

THE PLAINS TRUTH

VOICE OF THE NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL

Volume 48, Issue 1, Winter 2019

GRASSROOTS POWER IN MONTANA

Democracy in action as the 2019 Legislative Session begins!



- **Pushing for Clean Energy (C-PACE)**
- **Restoring County-of-Origin Labeling (COOL)**
- **Fighting Anti-Free Speech Bills**

IN THIS ISSUE

- 3 Letter from the chair
- 4 People of the Plains - Eric Schmidt
- 5 GNA grows stronger
- 6 Soil health
- 7 Food Hub launch
- 8 C-PACE clean energy
- 9 NorthWestern Energy rate case
- 10 Fake meat
- 11 COOL labeling
- 12 2018 Annual Meeting
- 16 Keystone XL, anti-free speech bills
- 17 EPA methane hearing
- 18 History Project
- 19 Colstrip cleanup
- 20 Council Roundup

FOOD HUB LAUNCHES



After years of hard work, the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub is officially open for business!

- **New General Manager**
- **First food boxes sold to public**



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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THE PLAINS TRUTH

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

Membership Dues

\$500+ Riders of the Big Sky, \$50 Range Rider
\$200 Bottom Line Rider, \$40 General Member
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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.

Western Organization of Resource Councils

Northern Plains is a founding member of the Western Organization of Resource Councils. WORC is a regional network of eight grassroots community organizations that include 15,200 members in seven Western states. WORC helps its member groups succeed by providing training and coordinating regional issue campaigns. Visit www.worc.org

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Office Manager: Karen Olson
Comptroller: Paula Berg
Facility Manager: Jim Cooper
Technical Assistant: Jen Marble

Northern Plains Resource Council

220 S. 27th Street, Suite A, Billings, MT 59101
Tel: 406-248-1154 Fax: 406-248-2110

info@northernplains.org • www.northernplains.org

TO THE MEMBERS

The heart of grassroots power

Ranchers who depend on grass for a livelihood know grazing must be managed in a way that allows the roots of the grass to go deep into the nourishing soil, down to where the moisture is. When we refer to people as “grass roots,” we are saying they are rooted deeply in the place where they live. Their base of action is their community, their concern is its welfare, their strength is derived from this rooting.

-Anne Charter (founding member of Northern Plains)



The 66th Montana Legislature has convened. As members of Northern Plains, we understand the importance of our grassroots actions during the Legislature session. As citizen lobbyists, we can change legislators' minds by speaking with facts (yes, the truth does still matter), with intent to educate not argue, and with concern for

our community and its welfare. We can tell the stories of place that come from our hearts.

Northern Plains understands the power of citizen lobbyists. That's why we provide education and support to empower you to testify at hearings, talk with legislators, and play a meaningful role in the legislative process.

Remember that legislators are elected by the people of Montana, not corporations, and you have roots in this place.

I want to thank those of you who took part in Northern Plains' "Clean Power For All Day of Action" at the Capitol. Our C-PACE bill (LC 1835) aims to keep the renewable energy revolution moving forward in Montana by providing a mechanism for business owners to finance renewable energy projects, energy efficiency,

and water conservation upgrades. Staff and members have worked out details in the past year to make this bill viable with bipartisan support. Still, many legislators don't yet understand how important this is to Montana's economic future, and your support during the session is critical.

Many Montanans are being misled by meat labeling that reads "Product of USA" when all this label means is that the meat was packaged in the USA. Northern Plains will be working to pass a bill (LC 1273) reinstating a Montana Country-Of-Origin labeling (or "COOL"). It calls for placarding the country of origin of meat at local grocery stores, which enables customers to know where the meat they are buying comes from, and to support US producers. This bill is a Montana solution to a problem that was caused by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 2013. Watch for the date of Northern Plains' "Day of Action for COOL" and join the rally!

By the time this reaches you, bills may have been introduced that threaten our First Amendment rights, our water, and air. Others will try to halt progress toward a renewable energy future. Our staff and our member leaders will be working hard during this legislative session to keep us informed.

We build grassroots power through phone trees and email alerts. We take action by calling or emailing legislators on identified bills. We come together in the halls of the Capitol to tell our stories and participate in the democratic process. These are the same halls and chambers where Northern Plains' founding members acted on their belief in grassroots power and their love for this place we call home – Montana.

I hope to see you at the legislature! Thank you for your love of this place, your vision for its future and your action as a citizen lobbyist.

-Becky Mitchell 

PEOPLE OF THE PLAINS

Eric Schmidt fights for his vision of an innovative, energy-efficient Montana

Billings is nearing a tipping point for innovative development, and local residents have worked for several years at building a sustainable local economy and developing an exciting downtown area.

As a mid-size city, Billings is responsive to community input, providing a unique path to change that might be difficult in larger cities. It is this potential that motivated Eric Schmidt to become a leader in his community.

In describing his experience in Billings, Eric sees a window for community voices to make waves. “I’ve never lived in a city that could develop in so many ways at once, and the impact single individuals to large organized groups can have in this town is amazing,” he said.

Eric was first introduced to Northern Plains through his work at High Plains Architects, where he is an architect-in-training. He joined when he witnessed the rallying and inspiring atmosphere of the 2016 Billings Wild and Scenic Film Festival. He then joined Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council’s Sustainability Committee, identifying with the shared vision for Billings to become a resilient, innovative, and energy-efficient city.

Eric’s connection to the Northern Plains community has only grown since then, as he elaborates, “I attended [a YVCC meeting] and met so many interesting and passionate people – they became my closest friends and I wanted to continue volunteering to help our community.” Continue volunteering he did, quickly becoming a leader for both YVCC and the Clean Energy Task Force.

