Summer Organizing Heats Up

From east to west and north to south, members are gathering across Montana to celebrate hard-fought victories, plan upcoming campaigns, learn new skills, and enjoy the company of neighbors standing shoulder-to-shoulder to protect the things we cherish most.

Local Food Challenge

The 2019 Montana Local Food Challenge is in full swing. Connect with local farmers, ranchers, restaurants, and your own backyard garden. New this year: kids challenges!

See page 13 for details...
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 ranches, and unique quality of life.

NORTHERN PLAINS BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Ken Decker, Livingston
Joan Kresich, Livingston

Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council
Emma Kerr-Carpenter, Billings
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THE PLAINS TRUTH

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

Membership Dues
$500+ Riders of the Big Sky  $50 Range Rider
$200 Bottom Line Rider  $40 General Member
$100 Rough Rider

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

Northern Plains Staff

Staff Director: Teresa Erickson
Staff Director Designee: Olivia Stockman Splinter
Director of Organizing and Campaigns: Maggie Gordon
Development Coordinator: Steve Paulson
Political Organizing Director: Svein Newman
Legislative Organizing Director: Cody Ferguson
Organizers: Caitlin Cromwell, Sydney Ausen, Alex Cunha, Makenna Sellers, Kari Boiter, Mikindra Morin, Caroline Canarios
Director of Grassroots Fundraising: Caleb Lande
Grassroots Outreach Coordinator: Claire Overholt
Communications Director: Dustin Ogdin
Communications Coordinator: Megan McLean
Office Manager: Karen Olson
Comptroller: Paula Berg
Facility Manager: Jim Cooper
Technical Assistant: Jen Marble
Program Support Assistant: Jillian Mavencamp

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Northern Plains uses many tools to build power. One of the central avenues to build grassroots power is through organizing local affiliate groups. Affiliates are where relationships and leadership are developed, where desired change is identified and defined, and where a winning strategy is implemented.

Democratic values are reflected in the statement “All people are created equal,” and affiliate members work to foster those democratic values. They listen to and try to understand different perspectives, they develop a collective vision of a community based on equality and justice, and they work toward having all group participants feel their input is valued and respected.

Fostering democratic values creates power from the ground up and empowers individuals, through the group, to change unjust power relationships.

Affiliates are entitled to elect representatives to the Northern Plains Board. Those affiliate Board representatives are the connection between the affiliate groups and Northern Plains. They bring the perspective of their affiliates to the Board discussions. (Healthy discussions are encouraged at Board meetings, as this allows for a thorough exploration of an issue and ensures that a decision is reached – through the democratic process – that all can support.)

Affiliate representatives also give a report at Board meetings outlining the work their affiliates are doing in their communities. This helps connect us to one another, no matter what communities we live in.

The affiliate representatives report back to their affiliates on the Board meeting so that local members are up-to-date on the decisions that were made. This ensures that we’re capable of building collective power for Northern Plains through the affiliates being able to mobilize their members to win on a state or even nationwide issues.

By paying their affiliate dues, those members support Northern Plains. Paying dues gives all our members – affiliate or otherwise – a sense of ownership in Northern Plains and the right to participate and make decisions regarding our campaigns, goals, policies, and strategies. The dues and donations from our members give us a core strength that we need to overcome well-financed opponents (often international corporations). That grassroots support also informs foundation funders that we have real support from real people, and that we are here for the long haul.

A final component of building affiliate power is our organizing staff. Our field organizers work with members of the affiliate to accomplish the members’ goals. The organizers know that grassroots power is built by members taking responsibility for informed decision-making and that members become empowered by doing, not having things done for them. This is at the heart of how Northern Plains works.

A huge “thank you” to all the affiliates for their support of Northern Plains’ mission, principles, and goals and for keeping us functioning as a powerful, grassroots, democratic organization!

“Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing justice. Justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

-Becky Mitchell
Chair
Our new Staff Director

After performing a nationwide search, we’re excited to announce that Olivia Stockman Splinter has accepted the position of Northern Plains Staff Director. She will officially begin her duties on September 16, 2019.

Our Staff Director is responsible for overseeing the success of Northern Plains’ entire program, directing all other staff, coordinating our leadership model of member-controlled grassroots democracy, and seeing to Northern Plains’ financial and organizational health. Olivia takes over from retiring Staff Director Teresa Erickson, who has successfully steered the ship for the past 33 years.

Many of you already know Olivia, given her long tenure with Northern Plains. She joined our staff in 2008 as Director of Organizing and Campaigns and has an extensive background as a nonprofit professional, with specific expertise in community organizing. Before coming to Northern Plains, Olivia worked for the League of Conservation Voters, Service Employees International Union, Montana League of Rural Voters, and the Western Organization of Resource Councils. She holds a master’s degree in Political Science from the University of New Mexico.

In her 11 years at Northern Plains, Olivia has directed a large and growing team of organizers, overseeing numerous successful campaigns. She has worked with members and allies in every corner of the state to establish grassroots democracy as a positive force across Montana. Her work has advanced Northern Plains’ mission of protecting our water, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life.

We could not be happier to have a proven leader like Olivia take on the challenge of Staff Director. Please join me in welcoming her as she takes on this new position!

-Becky Mitchell
Chair

They say you can’t take it with you. But you can make a difference by including Northern Plains in your will.

