Yellowstone National Park. The Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act, introduced by Senator Jon Tester, eliminates the ability for proposed mines to expand onto public land around the park. Representative Greg Gianforte brought forward a companion bill in the House, and thousands of business owners, residents, and citizens who live and work in the Yellowstone Gateway voiced their support for both bills. Sounds like a win-win, right? Think again.

Sen. Steve Daines still holds the key to passing the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act in his very own committee… and he remains the ONLY Montana congressional delegate that has not taken a position of support. His inaction has stalled a common sense bill that recognizes our bustling ecotourism economy and protects key public lands near Yellowstone. Please go to our website (www.northernplains.org/daines-ygpa) and fill out our form telling Senator Daines that you support the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act.

Sen. Daines must stop playing politics with the future of Yellowstone; we have too much at stake. Want to know more? Contact Makenna at makenna@northernplains.org.

-Makenna Sellers

The Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act would protect public lands near Yellowstone National Park from mining development.

MAKING YOUR VOICE KNOWN TO SENATOR DAINES:

- Visit our website to send a comment directly to senator Daines: www.NorthernPlains.org/daines-ygpa
- Look for our social media ads on Facebook and Instagram (like the one seen to the right). Please share, comment, and “like” (spread the word!)
- Contact Senator Daines’ office directly at 202-224-2651
- Does your job or livelihood depend on clean water in the Yellowstone River and unspoiled wilderness near Yellowstone National Park? Tell Senator Daines and let us know, too. Contact Makenna at 406-248-1154 or makenna@northernplains.org

STAND WITH MONTANANS, SENATOR DAINES...

SUPPORT THE YELLOWSTONE GATEWAY PROTECTION ACT

Look for our posts on Facebook and Instagram (like the one above) urging Senator Daines to support the Yellowstone Gateway Protection Act. Please comment, share, and “like” to help spread the word!
The Wild and Scenic Film Festival returns, bringing a wide-ranging program of thoughtful, inspiring, and beautiful short films to Billings, Gardiner, and Miles City. In Miles City, this will be the festival’s second year, the fourth in Gardiner, and the 10th year in a row in Billings.

Northern Plains member-volunteers screened dozens of films from around the world to hand-select a program specifically for audiences in eastern Montana. The films illustrate some of the challenges facing our planet, and show the work people and communities are doing to protect the environment and the places we love. The stories give us a sense of place and what it means to be responsible stewards of the earth.

This year’s lineup includes topics ranging from biomimicry (design inspired by nature), to the bond between an Inuit father and son, to soil regeneration for a drought-resilient farm, to a feature about families who live along our own Yellowstone River! This festival brings close-ups of community protection across the globe as well as portraits of neighbors in our own backyard. It’s an event for the whole family!

Wild and Scenic Film Festivals offer an opportunity to be inspired by stories from around the world and to realize how we can care for the landscapes that we call home. Each event provides the opportunity to learn more about Northern Plains’ work and to take action on local campaigns.

Catch one of the following Wild & Scenic film showings:

**BILLINGS**
- The Pub Station (new location!), 2502 1st Ave N.
- Saturday, Sept. 8th
- Doors open 6 PM, Films at 7 PM
- Come celebrate the festival’s 10th year in Billings! Beer, wine, and cider on tap; food; guest filmmaker

**GARDINER**
- Gardiner High School, 510 Stone Street
- Thursday, Sept. 20th
- Doors open 5 PM, Films at 6 PM

**MILES CITY**
- Montana Theatre, 905 Main Street
- Thursday, Sept. 20th
- Doors open 6 PM, Films at 7 PM
- Wine from the Tongue River Winery for sale

**Tickets for all three locations available online now at: www.NorthernPlains.org**

**Tickets are also available at the following locations:**

**Billings:** The Base Camp, Northern Plains Resource Council (available now)

**Miles City:** The Montana Theatre, Miles City Area Chamber of Commerce (starting Aug. 14)

**Gardiner:** Tumbleweed Bookstore and Café, Yellowstone Wild - The Gallery (starting Aug. 28)

*Thank you to our sponsors for helping bring this program to these communities!*

-Claire Overholt
UPCOMING EVENTS

August
- August 7 – Nye Good Neighbor Gathering at Historic Beartooth Ranch; Nye, 5:30-8PM (sponsored by Stillwater Protective Association, Sibanye Stillwater, and the Stillwater Valley Watershed Council)
- August 20 – SolarEase workshop at the Lewis and Clark Library; Helena, 6-8PM (this is a partnership between MEIC, SGCC, AERO, MREA, with support from DEQ energy office)
- August 23 – Beartooth Alliance Annual Meeting; Cooke City Community Center
- August 24 – Bear Creek Council’s Local Food Challenge Celebration; Yellowstone Basin Inn, 5-7PM
- August 27 – Green Drinks (host TBD); 5-7PM
- August 29 – CMRC’s Dinner in the Garden; CMRC’s GreenShare Garden
- August 30 – SGCC’s Forum for Action, Lewis and Clark Library; Helena, 6:30PM (with guest speakers from the Paradise Valley Yellowstone Gateway Business Coalition)