Eric currently serves as the co-chair of YVCC’s Better Billings Sustainability Committee and is a dedicated leader on efforts to enact city policy supporting energy conservation. For the past year, Eric has worked with the Committee to re-establish a Billings Commission on Energy and Conservation through Billings City Council. A favorite memory of his work at Northern Plains was when he addressed the City Council on January 7th



Eric Schmidt at High Plains Architects, where he works as an architect-in training.

in support of re-establishing that Commission. As he reflects, “Witnessing the supporter turnout, the great public comments, I could see the results of grassroots organizing actively inspire our City Council members to support our Commission. It was an inspiring moment about a project that will affect this city for generations.”

Eric’s commitment to clean energy doesn’t end at the Billings city limits. He’s been an active member of the Clean Energy Task Force since joining Northern Plains, digging into our state regulations and pushing for Property-Assessed Clean Energy (PACE) enabling legislation in 2017 and Commercial PACE during the 2019 legislature.

As he sees it, Montana has abundant resources and, if connected with innovative policy, they can lead to a brighter, cleaner energy future through wind and solar energy. Eric can see potential for Billings to “shine as one of the most progressive cities on energy use and efficiency in the nation,” and will continue to work as a leader at Northern Plains until this vision becomes a reality.

-Caroline Canarios



GOOD NEIGHBOR AGREEMENT

As Stillwater Mine grows, so does work of local good neighbors



Task Force members and local community members, (L-R) Van Wood, Betsy Baxter, and Jerry Iverson, related the history of the Good Neighbor Agreement at the 2018 Annual Meeting.

The Good Neighbor Agreement session at the 2018 Annual Meeting was titled *Still Going Strong*, and panelists explained its ongoing success. Betsy Baxter and Van Wood, both members of the Good Neighbor Agreement Task Force for just over a year, described their experiences working on the Agreement (spoiler alert, it's a steep learning curve) and settling in as task force members. To sum it up, there is a ton of reading and many meetings to attend!

For the past two years, many of these meetings have been focused on creating an "Adaptive Management Plan" that spells out all of the Agreement's water management and monitoring programs.

The Plan includes surface and groundwater programs for each mine site that are both preventative and proactive. The framework

requires that the Stillwater Mine conduct stricter water monitoring if nutrient or metals concentrations reach a certain level. If the concentration levels continue to increase, the Mine is required to fund research or a study into the source of the nutrient or metal and develop options for source controls. If an even higher pollution level is reached, the Mine is required to take remedial action.

After two years negotiating with the Mine, the Task Force took a huge step forward at the East Boulder Oversight Committee meeting in December. The East Boulder Adaptive Management Plan began a one-year "trial implementation" period in January to allow us to work out any tweaks, then will be officially approved at the end of 2019!

The Stillwater Oversight Committee intends to approve their trial implementation at their upcoming meeting in March and also approve a final Stillwater Adaptive Management Plan by the end of 2019.

-Mikindra Morin 

You don't have to be rich! (...to make a meaningful charitable bequest)

If you're thinking of including Northern Plains in your will, we can provide a free brochure that will help you through the process.

Just contact the office at (406) 248-1154 or email steve@northernplains.org. OR you can visit our website at www.northernplains.org.

Soil health doesn't just happen by itself



Soil Committee member Jim Amonette speaks to the crowd at the 2018 Northern Plains Annual Meeting.

The evidence is only becoming clearer that soil health is deeply connected to human health, air quality, water quality, animal health, and the nutrient density of foods. But what is really meant by “soil health”? A session at the Annual Meeting addressed that question but, as it turns out, the answer isn't at all precise.

Northern Plains member Jim Amonette of Big Timber shared a 2015 Natural Resources Conservation Service definition of soil health as “the capacity of a soil to function as a vital living ecosystem that sustains plants, animals, and humans.” But what does that mean?

Healthy soil is always changing – it is a living organism. Asking for a specific definition of healthy soil is in some ways like asking for a specific definition of a healthy community. They all look different, but there are key indicators that can show us health.

We also know what is not healthy, and what practices are detrimental to soil health. This may include fallow fields; over-use of pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides; repeated monoculture year after year; and entirely unmanaged land.

Amonette and fellow member John Brown of Shepherd imparted the importance of soil health to our communities and our landscapes in the face of rural depopulation and climate change.

The definition of soil health is often accompanied by five principles (or practices):

- Maximizing plant/biological diversity
- Minimizing disturbance of soil
- Maintaining growing vegetation throughout year
- Keeping soil covered
- Managing animal impact (a lot of animals in a small space for a short time)

No one knows their land better than the farmer or rancher who pays attention to it every day, for they are the ones who make the healthcare decisions for the land. Together as a community, Northern Plains farmers and ranchers are coming together to better understand the right treatments for their operations, and learning from one another about successes and lessons to achieve better soil health.

-Maggie Zaback 

LOCAL FOOD

Yellowstone Valley Food Hub launches

A thank you from the general manager

The Yellowstone Valley Food Hub is open for business, thanks to a lot of hard work by Northern Plains members (especially the Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council and their Community Food Campaign), and eleven local ag producers.

As the newly hired general manager, let me say “thank you” on behalf of all these people who worked so hard to make it a reality. My name is John Martinez, many of you may know me from the Good Earth Market where I was the Food Service Manager. I am not a native of Billings or Montana but my wife is, and I love this town. I love food, to cook and especially to eat. My wife and I owned and operated a restaurant company in Albuquerque for twenty years before moving back to Montana to be closer to her family.

I couldn't be more excited to have joined the Food Hub in November, just in time to join the producers on stage at the Northern Plains Annual Meeting and to help with the December Food Box launches.

After a fun game-show style presentation at the Annual Meeting, the Food Hub went into work mode, working hard to make the December food box offerings a reality. The Food Hub offered five different boxes in different price ranges. At each of the food box events, we ate foods made with Food Hub products, toured Swanky Roots' greenhouse, and producers met customers to talk about their local products and their farms. These first events demonstrated just the beginning of the fun and community we are excited to build with the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub.