Your bequest can create a ripple effect that will keep your values at work. Want information? Contact Steve at:

(406) 248-1154 or steve@northernplains.org

Olivia Stockman Splinter will officially become the Northern Plains Staff Director on Sept. 16, 2019.
For Northern Plains member Ken Decker, it’s all about walking the walk. Climate change presents huge challenges for our families and communities, and Ken doesn’t want to just “talk the talk.” He wants to see us put our money where our mouths are and take action. For Ken, one of the biggest ways we can do that is by being more intentional about what we put on our plates. 15 years ago Ken started feeling like he needed to make a change for his personal health and for that of the planet. “You’ve got to allow disruption in your life to get things done,” he said. “I started to look around and think it’s not fair to ask coal workers to change everything about the life they know if I’m not going to change mine.”

For Ken, eating a vegan diet means tackling the challenge of climate change on several levels: on a personal level by consuming foods that are less resource-intensive and, on a higher level, by pushing back at large corporate interests.

Ken joined Northern Plains when, after he and his wife Sandy moved to Livingston, he became concerned about pollutants from an industrial laundromat across from his home. Ken got very active in Northern Plains’ campaign to stop the development of coal and oil export terminals on the West Coast. He traveled twice to Spokane, WA, to testify against the Tesoro Savage Oil Terminal and to stand in solidarity with other rail communities like Livingston.

Since then, Ken became the co-chair of Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council, the Northern Plains affiliate in Livingston. He represents YBCC on the Northern Plains Board.

Besides his diet, Ken sees clean energy as the other biggest change we can make to address the challenges of climate change and, here again, he sees the need to reign in corporations. “Northwestern Energy needs competition. Their whole system is set up on raising your rates. And why would we continue to let a company that only wants to make our bills higher run the show?”

Ken is involved in YBCC’s Solarize Livingston Campaign to get 30 new residential solar installations in Livingston this summer. When asked why we want to see more people generate some of their power from the sun, Ken responds, “The more people with rooftop solar in Livingston, the more energy-independent our community and the less reliant we are on Northwestern Energy.”

I asked Ken if he’d be willing to share his favorite vegan recipe. He assured me that this pizza would rock my world:

**Ken’s “Go To” Pizza**

- organic cornmeal crust (pre-made)
- apple slices, sautéed
- minced garlic
- olives
- arugula

**Topping**

- fresh massaged kale
- mustard
- crushed Brazil nuts

Or if pizza’s not your thing, Ken suggests Sandy’s Walnut Pesto recipe for pasta or as a dip!

**Sandy’s Walnut Pesto**

Blend of walnuts, cilantro, nutritional yeast, salt, pepper, and olive oil

-Sydney Ausen

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**People of the Plains**

**Activism powered by a mindful diet**

Ken has been able to “zero out” his power bill with a rooftop solar array.
DEQ inches toward radioactive oil waste rules

For six years, Northern Plains members in eastern Montana and across the state have been pushing the state to create rules and standards for the disposal of radioactive oil waste. That includes how oilfield waste is buried in landfills, how waste is handled by workers, how water is tested around those landfills, what level of radioactivity Montana will allow, and much more.

Six years in… we’re still waiting. In recent months, our members have been back and forth with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality – offering feedback, commissioning independent technical analyses, meeting with key DEQ decision-makers, and developing strong, scientifically-based positions.

Now, DEQ is inching toward a close-to-final public draft of the radioactive oil waste rules, scheduled to be released this month. Here’s a look at what the DEQ is likely to include in those rules, and where our membership stands on it:

**What’s good**
- Landfills will have to construct stormwater ponds that can handle and hold the water from a much larger rain event than previously required (from a 100-year storm, rather than a 25-year storm).
- Landfills will now be required to monitor radioactivity at the property line of their facilities.

**What should be better**
- DEQ is proposing to increase Montana’s radioactivity concentration limit from 50 picocuries per gram to 100 picocuries per gram. Meanwhile, industry is lobbying for 200 picocuries per gram.
- DEQ is proposing to let landfills maintain a “rolling average” of radioactivity within the active landfilled area. We have concerns about how realistic a system that requires landfills to perpetually recalculate the concentration of radioactivity within a landfill cell is. How often will they take measurements? From where within the landfill cell? Does the state maintain oversight of the “average”? We also have concerns about whether a rolling average relies too heavily on landfills to self-regulate and self-report in order to keep tabs on that average.
- In an earlier draft, the department had required that stormwater ponds be lined and that stormwater be tested for radioactivity before being released into the surrounding environment. But now, DEQ is proposing to let stormwater flow off site without knowing if it has become radioactive.
- DEQ has not included a radioactivity limit specific to thorium, a radionuclide that shows up frequently in North Dakota oilfields.
- DEQ is proposing to exempt drill cuttings and drilling muds from regulation as radioactive oil waste. Exempting these wastes would mean landfills can still accept them without having to test for radioactivity, hydrocarbons, volatile organic compounds, or any other contaminants that frequently occur in oilfield waste.

We expect a public draft of these rules – plus an accompanying comment period – any day now. Stay tuned for alerts from Northern Plains on how you can help! Contact Caitlin at (406) 248-1154 or caitlin@northernplains.org with questions or for more information.

-Caitlin Cromwell
At Northern Plains, we are people from all walks of life striving to keep Montana a good place to live and work. Part of that pursuit – a critical part – is protecting our water. As Montanans, we know that clean water is our lifeblood. Our farms and ranches, our communities, our beautiful landscapes, and the health of our families depend on it.

But some of our water is under threat of contamination from oil and gas development.