September
- Sept 6 – YBCC Elections Meeting and Potluck; Park County Extension Office, 5:30PM
- Sept 8 – Wild & Scenic Film Festival; Billings, The Pub Station, 7PM
- Sept 8 – Say “hi” to CMRC tabling at the Chokecherry Festival in Lewistown
- Sept 9 – DRC is tabling at Bell Street Bridge Day; Glendive
- Sept 12-14 – Advanced Community Organizing Training (for members who have attended WORC’s Principles of Community Organizing training); Home on the Range in Billings, $75 training fee.
- Sept 17 - DRC hosts a cardboard recycling drive in Glendive
- Sept 20 – Wild & Scenic Film Festival; Gardiner; Gardiner High School, 6PM
- Sept 20 – Wild & Scenic Film Festival; Miles City, Montana Theatre, 7PM
- Sept 22 – DRC/MAPO Benefit (formerly known as Lindsay benefit); Knights of Columbus Hall in Glendive
- Sept 23 – YVCC Annual Meeting; Northern Plains’ Home on the Range offices, 4-6PM
- Sept 25 – Green Drinks (host TBD); 5-7PM, Billings
- Sept 29 – Beartooth Electric Co-op’s Annual Meeting; 9AM
- Late Sept – CCRC’s “Red Lodge Soil-to-Sun Eco Fair,” 1PM

Questions? Call the office at 406-248-1154 or email info@northernplains.org

Are YOU up to the Challenge?
- The challenge lasts through the end of August - you still have time!
- Submit a recipe for the last week’s challenge for a chance to win a $50 gift card!
- Take the Challenge online at MTlocalfoodchallenge.org

Visit our “whole farm” partners for local goodness:
DRC spearheads recycling efforts, promotes landowner rights, holds annual picnic

In June, Dawson Resource Council launched a community-wide recycling coalition called “Glendive Recycle Our Waste” (GROW) in partnership with Makoshika State Park, Cross Country Brewing, Community GATE, and Dawson Community College.

As a coalition, we're making moves toward solutions—and have even scheduled our very first cardboard drive. Save the date! It’ll be Monday, September 17 from 5:00 to 7:00 at the Eastern Plains Event Center (EPEC).

As relates to other community outreach efforts, oil and gas companies are afoot in Dawson County, and many landowners are navigating that process for the very first time. DRC is working hard to help keep landowners in the loop, and is planning a “Know Your Rights” seminar for later this summer.

Finally, the summer hasn’t gone without celebration! DRC hosted our annual June Picnic, with guest speaker Teresa Erickson on her favorite—and funniest—lessons learned community organizing. Members elected new officers (Rachel Torres as chair, Seth Newton as vice-chair, Millie Robinson as secretary, Irene Moffett as treasurer, and Rachel Torres and Bruce Peterson as board representatives), and Millie Robinson won the award for the best homemade pie.

-Caitlin Cromwell

Bear Creek Council promotes local food

Bear Creek Council is breaking ground this summer on connecting food consumers with local producers. In early July, the members presented on the Local Food Challenge to the Gardiner Chamber of Commerce and garnered positive feedback.

With a goal of bringing us closer to a values-based understanding of where and from whom our food originates, Bear Creek Council will host a Montana Local Food Challenge Celebration on August 24th at Yellowstone Basin Inn. The event will feature complimentary items from Northern Range Grassfed Beef in Paradise Valley and On the Rise Bakery in Bozeman.

-Makenna Sellers

CMRC talks climate, clean energy, and local foods

In June, Central Montana Resource Council kicked off a conversation on climate change in Lewistown. Researchers from Montana State University journeyed there to present insights from the 2017 Montana Climate Assessment to a standing-room-only crowd.

Some of their predictions? More precipitation in fall, winter, and spring; less precipitation in summer. More days with temperatures of over 90°. Dramatic declines in Montana's snowpack. Researchers also shared helpful tips and climate coping strategies for agricultural producers—practical tidbits that will mean more and more in the years ahead.

CMRC also continues to push and support the local food movement in Lewistown. CMRC sponsored the Montana Local Food Challenge, and is gearing up for our annual Dinner in the Garden fundraiser. Join us at CMRC’s GreenShare Garden on August 29!

Finally, CMRC hosted a team of canvassers from Northern Plains for a deep canvass around Lewistown. The canvassers knocked doors, talked to people about solar energy and clean water, and recruited members for CMRC. Thanks, canvass team!

-Caitlin Cromwell

Bull Mountain landowner speaks up for taxpayers, corporate accountability

Bull Mountain Land Alliance member and rancher Steve Charter is the lead spokesperson in a lawsuit filed to challenge Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke’s Royalty Policy Committee.

Zinke created a new government committee last September to look at energy royalty payments to states, then stacked it with fossil fuel industry representatives. The committee often meets in secret.