The Food Hub is off and running in the New Year, busy with organizational tasks and planning what comes next. We are working hard to develop our strategies for getting great local foods into your kitchens (and stomachs). Please keep an eye out for news and future offerings on the Food Hub website (YVFoodHub.com).

Contact me with any questions, or to sign up for more local food announcements at our website.

John Martinez: General Manager, Yellowstone Valley Food Hub

Office: (406) 689-1908

Cell: (406) 606-8236

Email: yellowstonevalleyfoodhub@gmail.com

Website: YVFoodHub.com



Member Dr. Maggi Beeson picking up a box of fresh, local microgreens from one of the Food Hub's "Preview Pick-up Parties" last December.

-John Martinez



CLEAN ENERGY

Picking up the PACE for jobs, energy savings, cleaner air

“My building was built in the 1920s. It’s almost a living organism and we are working to keep it alive,” says Dale Sexton owner of Timber Trails, a local outdoor shop in Livingston. This is the story of many buildings on many main streets across Montana: they are old, inefficient, and in need of meaningful upgrades that will keep them thriving into the future.

We know that energy efficiency upgrades like better insulation and windows, LED lighting, and rooftop solar will save building owners more money over the long term than they cost. However, coming up with the cash to cover the upfront costs of these upgrades presents a challenge for many.



Panelists Dale Sexton, Jay Cederberg, and Loren White speak to the role of energy efficiency in local communities.

The Annual Meeting session on Montana’s Clean Energy Future highlighted the voices of several Montanans who see that a brighter future is possible if only clean energy can be made more affordable and accessible to more Montanans.

Nearly half the energy we consume in the United States (and three-quarters of the electricity) is used to light, cool, and heat our buildings. Most of that energy is created by burning fossil fuels, which pollute our air, water, and land. Making a meaningful move away from these dirty sources of power will require reducing energy use or replacing energy sources, but how can we make it more affordable?

Commercial Property-Assessed Clean Energy (or C-PACE) is a solution to bridge this gap, allowing building owners to receive 100% upfront financing for energy efficiency, renewable energy, and water conservation upgrades. The cost of those upgrades is paid back over

time as an assessment on their property’s annual tax bill.

C-PACE is designed so that the assessment payments are offset (or more) by the utility savings that result from the upgrades. C-PACE financing is being used today in 36 states to replace inefficient heating and cooling systems in hospitals, to put solar panels on the roofs of churches, to make LED lighting upgrades in restaurants – and that’s only the beginning! “There are huge opportunities in agriculture,” said Ed Gulick, local architect and chair of the Northern Plains Clean Energy Task Force. “C-PACE can be used by farmers and ranchers to upgrade to water-efficient center pivots and more.”

Not only will C-PACE help save money, but it can jump-start economic development and create local jobs. “If there was a program like C-PACE we’d have a lot more customers. It’d generate business for engineers like myself, contractors, everyone down the line,” said Jay Cederburg, owner of AirControls – a Billings based HVAC (heating/ventilation/air conditioning) repair and installation company. “It’s a lot easier to sell something to someone if it’s not going to cost them anything.” And when more businesses can afford to make upgrades that help cut their energy costs, that’s more money they can put back into their business.

In the case of Dale Sexton (who spends 11% of his income on energy), “Anything we can do to improve the bottom line is important. I’d probably give the 5% reduction in energy savings over to my employees and increase their wages.” C-PACE is more than just a tool for financing energy efficiency. It’s a movement for a cleaner, more affordable energy future in Montana. Loren White of the Indigenous Environmental Network said, “What I see is the big-picture benefit of this, if C-PACE is in Montana and other states, that means less extractive industries and more energy conserved.” So come on Montana, let’s be the 37th state to pick up the PACE!

-Sydney Ausen 

CLEAN ENERGY

Are we achieving a just and reasonable rate case?

In the background of the legislative session, a quieter but equally powerful battle is under way... the battle over your power bill. NorthWestern Energy (NWE), the largest energy supplier in Montana, is requesting to re-figure the way utility rates are calculated, and what costs they incur are recovered through their customers.

At issue right now is how customers who generate their own electricity with renewable energy systems are treated by NWE's rate structure. These customers use "net metering" to balance the rates for the electricity they use and the electricity they put back into NWE's grid.

The company wants to create a new rate class for net metered customers (even though they make up only a tiny fraction of NWE's customer base), adding a special monthly "demand charge" so that these customers are paying an additional layer of charges in their bill to NorthWestern Energy.

A demand charge will discourage new residential solar development (as we've seen happen in other states), and many feel that's the likely intention behind the new rate class.

With a regulated monopoly structure like we have in Montana, there isn't competition to give customers the best deal for their power -- that's why an entity like the Public Service Commission exists. The Public Service Commission (PSC) is supposed to keep utilities like NorthWestern in check -- ensuring that utility rates are just and reasonable.

How does the PSC know what "just and reasonable" is? The PSC commissioners and their staff gather data from the company and use it to decide whether NorthWestern's rate requests are just and reasonable.

NorthWestern Energy's request to charge new rates is before the PSC at this time, and the five Public Service Commissioners should hear from you about it. Contact the elected Public Service Commissioner for your district... they all need to be reminded that NWE should not be allowed to shut the door on solar development in Montana.

Leave your commissioners a message by visiting this web address:
<http://psc.mt.gov/Contact-Us/Contact-Commissioners>

Call your commissioner directly:

- District 5** – Brad Johnson (406) 444-6169
- District 4** – Bob Lake (406) 444-6167
- District 3** – Roger Koopman (406) 444-6168
- District 2** – Tony O'Donnell (406) 444-6165
- District 1** – Randy Pinocci (406) 444-6166

Other questions about the rate case? Contact Makenna at the office (406) 248-1154; or email makenna@northernplains.org.



"Urban Frontier House" with renewable electricity generation.