That’s why Northern Plains is planning to propose a baseline water testing policy, which would require mandatory water testing before oil and gas development begins and after drilling is completed.

Right now, we don’t know enough about the quality of our water to be able to document how it’s affected by oil and gas development. Baseline water testing help people with an oil or gas well in their backyards to defend themselves and hold drillers accountable.

What exactly does baseline water testing mean? Here’s a partial list of what we want:

• Existing water wells within 1 mile of a new oil or gas well must be tested.
• Pre-drilling tests must be conducted between 12 months and 30 days before a new oil or gas well is drilled.
• Follow-up tests must be conducted at 1 year and again at 5 years after the original testing event.
• If landowners suspect contamination, they must able to request additional testing at points other than, or in addition to, the above intervals.
• Testing must include parameters for both water quality and water quantity.
• Testing must be done by a certified 3rd party water sampler who would follow chain-of-custody.

If you have feedback on this list, we would love to hear from you. Contact Caitlin at (406) 248-1154 or caitlin@northernplains.org.

Otherwise, stay tuned for ways you can support this proposal at the Board of Oil & Gas in the months to come.

-Caitlin Cromwell
In the late 1960s, energy economists warned that American energy consumption was growing at such a rate that it would double by the end of the century. If the United States did not aggressively move to counter the predicted increase of 4.5% per year, America was headed for a crisis.

President Nixon, and later his successors, vowed to meet the challenge. The result was the North Central Power Study, which prescribed meeting the nation’s energy needs by developing the coal beneath the northern Great Plains. Federal bureaucrats and corporate CEOs made promises of unimaginable millions of kilowatt hours and healthy shareholder returns.

Residents and landowners in the region feared that their homeland was about to be transformed into “the boiler room of the nation” and “a national sacrifice zone.” In 1972, ranchers, farmers and environmentalists got together, formed Northern Plains to fight for their land and way of life, and the rest is history.

This is the origin story of our organization. Though Northern Plains has grown in membership, geography, and the range of issues we address, our history has nevertheless tracked alongside coal development – from the North Central Power Study through the development of Colstrip, the Tongue River Railroad, coal bed methane, and even across Montana and into neighboring states to fight schemes to export coal to Asia. We have had a profound impact on how coal has been developed and what happens to the land once the play is over.

Over the past few years, the end of the coal boom has become more apparent. Coal-burning power plants nationwide are closing down. The companies that operate the Rosebud, Absaloka and Spring Creek mines have gone bankrupt. This past February, Montana-Dakota Utilities announced that it planned to close the Lewis and Clark plant near Sidney by the end of 2020. The reality of coal’s decline became even more imminent on June 11 when Talen Energy, operator of the Colstrip power plant, announced that it would be shuttering Units 1 and 2 at the end of 2019, two years earlier than expected.

Despite all of the political bombast about environmentalists waging a “war on coal,” it turns out that the primary causes are cheap natural gas, the falling prices of renewables, and simple free-market economics. Unpredictable market forces, energy conservation, and new technologies prevented the dire warnings of Nixon’s energy economists from becoming a reality. While the North Central Power Study predicted that the northern Great Plains held 600 years’ worth of coal, the coal boom has busted after less than 50.

Over the years, many of our founding members have been interviewed about Northern Plains’ early days and the struggle against “Big Coal.” Many had thought, when they first got involved, that the battle would be over in a few years. They never dreamed that they would still be fighting for the land many years later or that their kids might inherit the fight. Some expressed anger that it had lasted so long. Few, though, could likely predict the rapid demise of coal strip mining in the Plains. The closing of Colstrip Units 1 and 2 is a cause for reflection.

Speculating about the future is difficult. In less than 50 years, coal has shifted from a cheap, plentiful source of energy to one of the most expensive energy sources and one of the largest producers of the pollutants driving global climate change. (continued next page...)

Coal country landowners in the 60s and 70s feared their property was being designated a “sacrifice zone” for the coal industry. 
*Photo by Terence Moore*
Northern Plains has been there speaking truth to power and holding decision-makers accountable throughout this transition and we’ve learned a lot of important lessons along the way that prepare us for whatever comes next.

We’ve learned to be persistent, to talk to our neighbors and find common interests, to make unlikely alliances, and to win on issues that unite us. We’ve learned to be creative. We’ve learned that, if we’re organized, we can bring down Goliaths while making lifelong friendships and having fun.

We are applying these lessons to our work to protect and promote family agriculture, speed along the clean energy revolution, expand energy democracy, fight climate change, restore our soil health, and rein in the destructive practices of other mineral extraction industries.

We are also applying these lessons to make sure the owners of the Colstrip power plant clean up their hundreds of millions of tons of toxic coal ash in a way that permanently protects precious groundwater, while creating jobs for power plant and mine workers that will help the town of Colstrip progress to a more diversified, sustainable future.

Our organization was born with coal, grew with its development, and is evolving as the coal industry declines. The intuitive sense of our founders to pay attention to democratic process and to take care of each other continues to make us strong and able to adapt. The coal boom may be coming to an end, but Northern Plains will still be making history for a long time to come.

- Cody Ferguson

Almost 50 years after our founding, camaraderie and kinship keep us growing and vibrant, even into coal's twilight. Photo: Steve and Jeanne Charter wedding, 1970s.

Coal & oil loophole cinched tight

June 11 marked a big policy victory for taxpayers! The federal government did not appeal a recent district court ruling about mineral royalties, ensuring that fossil fuel companies will pay their fair share for public coal and oil resources.