“Zinke set the fox to guard the henhouse with a one-sided committee that tasked industry with overseeing itself, with little regard for protecting taxpayers or proper management of our public lands and minerals,” said Charter. “It’s just not right.”

The suit was filed in Montana District Court by the Western Organization of Resource Councils, Northern Plains’ regional umbrella organization.

-Svein Newman
SGCC to convene "Forum for Action"
Sleeping Giant Citizens Council’s slogan for the month is, "We all protect paradise." SGCC leaders Pat Bik and Roxa Reller spent their springtime running a membership outreach drive, and simply asking folks a series of questions about what issues matter to them personally.

The outreach drive will culminate in a Sleeping Giant “Forum for Action” on August 30th at the Lewis and Clark Library, with special guest speakers from the Yellowstone Gateway Business Coalition. Following the speakers, Sleeping Giant members will meet to plan their affiliate’s work for the coming year to create a thriving, healthy community in Helena… our own version of protecting paradise.

– Makenna Sellers

CCRC promotes community-based solutions
Carbon County Resource Council’s campaign to get a community composting system running in Red Lodge continues to gather support! The Energy Conservation Planning Committee at the city of Red Lodge identified composting as a way that the community could reduce its carbon footprint and conserve energy.

CCRC will be educating Carbon County residents about composting at a community event in September. CCRC will be putting on the “Red Lodge Soil to Sun Eco Fair” to be held in Red Lodge in late September. The event will highlight the local work being done by CCRC and other organizations to promote local self-reliance.

-Sydney Ausen

Growing YVCC membership promotes Food Hub, energy efficiency, and litter cleanup
YVCC has steadily grown to over 300 current members who are working on two active campaigns. The Community Food Committee recently hosted a chef’s dinner at the Moss Mansion in Billings to raise funds for the launch of the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub, which you can read more about on pages 8-9.

Meanwhile, the “Better Billings” Sustainability Committee is preparing to present a resolution to the Billings City Council that would revitalize the “Mayor’s Commission on Energy and Conservation.” The goal is to perform a baseline inventory of greenhouse gases and develop a comprehensive strategy for boosting energy efficiency for City-owned facilities, equipment and transportation.

In addition, YVCC was invited to take part in stakeholder meetings for Project Re:Code, a comprehensive effort to rework our region’s land use rules for the first time in 50 years. YVCC has also adopted a 2-mile stretch of the Blue Creek Road and recently completed the spring cleanup.

Please join us! Email kari@northernplains.org to get involved!

-Kari Boiter

"I do my best work if I think about what it is I have to offer." - Barbara Kingsolver

YBCC raises the solar roof
In July, Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council organized a barn dance to fundraise for a new roof on the Park County Senior Center. YBCC has partnered with the Senior Center on a solar installation that will provide savings for the Center and its 24 low-income residents.

The project hit a snag when it was discovered that a new roof would be needed before the solar installation can move forward. But the barn dance was a hit! People of all ages put on their dancing shoes and gathered at the Park County fairgrounds for an evening of solar celebration.

-Sydney Ausen

CRC celebrates 30th anniversary
Carbon County Resource Council celebrated its 30th anniversary at its Annual Picnic on July 8 in Big Timber. Members gave presentations on local solar projects, the Good Neighbor Agreement, and CRC’s history over the past 30 years.

CRC is sponsoring the Local Food Challenge in August and has been tabling at the local farmers’ market to sign up new participants.

-Mikindra Morin

Beartooth Alliance hosts Nathan Varley in Silvergate
Beartooth Alliance held its first of two summer meetings, featuring Nathan Varley, PhD, president of Bear Creek Council and owner of The Wild Side, a wildlife guide service. Varley shared the history of wolves in Yellowstone, the ecological benefits of wolf re-introduction, and some of the social and cultural challenges of wolves.

On August 23, BA will host its annual meeting and election at the Cooke City Community Center. Dylan Hoffman of Xanterra will discuss sustainability in Yellowstone National Park.

-Maggie Zaback
SAVE THE DATE:

Northern Plains 47th Annual Meeting
Friday-Saturday, November 16th–17th
Northern Hotel, Billings

It’s not too soon to start making plans for the fun and fellowship, the learning and the inspiration that make up the Northern Plains Annual Meeting! We hope to see you there!

CALL FOR RESOLUTIONS:
If you want to propose a resolution for consideration at the Annual Meeting, please submit it to the Resolutions Committee by September 15th. Email your draft resolution to Claire at the Northern Plains office – claire@northernplains.org.

KEYNOTE SPEAKER ANNOUNCEMENT:
We’re pleased to welcome Jim Hightower as the keynote speaker for this year’s Annual Meeting! Twice elected Commissioner of Agriculture for the state of Texas, Jim is a national radio commentator, public speaker, and bestselling author who has spent four decades battling the Powers That Be on behalf of “the Powers That Ought To Be” – consumers, working families, small businesses, and just-plain-folks. Hightower believes that the true political spectrum is not right-to-left but top-to-bottom, and we look forward to hearing how his experience intersects with Northern Plains’ work.