Photo: High Plains Architects

-Makenna Sellers 

Winning C-PACE in 2019

Here's how you can help pass C-PACE (Commercial Property-Assessed Clean Energy) during the 2019 Legislative Session:

- Call your state representatives and ask them to support our C-PACE legislation - **Bill # LC 1835**
- Sign up for our text updates. We will send you text alerts about important votes and let you know who to call: **northernplains.org/phone-power**
- Submit a letter-to-the-editor to your local paper and/or one of Montana's major daily newspapers.

Key message: C-PACE will create jobs, conserve energy, and save money for Montanans.

AGRICULTURE

Big Ag looks to introduce cell-cultured fake “meat” into marketplace



Cell-cultured edible products are receiving millions in investments from Big Ag.

Big Ag is investing in cell-cultured edible products, colloquially referred to as “fake meat.” Tyson and Cargill, two of the world’s leading agribusiness conglomerates, are funneling millions into startups developing cell-cultured edible products with the hope of reducing cost of production to get it to market.

These investments are being framed as innovations to feed the world and as opportunities to diversify their stake in the animal market but, in reality, would only deepen monopolization of our food system while stealing market share from hard-working ranchers and peddling fake meat to consumers.

“Cell-cultured edible product” is derived from animal stem cells and grown into muscle tissue, not to be confused with meat, which is from live animals raised on the land. As corporate ag infuses more capital into these products, it’s important to insist on transparency in labeling language for the sake of meat producers and also for consumers.

The Food Safety Inspection Service (FSIS) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) are proposing a joint structure to regulate cell-cultured edible products, with the FSIS determining labeling language.

Producers and consumers all deserve an honest market, one that won’t mislead people by labeling cell-cultured edible products as “meat.” This will mean holding our regulatory agencies accountable and working to ensure transparent labels.

We seek fairness on the issue of fake meat just as we seek fairness in pursuing country-of-origin labeling for beef and pork at the Montana legislature.

To learn more about cell-cultured products, or to get involved, contact Caroline at caroline@northernplains.org or call (406) 248-1154.

-Caroline Canarios 

MONTHLY SUSTAINERS - EVERYBODY WINS!

Would you like to up your membership game with Northern Plains by becoming a monthly sustainer? Being a monthly donor helps us all in the following ways...

- **Saves time for you:** Set up payment once and know your donation is made throughout the year
- **Saves time for us:** Your monthly gift means time, postage, and paper saved on membership renewals and follow-up
- **Is helpful for your budgeting:** A little bit every month helps you plan your giving and still makes the same big difference
- **Is helpful for our budgeting:** Your dependable monthly donation helps us plan effectively.
- **Means a lot to all of us:** Your support allows us to make Montana a great place to live, work, and play!

To learn more call Claire at (406) 248-1154 or email claire@northernplains.org.

AGRICULTURE

Producers and consumers join forces on COOL at Northern Plains Annual Meeting

Where's the beef...from? Well, right now, we're not exactly sure.

Gilles Stockton from Grass Range and Peter Mickelsen from Lewistown led a flash talk on Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) at the Annual Meeting. In just 15 minutes they informed members on the fraudulent "Product of USA" label, the process by which COOL was repealed, and how consumers and producers can get the fair and honest label they deserve.

Stockton described the history of labeling, and how not much has changed as meatpacking has become more monopolized by the big packers. Mickelson elaborated on the issue: "Twenty years ago we didn't know where beef was being raised, fed, and processed. Today, we're being deliberately lied to." Our public discourse is being poisoned, as U.S. produced beef and pork is being mixed with foreign meat, all of which is labeled "Product of USA."

And this lie is only applied to beef and pork, a loophole outlined by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and supported by the meatpacking industry. As Stockton stated, "everything in this country, from your tomatoes to your trousers, you can find out where it's made. Everything except beef and pork."

Stockton and Mickelson ended the flash talk by rallying members to get involved in the 2019 legislative session where Northern Plains is running a bill to restore mandatory Country-of-Origin Labeling in Montana for beef and pork. To learn how you can support COOL, contact Caroline at caroline@northernplains.org or call (406) 248-1154.

-Caroline Canarios



Country-of-Origin placards are easy to implement and offer consumers the information necessary to make informed decisions about their purchases.

Restoring COOL in Montana

Here's how you can help pass Country-of-Origin Labeling during the 2019 Legislative Session:

- Call your state representatives; and ask them to support our COOL legislation - **Bill # LC 1273**
- Sign up for our text updates. We will send you text alerts about import votes and let you know who to call: northernplains.org/phone-power
- Submit a letter-to-the-editor to your local paper and/or one of Montana's major daily newspapers.

Key message: Consumers deserve to know where their beef comes from, and family ranchers deserve a fair and honest market.

2018 ANNUAL MEETING

2018 Annual Meeting rallies around power of grassroots democracy

Northern Plains' 47th Annual Meeting spoke to the enduring power of grassroots organizing seen in Montana and by our kin across the county. The variety of speakers and topics showcased the range of that power:



Northern Plains members raise a glass to another successful year of organizing Montanans to protect the things we value most.

- The weekend kicked off with a workshop where experienced members and former legislators trained attendees on how to be effective citizen lobbyists in preparation for the 2019 legislative session.
- The History Project brought an interview telling the story of one of Northern Plains' historic campaigns – the battle for clean air in Billings.
- An update on the Good Neighbor Agreement detailed how, for 18 years, our members have worked in partnership with one of the largest mines in Montana to protect the interests of their communities and operate responsibly.
- A panel of representatives from the Indigenous Environmental Network, business, and industry discussed Montana's clean energy future after a presentation of how energy efficiency can help fight climate change, save people money, and spur economic development. C-PACE legislation was identified as a clear path forward.
- An illuminating presentation about the challenges facing king coal preceded an update on our jobs study about the opportunities in cleaning up waste from the West's 2nd largest coal-fired power plant. Speakers included researchers, a Colstrip

plant worker and member of IBEW 1638, and a member of affiliate Rosebud Protective Association.