Fossil fuel companies have long dodged royalty payments to the public through a loophole that allowed them to sell their resources to themselves at discounted prices before selling them to the actual buyer. Under such a loophole, you could buy a car for $20,000, sell it to yourself again for $5,000, and then go to the DMV and only pay registration fees on the $5,000. Similarly, federal royalties had previously been artificially reduced by assessing royalty payments on those discounted sales to wholly owned subsidiaries instead of the actual sales to actual customers.

A 2016 investigation by Headwaters Economics estimated that Montana loses $11.8 million a year in revenue from this loophole.

Northern Plains was a leader in the campaign for closing the loophole back in 2014, and a new rule was established by the Obama administration in 2016 to block this tax-dodging practice. The Trump administration repealed the rule change in 2017, and Attorneys General in western states sued the Office of Natural Resources and Revenue (ONRR) to have it reinstated. We intervened in the case to ensure that this “fair royalty rule” would remain in place. On June 11th the Obama rule became official, and the royalty loophole is now closed!

-Alex Cunha
Mark your calendars – the Wild and Scenic Film Festival returns in September to bring a wide-ranging program of thoughtful, inspiring, and beautiful short films to Billings, Miles City, and Gardiner.

Northern Plains member-volunteers have screened dozens of films from around the world to hand-select a program specifically for audiences in central and eastern Montana. The films illustrate some of the challenges facing our planet as well as 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 a close bond with Yellowstone grizzlies, to cowboys and scientists partnering for conservation, to the magic of the moon!

Wild and Scenic film festivals are a night for us to be inspired by stories from around the world and also to realize how we can care for the landscapes that we call home. Each location provides the opportunity for attendees to learn more about Northern Plains’ work and to take action on local campaigns. An event for the whole family - come hear these stories and more! Catch one of the following Wild & Scenic film showings:

**Billings – Babcock Theatre**
Saturday, Sept. 21st  
Doors open 5 PM, Films at 6 PM  
Join us to celebrate the festival’s 11th year in Billings! Wild & Scenic films will be featured as part of Montana International Film Festival programming, including a pre-show reception with live music and drinks followed by a selection of films related to conservation, wildlife, and more.

**Miles City – Montana Theatre**  
Thursday, Sept. 26th  
Doors open 6 PM, Films at 7 PM  
Wine from the Tongue River Winery for sale

**Gardiner – Gardiner High School**  
Thursday, Sept. 26th  
Doors open 5 PM, Films at 6 PM  
Tickets for all three locations available online now at northernplains.org!  
Tickets will also be available for purchase 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. 16)  
**Gardiner:** Tumbleweed Bookstore and Café, Yellowstone Wild - The Gallery (starting Aug. 20)  

-Claire Overholt
Here’s a roundup of Northern Plains, Affiliate, and Partnership events. Join fellow members at these events around Montana!

## AUGUST
- **All month:** Montana Local Food Challenge
- **Aug 8** – Local Food Chefs’ Expo at the Montana Club in Helena, 5:30-8:30pm
- **Aug 18** – Cottonwood Resource Council Summer Picnic in Big Timber, 5-7:30pm
- **Aug 19** – Bear Creek Council Local Food Challenge celebration at Arch Park in Gardiner, 5-7pm
- **Aug 27** – Billings Green Drinks at Northern Plains office, 5-7pm
- **Aug 29** – Stillwater Protective Association summer event, Beartooth Ranch on Nye Rd, Nye 5:30-8 pm (RSVP required - contact maggie@northernplains.org)

## SEPTEMBER
- **Sept 7** – Say “hi” to Central Montana Resource Council tabling at the Chokecherry Festival in Lewistown
- **Sept 17** – Cottonwood Resource Council’s Homegrown Energy Film Festival in Big Timber
- **Sept 21** – Billings Wild & Scenic Film Festival at the Babcock – in partnership with the Montana International Film Festival; doors at 5, films at 6
- **Sept 24** – Billings Green Drinks, 5-7pm
- **Sept 26** – Miles City Wild & Scenic Film Festival at the Montana Theatre; doors at 6, films at 7
- **Sept 26** – Gardiner Wild & Scenic Film Festival at Gardiner High School; doors at 5, films at 6
- **Sept 28** – Soil Crawl at Health Meadows Ranch outside Red Lodge

## OCTOBER
- **Oct 5** – Yellowstone Valley Food Hub Farm to Table dinner at Wild Flower Kitchen in Absarokee
- **Oct 29** – Billings Green Drinks, 5-7pm

**NOTE:** Northern Plains’ 48th Annual Meeting in Billings is November 8-9! See back cover for more details.
The Yellowstone Valley Food Hub, with support from Northern Plains and its wonderful members, is now selling local products to families, restaurants, and grocery stores!

Montanans are surrounded by agriculture, but most of the food grown here is shipped out of state for processing. It’s then trucked back hundreds of miles and placed on grocery store shelves.

Purchases through the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub circulate more dollars in our local economy — bolstering jobs in agriculture, meat processing, stores and restaurants, and our small delivery company.

This new system drastically reduces the carbon footprint of our food, increases the transparency of how the animals and soil are treated, and makes it possible for the next generation of family farmers and ranchers to dream about staying in agriculture.