- A panel organized by our Keystone XL Task Force warned of bills that aim to criminalize the right to peacefully assemble, featuring speakers who have been fighting these bills first-hand in North Dakota and Wyoming. They shared lessons about how Native Americans, landowners, and civil rights advocates all have a part in saving our democracy.

This year's meeting added "flash talks" – punchy presentations to inform on a subject in a short time. The Food Hub producers took a fun spin with a game show style "meet the producers" feature. Locally-sourced food was a priority at the meeting and several food hub producers also starred in the meals!

A Country of Origin Labeling flash talk provided a condensed update about how American farmers and ranchers lose out because country-of-origin labeling isn't required on beef and pork. A flash talk on Soil Health explained why healthy soil really matters in fighting climate change.

-Claire Overholt 



Member Stuart Shay (far left) seeks a suitable food producer "match" among Food Hub producers Annika Charter-Williams, Brittany Moreland, and Tom Tschida. Food Hub General Manager John Martinez holds up the "Laughter" sign.

2018 ANNUAL MEETING

Jim Hightower delivers rousing keynote speech

“Those who say it can’t be done shouldn’t interrupt those who are doing it.”

-Jim Hightower

Northern Plains’ 2018 Annual Meeting rallied around *Defending Democracy* in all we do, and keynote speaker Jim Hightower couldn’t have been a better anchor for that theme.

Jim is a national radio commentator, public speaker, and bestselling author. Also well-known as “America’s favorite populist”, he believes in and encourages “normal people” to take control of decisions and stand up to the powers that be. America’s history, he pointed out in his address, is one of populist rebellions against the moneyed elites – that America was built on agitation. Never far from his Texas roots he elaborated, “You don’t get a hog out of a creek by saying ‘here hog, here hog,’ You’ve got to put your shoulder in and shove it out.”

Progress in defending democracy comes by bringing the outside inside, so the voices of regular folks hold power in decision-making rather than corporate lobbyists and moneyed insiders. He commended Northern Plains’ organizing work as a model for this. Despite often-discouraging, topsy-turvy political times, if you ask Jim what’s the best thing to bring to a fight, it’s “You. Organized people.”



Jim Hightower delivered an inspiring keynote speech full of pithy one-liners and fiery words in support of grassroots democracy.

-Claire Overholt



2018 brings new features

Several new features were added to this year’s annual meeting, and all were a big hit. Here are details about a few of them:

- A reception and social hour with Jim Hightower Friday night mixed light appetizers and drinks with a brief speech from Hightower. Guests enjoyed the opportunity to mingle and ask questions in a more personal setting.
- A happy riot for all involved – a live dessert auction – included homemade baklava, linzer torte, pies, cookies, and a coconut cream cake.
- The night ended with a dance party with our own personal DJ – former Northern Plains Chair, Kate French.



Dessert auctioneer Eric Schmidt entertains the crowd while helping raise some sweet revenue for Northern Plains’ work.

Children’s Presentation

This year, childcare was provided on-site at the Annual Meeting. The children who participated in childcare displayed art they made about the natural world and told the audience about their work. One participant reminded us of who benefits from this kind of work: ourselves, “and the trees, and the birds, and the flowers, and the trees.”

-Claire Overholt



2018 ANNUAL MEETING

Long-time champions Jean Lemire Dahlman and Dena Hoff win annual awards

Jean Lemire Dahlman was this year's recipient of the Bob Tully Spirit award. A member since the 1970s, she has more recently become a leader on agricultural issues: lobbying Congress on the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Montana legislature on Northern Plains issues, and representing Northern Plains in coalitions like Grow Montana and in meetings with decision makers. Jean currently chairs our Agriculture Task Force, building farm-to-school programs. She also serves on our COOL Committee and the Organization and Finance Task Force. Jean represents Northern Plains on the WORC Ag and Food Team to build regional and federal agriculture campaigns. Recently, she concluded a board meeting in a way that only Jean can: "We didn't have title nine when I was in school, so I never got to be part of a team. This is my team, you guys, Northern Plains are now my team."



Jean Lemire Dahlman is 2018's Bob Tully Spirit Award recipient.

This year's Mary Donohoe "Tell It Like It Is" Award goes to Dena Hoff. Dena has been the face, voice, and a key strategist in the campaign against the Keystone XL pipeline. Her nomination letter stated that "Dena has never not 'told it like it is,' whatever the



Dena Hoff is 2018's Mary Donohoe "Tell It Like It Is" Award recipient.

cost or consequence – and that truth goes back to the early 90s, when Dena first got involved in Dawson Resource Council and Northern Plains." Fellow DRC members shared: "Dena truly shows what it means to persevere. Even when so many are wanting her to back down and quiet down, she has shown that she will not give up fighting to protect those same people from the devastation that will come from the Keystone XL pipeline."

The award for greatest percentage of new members in an affiliate went to Dawson Resource Council. The award for the greatest number of new members went to Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council.

-Claire Overholt 

Elections

Say hello to our 2019 officers!

- **Chair** – Becky Mitchell, Billings
- **Vice-Chair** – Sue Beug, Red Lodge
- **Secretary** – Beth Kaeding, Bozeman
- **Treasurer** – Ed Gulick, Billings
- **Assistant Secretary** – Deb Muth, Red Lodge
- **Assistant Treasurer** – Jeanie Alderson, Birney

At-Large Board Representatives

- John Brown, Shepherd
- Karen Stevenson, Miles City
- Jean Dahlman, Forsyth
- Alaina Buffalo Spirit, Lame Deer

2018 ANNUAL MEETING

Free Speech Resolution

Northern Plains members voted to approve the one resolution proposed this year: that “Northern Plains Resource Council will actively oppose any legislation or ordinances that criminalize any form of free speech, assembly, opposition, or peaceful assembly by individuals or organizations.” This means, as an organization, Northern Plains will stand against any attempts to make free speech illegal. Here is the official language:

NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL

Resolution No. 2018 – 1

Introduced by Metta Ravenheart at the request of Keystone XL Task Force

A RESOLUTION OF THE MEMBERS OF NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL
OPPOSING THE CRIMINALIZATION OF PEACEABLE ASSEMBLY, PETITIONING FOR
REDRESS, OR PEACEABLE PROTEST IN PROPOSED LEGISLATION OR ORDINANCES.