Shop our online store – www.yvfoodhub.com – where you can buy exactly what you want with three convenient pick-up locations:

- Shrine Auditorium in Billings
- Red Lodge Ales Brewery in Red Lodge
- Wild Flower Kitchen in Absarokee

Saturday, October 5th, the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub, in partnership with the Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council, will host its third annual fundraising dinner. This year, guests will be treated to high-end local food selections and wine at Wild Flower Kitchen in Absarokee, curated by its chef, Nick Goldman. Stay tuned through our website for more information – yvfoodhub.com - and to obtain tickets. It will be a great time!

-Brittany Sechler

“Food is not just fuel. Food is about family, food is about community, food is about identity. And we nourish all those things when we eat well.”

— Michael Pollan
The 4th Annual Montana Local Food Challenge is underway! During the month of August, we challenge you to eat local food every day, plus take our weekly challenges to try delicious new recipes, connect to your community, eat local specialties, and take action for local food. By participating, you’re already entered in the drawing for a $250 gift card to your favorite local food market, restaurant, or producer!

Sign up today at mtlocalfoodchallenge.org

New weekly challenges this year! Each time you complete a weekly challenge you will be entered into an additional drawing for a $50 gift card to your favorite local food market, restaurant, or producer.

New for 2019: kids’ challenges! We’re encouraging everyone to participate in the Challenge, including those 18 and under. We’ve created special challenges for the kids, and are offering great prizes, like a reusable water bottle, a printed reusable bag, seeds for your garden, and more! Sign up with your kids and teach them the importance of eating local food.

Week 1: Buy food directly from a farmer
Week 1 Kids Challenge: Trace the origin of a vegetable, fruit, or animal from the grocery store

Week 2: Learn about edible flowers and work them into a salad
Week 2 Kids Challenge: Count the worms in your soil

Week 3: Ask a business to carry local food, or thank a business for carrying local food
Week 3 Kids Challenge: Cook the August Harvest of the Month item: summer squash

Week 4: Go zero food packaging for one week
Week 4 Kids Challenge: Can, freeze, pickle, or dry a summer food to eat this winter

The Local Food Challenge is a delicious way to support your community; sign up today if you haven’t already!

Take the challenge!
MTLocalFoodChallenge.org
Thank you to our partners for supporting the 2019 Local Food Challenge:
When making the highest quality living soil products there are two things to keep in mind. #1, aerobic organisms are just like you and me, they need water, air, food, and shelter; and #2, diversity rules the roost.”  
- Molly Haviland

The July 19 Soil Crawl at the Sandy Arrow Ranch near Square Butte hosted a “class” of 25 attendees for a day-long workshop. Soil scientist Molly Haviland of Haviland Earth Regeneration and ranch manager Joe Barta led those attendees around the farming and ranching operation where composting is a top priority.

Over the past four years, the ranch has experimented with windrow thermal composts (they need to be turned, and to maintain a hot temperature), vermicasting (with worms), and the Johnson-Su Bioreactors (requires no turning… Google it!).

Once they’ve made each kind of compost, in order to make it useful at-scale for a large ranch, Haviland and Barta have experimented with making compost extracts and teas, as well as retrofitting equipment to spray the seeds with compost as they go into the ground (like on a no-till drill!)

Haviland says, “Composting in Montana is doable, but it’s very different in the high plains than in the Midwest. We’ve really taken time to learn that here.”

While the innovation at the Sandy Arrow is exciting in itself, their willingness to share their hard lessons and successes is even more inspiring.

A few lessons:
1. Don’t use city (chlorinated) water for your compost – it will kill lots of good bugs and stunt progress.
2. You need at least 25 times more carbon material than nitrogen - carbon is the dead stuff (hay, cardboard, leaves, etc.)
3. Compost should be 50% water, which you can tell if you squeeze a handful and you get a small drop of water.

-Maggie Gordon

Attendees of the Sandy Arrow Ranch Soil Crawl get down and dirty while learning about innovative compost techniques.

Climate change & agriculture - do you have a story to tell?

Are you a farmer or rancher concerned about climate change? Has climate disruption affected your work or altered your thinking about your operation? If so, we would love to hear your story. Learning about the direct experience of our members helps inform our work and makes us better organizers. Contact Dustin at (406) 248-1154 or email dustin@northernplains.org.
Northern Plains signs on in support of federal agriculture anti-merger bill

The monopolization of agriculture has resulted in the disappearance of fair prices for producers, bankruptcies among family farmers, and instability for rural agriculture communities.

In May, Senator Cory Booker (D- NJ) and Senator Jon Tester (D- MT) introduced the Food and Agribusiness Merger Moratorium and Antitrust Review Act, a bill that would place an 18-month moratorium on agribusiness mergers and acquisitions until Congress passes legislation to address the lack of competition in agriculture markets. More than 200 organizations, including Northern Plains, have signed on in support of this bill.

The rapid concentration of agriculture markets into fewer and fewer hands is especially evident in the meat industry, with four companies controlling 85% of the beef packing market. Our campaign to restore Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) for beef and pork is a fight to bring back competition in the beef and pork markets.

To get involved with our COOL campaign or to learn more about “Big Ag” monopolies, contact Caroline at caroline@northernplains.org or (406) 248-1154.

-Alex Cunha

Farm to School programs benefit the health of our families, local economies, and the climate.
Good Neighbor Agreement presents to national conference

In June, our Good Neighbor Agreement Task Force was invited to make a presentation on the Agreement as a case study in responsible mining at a conference in Washington, D.C. The conference – “Critical Minerals and the Role of U.S. Mining in a Low-Carbon Future” – was hosted by the Blue-Green Alliance, a nationwide organization uniting labor and environmental groups.

The conference focused on the role mining will play as we move toward a future that emphasizes renewable energy (e.g., solar and wind will spur greater demand for copper and cobalt). Participants included economists, labor unions, mining companies, government agencies, and the conservation community.

Task Force member Betsy Baxter of Big Timber spoke on behalf of the Good Neighbor Agreement with Randy Weimer, the U.S. Environmental Manager for Sibanye-Stillwater Mining Company. Together they highlighted why the Good Neighbor Agreement works and discussed critical elements written into the contract itself that contribute to its success.

Conference attendees showed considerable interest in the circumstances under which it was negotiated and surprise that a mining company and community organizations have been able to build trust and work together for almost twenty years.

The Good Neighbor Agreement remains unique in its capacity to foster cooperation between mining and conservation interests to protect land, water, and communities from the consequences of extractive industry.

-Mikindra Morin

Call for Annual Meeting sponsors

Help put on Northern Plains’ biggest celebration of the year: our Annual Meeting! This is the time of year when the entire membership is invited to come together for a weekend of education, inspiration, and fellowship. We host hundreds of people from across Montana and sponsoring as a businesses or individual helps make much of it possible: serving locally-sourced meals, providing childcare, sponsoring attendance for fellow members, two days of first-rate speakers, and homegrown entertainment.

Become a sponsor today to receive ad space in our event program, social media and online publicity, tabling space, and even verbal shout-outs at the event. If you’re interested, contact Claire at (406) 248-1154 or claire@northernplains.org.
Committed to the long game on Keystone XL

One reason that Northern Plains has been successful for almost a half century is because we play the long game. It took almost forty years to stop the Tongue River Railroad, but grassroots perseverance outlasted the railroad and coal companies eager to carve up eastern Montana for an ill-conceived, shape-shifting project.

Northern Plains was founded in part to protect Rosebud County ranchers against pollution from the newly built Colstrip power plant in the early 1970s, and now we have outlasted Units 1&2, which are set to retire at the end of this year. Our fight to protect our water and climate from the Keystone XL pipeline is shaping up to be another battle that requires steadfast persistence, and we know from our history that we have the tenacity to win this one, too.

We also know that our legal arguments against KXL are sound, as evidenced by our successful federal court challenge against the pipeline's permit last November. Unfortunately, the White House used dubious legal tactics to render that lawsuit moot this past March (see “The convoluted Keystone XL situation” from the Spring 2019 issue of the Plains Truth for details). It was a desperate tactic employed by the president to ingratiate himself with TC Energy (formerly TransCanada Corporation) and the fossil fuel industry as a whole.

However, his shenanigans did nothing to address the legal concerns we raised in our successful district court lawsuit. Those concerns still exist, and we have filed a new lawsuit in the very same court, which will be heard by the very same judge, and which will bring up many of the very same legal arguments that won our case last year. This time, though, President Trump cannot abuse his executive authority to disrupt the process, because our new lawsuit challenges a broad permit he cannot supersede.

On July 1, Northern Plains joined a coalition of other organizations as the lead plaintiff in a lawsuit challenging the Army Corps of Engineers’ illegal approval of the Keystone XL pipeline. The Army Corps used its streamlined “Nationwide Permit 12” process to give blanket approval to hundreds of river and stream crossings along the KXL route, including the Yellowstone and Milk rivers here in Montana.

This insufficient Permit 12 process does not require the comprehensive review a project like the Keystone XL demands, and the Army Corps did not evaluate the impacts of potential tar sands spills or climate impacts. Just as our prior lawsuit argued in successfully in federal court last year, this is a violation of the National Environmental Policy Act and the Clean Water Act.

“The United States is still a country of laws, and this foreign corporation’s proposed tar sands pipeline has yet to prove it meets legal standards in the American court system,” said Dena Hoff, Glendive farmer and Northern Plains member. “We will continue this fight for the safety of Montanans and the livelihoods of farmers and ranchers who depend on clean water.”

And, just like the other battles we fought for years and decades before winning, we will ultimately prevail in this fight, too.

-Dustin Ogdin

Member Dena Hoff, declarant in our new KXL lawsuit, stands in front of the federal courthouse in Great Falls in 2018, where the current suit will also be heard.
If you’ve been on your computer or TV this summer, you may have seen the lovely-looking commercials and videos that Northwestern Energy created for audiences statewide. The message of these ads is this: we love our employees and we love our clean, renewable, energy.

However, NorthWestern’s message on clean, renewable rooftop solar in its rate case before the Public Service Commission is not so lovely – they sing a different tune. As many of you know, the future of rooftop solar in Montana is on the chopping block, and it’s NorthWestern that put it there.

For years, NorthWestern Energy has orchestrated various attempts to enact state policy that will discourage their customers from generating their own power with rooftop solar. Northern Plains members have fought those attempts in the belief that Montanans should have the right to choose a clean energy future. But NWE’s latest attempt to crush the rooftop solar industry (by adding a significant new fee to electricity bills) penalizes those who want to go solar by making it cost-prohibitive to do so.

Northwestern Energy’s closing brief for the rate case says that rooftop solar owners are just a special subgroup representing special interests, not the good of the whole system (even though distributed energy has proven increasingly reliable in natural disasters and blackouts all over the world). NWE continues to claim that rooftop solar users are creating a “hidden tax” for everyone else, and all NorthWestern wants to do is ensure that everyone pays their “fair share.” If you’re wondering where they find proof for these allegations, it’s all in a “straw man” net metering study that redacts the information folks like us could use to check their work.