WHEREAS, the 1st Amendment to the Constitution of the United States guarantees all people of this country freedom of religion, speech, and the press as well as the right to assemble peaceably and to petition the government for redress of grievances; and

WHEREAS, Article II, Section 6 of the Montana Constitution guarantees Montanans the “right peaceably to assemble, petition for redress or peaceably protest governmental action”; and

WHEREAS, Article II, Section 7 of the Montana Constitution guarantees that no law shall be passed impairing Montanans’ freedom of speech or expression nor the freedom of the press; and

WHEREAS, a number of state legislatures, including Montana’s, have considered and/or passed a variety of legislative bills in the recent past that would limit the rights of people to peaceful assembly and/or free speech, free expression, or free press, all of which are protected by the U.S. Constitution and (for Montanans) the Montana Constitution.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MEMBERS OF NORTHERN PLAINS
RESOURCE COUNCIL, IN ANNUAL MEETING ASSEMBLED:

Northern Plains Resource Council will actively oppose any legislation or ordinances that criminalize any form of free speech, assembly, opposition to projects, or peaceable protest by individuals or organizations.

-END-

KEYSTONE XL

Will Montana's legislature mount an attack on your right to protest?

When people start organizing, speaking up, protesting, and – as a result – close in on winning, the entrenched corporate polluters react, sometimes in desperate and nefarious ways.

TransCanada and its political allies have stoked fears and have cultivated relationships with law enforcement in the hope of persuading police officers and sheriff deputies to see and treat protesters as criminals – and they're making headway. Fearing large protests akin to the protests against the Dakota Access Pipeline in North Dakota, local law enforcement agencies are preparing to take on Keystone XL protesters.

We'll see legislative proposals this session which fan this fear in order to criminalize legal peaceful protest – a thinly veiled attempt at intimidating Montanans into silence.

As you'll see printed in this Plains Truth [page 15], the Northern Plains membership passed a new resolution at our Annual Meeting in November, specifically addressing the likelihood of legislative attacks on our rights as Americans to free speech, assembly, and legal protest here in Montana.

It's still early in the session so we don't know exactly the form these bad bills will take. Some good guesses are:

- **Critical Infrastructure** – Bills that classify any protest of energy projects or that involve blocking roadways as “economic disruption” or interfering with “critical infrastructure” with enhanced penalties and felony status for such protests;
- **Masks** – Bills that would make it illegal to wear masks in public or at protests;
- **Guilt by Association** – Bills that would make supporting organizations – e.g. a church that sends water and granola bars – “vicariously liable,” for any property damage occurring at a protest (and policing costs associated with the protest) even if they weren't responsible for any damage;
- **Any Force Necessary** – Bills that would either allow or mandate that law enforcement use “any force necessary” to remove protesters in certain circumstances.

During the Annual Meeting, a panel of speakers from North Dakota and Wyoming shared with us warnings and lessons related to these types of recent efforts in their states' legislatures.

One panelist, Joyce Evans, serves as the chairwoman to Northern Plains' sister group in Wyoming, the Powder River Basin Resource Council. She was involved with PRBRC's efforts last year to combat a “critical infrastructure” bill, which passed the legislature but fortunately was vetoed by their Governor at the urging of groups like PRBRC and the American Civil Liberties Union. Evans explained to us that this bill “essentially criminalizes people who are trying to exercise their first amendment rights.”

Another panelist, Ruth Buffalo (just elected to the North Dakota legislature), pointed out that these bills don't seek to address true problems but rather to intimidate. “A lot of these bills were to silence and intimidate our communities, and prevent us from stepping forward to exercise our right to participate in democracy,” she said.

Our right to speak up is fundamental to who we are as Americans. We have a right to legally protest destructive energy projects (and anything else!) When we protest, when we rally, when we organize and participate in other forms of demonstration, we make our voices heard by decision makers – and we do so legally... we follow the law. Trespass and vandalism are already against the law. So what do these bills really seek to do?

-Olivia Stockman Splinter 

OIL & GAS

Northern Plains members fight air pollution in Denver

“You are the Environmental Protection Agency - not the Energy Protection Agency.”

- Sue Beug, Northern Plains Vice Chair



Member Sue Beug testifying before EPA officials on proposed rollbacks to national methane protections.

Northern Plains Vice Chair and Carbon County Resource Council member Sue Beug delivered her message during fiery testimony to the EPA in November. She was responding to the EPA’s proposal for yet another round of rollbacks to federal protections against methane pollution.

Beug and fellow members Pat and Laurie Wilson made the long trip to Denver this fall to tell federal officials that Montanans will not stand for weaker methane standards. Weaker protections mean more air pollution, more health impacts, and a faster-warming climate.

On top of that, methane leaks and flares have economic costs that represent lost revenues for our schools, our communities, and for mineral owners.

“I grew up in Weld County, Colorado, where our family farm has extensive oil and gas development,” added Beug. “But Colorado has stronger methane rules, which help protect my family from air pollution.”

“In Montana, we don’t have those same protections,” said Beug. “Every American deserves equal protection from air pollution.”

Thanks to Sue, Pat, and Laurie for speaking up for all of us – and stay tuned for another opportunity to comment on the EPA’s ill-advised rollbacks, coming late this winter.