While Northwestern Energy believes in the power of a good TV ad, we believe in the power of everyday people to have a say in the decisions that impact our lives, including the decision to use clean energy if we wish to.

NorthWestern’s proposed fee on rooftop solar is still pending in a rate case before the Public Service Commission. You can have a voice in this process. Here’s how:

- Contact your Public Service Commissioner before they make their decision this October. You can find their names and contact information on Northern Plains’ website here: [https://northernplains.org/nwe-rate-case/](https://northernplains.org/nwe-rate-case/)
- Submit a comment to the rate case docket.
- Write a letter to the editor. Want some help on this? Contact Makenna or Sydney at 406-248-1154.

The PSC commissioners need to hear from you. If they approve NorthWestern’s proposed new fee on rooftop solar, it could stifle this new industry far into the future at just the time we need more people to make this transition. Why are they doing it? Because they don’t control or profit from the electricity that people generate themselves.

Please act soon and ask your PSC commissioner to deny NorthWestern’s proposed fee on rooftop solar systems.

-Makenna Sellers
Montana has 26 rural electric co-ops providing power to 400,000 Montanans who live in rural areas. While some co-ops have taken steps to move to a cleaner, more affordable energy future, others are still stuck in the past.

This summer, Northern Plains members at several of Montana’s rural electric co-ops are working to make co-op governance more democratic and adopt more clean energy opportunities to benefit co-op members. From voting by mail to developing community solar, members would like to see their co-ops embrace innovative ideas.

Members will be taking the opportunity to voice their concerns at their co-ops’ Annual Meeting this year. Are you a member of a rural electric co-op who would like your co-op to move forward? Get in touch with us and tell us about your experience as a member-owner! Email Sydney at sydney@northernplains.org or call (406) 248-1154.

-Sydney Ausen

**Why I’m a Monthly Sustainer**

Becoming a monthly sustainer for Northern Plains Resource Council makes it a little bit easier on my pocketbook because I can donate a small amount each month. I’m excited to join like-minded friends and neighbors in protecting Montana’s land and water. It feels good to support an organization whose mission and vision I truly believe in.

— Sara Channell
Billings, MT

Would you like to up your membership game with Northern Plains by becoming a monthly sustainer? Visit northernplains.org/donate or contact Claire at (406) 248-1154 or claire@northernplains.org.
Beartooth Alliance celebrates major victory

Beartooth Alliance, along with the National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service, and Montana Department of Environmental Quality, threw the party of the year in Cooke City and Silver Gate this summer. BA members celebrated their longtime campaign that succeeded in getting the government agencies to listen to the locals and work together to clean up Soda Butte Creek from the effects of pollution by old and abandoned mines.

Now, Soda Butte Creek has become the first Montana stream polluted by mining to be removed from the state’s Impaired Waters List. Soda Butte Creek is also one of the few safe homes to native Yellowstone cutthroat trout.

-Maggie Gordon

BCC takes on bison, local food, and films this summer

From history presentations to potlucks, Bear Creek Council is hard at work this summer making waves for the betterment of the Gardiner community. On July 29, former BCC president Carolyn Duckworth gave a public presentation on the history of BCC’s wild bison restoration effort that started in 1997. On July 31, representatives from Bear Creek Council presented their proposed revisions for the north side bison hunt to the Interagency Bison Management Partners (IBMP) in Bozeman. The IBMP is a multi-agency effort that guides the management of bison around Yellowstone National Park. Official members include the US Forest Service, Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, Montana Department of Livestock, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, the Intertribal Buffalo Council, and the National Park Service.

Mark your calendars for BCC’s Local Food Challenge Potluck in the Park (August 19) and Wild & Scenic Film Fest (September 26) – we’re in for a fun-filled summer and fall.

-Makenna Sellers

BCC member Ilona Popper speaks to decision-makers about the bison hunt outside the north entrance of Yellowstone National Park.
Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council’s Solarize Livingston Campaign comes to a close with more than 20 Livingston residents getting rooftop solar arrays this summer! YBCC will take the time to celebrate the success of this campaign in August.

While there are many members that made Solarize Livingston possible, YBCC will use our August celebration as an opportunity to thank and bid farewell to the outgoing Livingston Energy Corps intern - Cameron Tehranchi - who has helped champion clean energy in Livingston.

-YBCC members celebrate the installation of solar on the home of Joan Kresich.

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Cottonwood Resource Council members are working to place a solar array on the Sweet Grass County High School. They have received a grant from NorthWestern Energy and are now working to line up matching funds and confirm a solar installer. CRC is also planning their Annual Summer Picnic for August 18, which will feature a presentation from soil scientist and professor Tony Hartshorn and interns from Montana State University.

-CRC gets into solar and soil.

On August 8, Sleeping Giant members will celebrate the Montana Local Food Challenge in a unique and flavorful way by hosting the first Local Food Chef’s Expo at the Montana Club in Helena. The 5:30 – 8:30pm evening event will feature eight different organizations and chefs using their purchasing power to advance the local food movement in our state. Attendees will have the opportunity to try new foods and make meaningful connections with culinary professionals who also care about sourcing locally.