-Caitlin Cromwell



KEYSTONE XL

Keystone XL Lawsuit Update

On December 6, U.S. District Judge Brian Morris ruled in our favor on what he meant in his November 8th ruling when he forbade TransCanada from doing “pre-construction” of the Keystone XL pipeline. He’s allowing TransCanada to conduct administrative tasks only, such as the surveys and other work needed for the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Physical pre-construction – e.g. moving pipe, and constructing pipeyards or man-camps – is prohibited. This ruling has recently withstood the first round of appeal.

HISTORY PROJECT

Fight for clean air was driving force behind Northern Plains' largest affiliate

Not too many years ago, Billings had one of the worst sulfur dioxide pollution (SO₂) problems in the United States. With three in-county oil refineries, a sugar beet factory, an aging coal-fired power plant, and limited air quality laws, the city saw a surge in children with respiratory problems and weather events like inversions that could pose serious risks to asthmatics and others.

This problem spurred a group of concerned Billings residents to get together and organize for the community's health. Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council founding member Eileen Morris told this story to WORC Executive Director John Smillie over the course of a session at the Annual Meeting.

Originally envisioned as the "Good Air Group" (GAG), members ultimately settled on the name Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council (YVCC). YVCC spend years pushing the state legislature, county commissioners, and others to take action to clean up the air. One night, after a meeting with the chief of the state Air Quality Bureau, Eileen and her good friend and fellow YVCC leader Nettie Lees drove home through an inversion plume of SO₂ pollution, triggering an asthma attack that ultimately led to Nettie's death.



WORC Executive Director John Smillie interviews member Eileen Morris about the fight for clean air in Billings and the founding of Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council.

Nettie had once considered moving from Billings due to the pollution, but resolved not to, telling Eileen, "My kids and grandkids breathe the same air. I'm not moving. I'm fighting." Nettie's resolve and willingness to fight to the end for the community's health helped motivate Eileen and other YVCC members through that tough time.

After Nettie's death, YVCC members redoubled their efforts, researching, learning, and speaking out with support from Northern Plains staff. They grew the organization, gathered stories, and ultimately became a major catalyst for the EPA to develop national air quality standards to control sulfur dioxide pollution.

Eileen's advice to attendees of the Northern Plains meeting was clear: "If you have a problem that seems too big for you to solve, get help. Go to Northern Plains and they will help you find resources, speak up, and find others so you won't be alone in your struggle."

YVCC has grown from 20 members in 1977 to more than 400 members today, working on local foods, sustainability, energy conservation, and more.

-Svein Newman 

COAL

What does Colstrip mean to you?

“In Colstrip, there is also lot of pride around the coal industry, but it is obvious that change has come whether we like it or not.”

-Ted Stimac, Colstrip Plant worker and IBEW 1638 Registrar

This year’s Coal Task Force panel at the Annual Meeting asked two locals and two researchers what the West’s second largest power plant means to them.

To former Rosebud Protective Association (RPA) chair Brad Sauer, Colstrip means a changing aquifer. 500,000 gallons leak each day from the plant’s coal ash ponds. The growing groundwater plume is high in sulfates and boron and is a threat to the long-term quality of wells on neighboring ranches.

Brad explained to the audience what it means to ranch around the power plant: “You need glasses to stay up late reading all those reports,” he said as he handed out a history of the back-and-forth between RPA and the corporations managing Colstrip. Going over details of the plume’s discovery and expansion beneath neighboring ranches, Brad told the crowd, “It reads like a Grisham novel... he wouldn’t need to change much to pull this into a book.”

To Ted Stimac, lifetime Colstrip resident and Registrar of the labor union (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers – Local 1638) representing the power plant’s 200+ workers, Colstrip continues to mean a life for his family. “In 1981, my dad and his two brothers were all union pipe fitters from Great Falls and work got scarce. Friends and family had to start traveling to find it. That was the first time I remember hearing about Colstrip.”

After working 30 years at the plant, Ted is frustrated by what company-pushed rumors have done to people’s views on the ash ponds: “I want to point out that corporations have done an outstanding job convincing the masses that clean air and water are a political issue to increase their own profits. In 1970, when Richard Nixon created the EPA, he believed clean air and water are a human right.”

Seth Feaster, analyst for the Institute for Energy Economic and Financial Analysis, explained why Colstrip is center-stage in a nationwide upheaval in energy markets, where new technology is upending coal’s role. He went on to talk about something not highlighted in research papers. “As coal turns over to natural gas and renewables, the companies making these decisions leave no space for what this all means for people on the ground. It is deeply frustrating as an observer to watch this model of financial extraction play out in communities across the country.”

For the past year, Northern Plains and Local 1638 have worked to address one piece of Montana’s changing coal country. The Northern Plains board hired past Chair Kate French to research the jobs that could be created by cleaning up pollution from the leaking ash ponds. French delivered the headline takeaways from that research to the audience and at community meetings in Lame Deer, Colstrip, and Forsyth in November.

If you want to contribute to the cleanup jobs effort, please contact Alex at (406) 248-1154 or alex@northernplains.org to take part in DEQ’s comment period this February.



Northern Plains continues work in Colstrip to seek cleanup jobs as part of the region’s transition plan to the future.

-Alex Cuhna 

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

DRC wins annual meeting awards



DRC members at one of their many successful recycling drives this fall.

Dawson Resource Council has hosted four cardboard recycling drives in Glendive to date. Their January event filled a first trailer with cardboard within the first six minutes.

In October, DRC member Seth Newton represented the group at a stakeholders meeting with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality about DEQ's proposed radioactive oil waste rules.

At the Northern Plains Annual Meeting, DRC member Dena Hoff was honored with the Mary Donohoe "Tell It Like It Is" Award for her bravery and leadership in the fight to protect our water and livelihoods from the Keystone XL pipeline. DRC also received an award for the greatest percentage increase in affiliate membership – for the second consecutive year!