SGCC’s sustainable street lighting campaign continues as members work with the city commission, city manager, and city attorney to develop a comprehensive city lighting plan that achieves energy efficiency, dark skies, and maintains Helena’s historic character.

-YSGCC advances on local food, better street lights in Helena.

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Council Roundup

CMRC making solar mainstream in central Montana

Central Montana Resource Council continues to make waves for solar in central Montana! Two more Lewistown organizations have applied for Northwestern Energy’s solar grant—the Boys & Girls Club and the Fergus County Fairgrounds. CMRC is proud to support both of their applications.

CMRC has begun facilitating discussions about solar with businesses in central Montana. Businesses stand to gain substantial savings on their utility bills with the installation of a solar array, and many of them—with CMRC’s help—are starting to take notice of that fact. Over the coming months, our members will continue to meet with area businesses and help spur forward movement toward solar.

In May, CMRC celebrated our Annual Meeting with a potluck dinner, a rousing speech by Teresa Erickson, and a banner turnout of 55 people.

-Caitlin Cromwell

CMRC member and rancher Stephanie Shammel enjoys CMRC’s Annual Meeting.

Major milestone for YVCC members

Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council is celebrating a BIG win! In May, the Billings City Council voted 10-1 to re-establish a Commission on Energy and Conservation, which YVCC members pursued for nearly 18 months. The Commission will conduct a baseline inventory of City operations and create a comprehensive energy conservation plan. Several YVCC members have applied to serve on the Commission, which is expected to launch on September 1.

YVCC’s Community Food Committee has been busy developing “Harvest of the Month” pilot programs at two local elementary schools. The Community Food Committee is also partnering with the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub to host a Chef’s Dinner on October 5.

YVCC members are also exploring whether to set up a committee to address issues affecting the Yellowstone River, such as arsenic discharge from the CHS Refinery in Laurel, disposal of coal ash from the Corette Plant site, and implementation of a Coulson Park Master Plan.

-Kari Boiter

YVCC members were instrumental in lobbying the Billings City Council to re-establish a Commission on Energy and Conservation.
Council Roundup

SPA to host another Neighborhood Gathering

Stillwater Protective Association is planning for their third “Neighborhood Gathering” with the Sibanye-Stillwater Mine and the Stillwater Valley Watershed Council. The community event is set for August 29 at the Beartooth Ranch outside of Nye, and will feature speakers from each group, as well as local food from the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub.

SPA has also been busy making the case for local oil and gas zoning efforts at the Stillwater County Planning Board. Although some planning board members seem skeptical, they are considering the creation of a specific zone that would uphold certain protections for local landowners in the face of oil and gas development.

-Maggie Gordon

The “Neighborhood Gathering” will be held at the Beartooth Ranch outside Nye.

CCRC kicks off Local Food Challenge

Carbon County Resource Council hosted a Local Food Challenge Kickoff Party in Red Lodge to encourage attendees to consider their purchasing habits, support local food, and – of course – take the challenge!

CCRC continues to work with local businesses to ramp up composting and recycling efforts in Red Lodge. This summer CCRC sent a survey to Red Lodge businesses to assess what efforts were under way and what gaps can be filled. We were delighted to find so many businesses taking steps to reduce their waste. CCRC will work to raise up the efforts of the businesses and help those who want to do more.

-Sydney Ausen

DRC fundraising off to a big start

Dawson Resource Council is fundraising for our future recycling center in Glendive. To date, DRC and our recycling coalition Glendive Recycles Our Waste (GROW) have $13,000 in the bank and another $10,000 pledged!

Meanwhile, DRC and GROW purchased a cardboard baler and are in the process of securing a site.

In June, DRC held our annual Summer Picnic along the banks of the Yellowstone. Officers elected were Rachel Torres, chair; Melissa Mittelstaed, vice-chair; Millie Robinson, secretary; Irene Moffett, treasurer; and Rachel Torres and Bruce Peterson, board representatives to Northern Plains. Members celebrated a year of success for DRC, and competed in an annual favorite—the pie contest.

-Caitlin Cromwell

Melissa Mittelstaed is DRC's new vice-chair.
Check the date at the upper right of your address label to see when your membership is due for renewal. Your membership pays for all the work you read here!

SAVE THE DATE
NORTHERN PLAINS’ 48TH ANNUAL MEETING
November 8-9, 2019 • DoubleTree Hotel, Billings
More updates and information coming soon!

CALL FOR RESOLUTIONS:
The Annual Meeting of the Membership provides a time each year for Northern Plains members to debate and adopt proposed policy resolutions. Being a member means you have the right to vote on policy resolutions that help guide Northern Plains’ work in the year ahead. Please submit resolutions to the Resolutions Committee via email by October 1st for consideration at this year’s annual meeting. Resolutions and any questions can be directed to cody@northernplains.org.

THE 2019 KEYNOTE SPEAKER IS…
Northern Plains Resource Council is pleased to announce that Teresa Erickson will keynote this year’s Annual Meeting. Teresa is soon retiring after 33 years as Northern Plains’ Staff Director. To an extraordinary level, Teresa understands the value of face-to-face organizing and building strong citizen leaders, and she has brought determination, persistence, a sense of humor, strategic thinking, and grace to her work. As our Staff Director, Teresa has remained largely in the background; this is your chance to hear from one of America’s most experienced community organizers and learn more about Northern Plains from this unique “inside” vantage point. Come and be inspired by Northern Plains’ work over the decades, take to heart the importance of people power, and say “bon voyage” to an incredible leader!