-Caitlin Cromwell 

Sleeping Giant gathers for quarterly meeting



SGCC members learned about city lighting tariffs by talking with former city commissioners, staff of the Public Service Commission, and more.

On January 30, Sleeping Giant members will host their first quarterly meeting of 2019. The gathering will include the election of leadership, a report on our city lighting research and the Northwestern Energy rate case, and a Sun Run partnership discussion. Their guest speaker for the evening is DEQ Director Shaun McGrath.

The meeting is from 6:00-8:00 PM at Free Ceramics. In 2019, SGCC's goals include making cost-effective and environmentally friendly changes to the way that Helena's public streetlights are managed, and being a force to reckon with in citizen lobbying during the legislative session.

-Makenna Sellers 

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

YVCC reaches milestone in Billings energy conservation campaign



Billings residents show their support for energy conservation at City Council meeting.

The year-long campaign for a City of Billings Commission on Energy and Conservation is moving through the City Council. Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council, in coalition with the League of Women Voters and Angela's Piazza, advocated for the idea at the City Council's January 7th work session.

More than 30 supporters attended the meeting, with 10 members providing thoughtful, inspiring public comment. Council discussion indicated broad support for the Commission, with Council members explicitly referencing public comment as moving their position. But the campaign isn't over yet, we still need your support as we work toward a vote at a City Council regular business meeting.

Contact Kari at kari@northernplains.org to find out how you can get involved.

-Caroline Canarios 

SPA members gather to plan upcoming work

Members of Stillwater Protective Association gathered for their general membership meeting on January 16 at the Nye Fire Hall, where they heard a presentation from Technical Advisor Jim Kuipers about the Good Neighbor Agreement. They also discussed local happenings with the Citizen-Initiated Zoning effort, the solar project by Beartooth Electric Co-op, and ways to be involved in the Montana legislative session.

-Olivia Stockman Splinter 



SPA members gather at Nye Fire Hall.

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

CMRC bringing COOL to central Montana

Central Montana Resource Council is working hard to help Northern Plains pass Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) legislation at the 2019 legislative session. In October, CMRC held a special meeting for members to learn more about why labeling matters and how it impacts both ranchers and consumers. Since then, members have been busy writing letters to the editor, meeting with neighbors and potential allies, and gearing up to host a public event on COOL this winter.

In October, CMRC held their first-ever Pint Night – a social event focused on recruiting new members and held at Lewistown’s brand-new brewery, Central Feed Grilling Co. The event was a great success, and CMRC is pleased to be reaching new audiences with our messages of clean energy, clean water, and local food.

-Caitlin Cromwell 



Ranchers Peter Mickelsen (standing) and Gilles Stockton hosted a special meeting about Country-of-Origin-Labeling for CMRC members in October.

YBCC Launches ‘Solarize Livingston’



YBCC members gather to learn more about solar development opportunities.

Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council members launched their Solarize Livingston campaign this January after months of hard work and planning. YBCC held two community outreach meetings featuring solar installers, energy specialists, and the stories of those in the community who have already made the choice to go solar. YBCC’s *Solarize Livingston* campaign has the goal of helping 30 households to “go solar” in 2019.

-Sydney Ausen 

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

Bear Creek prioritizes human and wildlife safety

Throughout 2018, Bear Creek Council presented testimony to the partners of the Interagency Bison Management Plan about the safety of the bison hunt. After a year of hard work, BCC convinced the partners to take a field trip to Gardiner to see the safety issues firsthand. The council intends to use this opportunity to demonstrate the severity of the problems caused by carcasses left behind by hunters, recognize the sovereignty of tribal hunting rights, and offer viable solutions to the problem. Bison management decision makers are planning to visit Gardiner in late April.



On February 25th, BCC will host the annual Jardine Ski Run, a fun event for the whole community. All of you are invited! Contact Makenna for information: makenna@northernplains.org.

BCC members encourage safety and fairness regarding wildlife management decisions.

-Makenna Sellers 

CCRC helps bring composting to Red Lodge



Carbon County Resource Council has been working to bring a community composting system to Red Lodge. When it was announced last fall that the recycling center would be closing because of a budget shortage, the community came together to find solutions to manage waste in Red Lodge. CCRC members proposed that composting be considered in any new recycling system. Thanks to community support, the recycling center will stay open as a new community non-profit, and composting with Swift Buckets, a Billings based composting company, will be offered at the recycling center! CCRC members played an important role in resolving solid waste problems in Red Lodge!

CCRC members helped bring a composting system to Red Lodge recycling center.

-Sydney Ausen 

Cottonwood Resource Council gears up for 2019

Cottonwood Resource Council is gearing up for another exciting year, and started off 2019 with their Annual Meeting on January 17. Members elected officers and Board representatives, and discussed plans for 2019. In the near term, CRC will be keeping an eye on their grant application to help fund the installation of solar panels at Sweet Grass County High School.



-Mikindra Morin 

CRC members continue to work towards installation of solar panels at Sweet Grass County High School.



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LET'S BRING GRASSROOTS POWER TO THE 2019 MONTANA LEGISLATURE!



We win in the legislature when Northern Plains members step up and speak out! To ensure you're empowered with all of the information you need to do that effectively, we'll keep you up to date every Friday with updated e-bulletins. Those bulletins will provide you with everything you need to know about the progress of bills, important votes, and ways to take action.

Other ways to stay informed and help us win:

- **Visit our website to stay up to date on bills we're tracking**
NorthernPlains.org/2019-legislature-bill-positions
- **Sign up for our phone tree**
When a bill we support or oppose is at a critical juncture, legislators NEED to hear from you! Email rachel@northernplains.org to sign up
- **Attend our Citizen Lobby Training**
Event will be held in Red Lodge on Monday, February 11 at 5 PM in basement of Red Lodge Carnegie Library: 3 8th Street. Soup will be provided!