

THE PLAINS TRUTH

VOICE OF THE NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL

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AUTUMN OF ACTION ACROSS MONTANA



Photo Credit: Neil Carlson



Montanans are standing up, speaking out, and working hard together to protect the things we value most.

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2019 ANNUAL MEETING

The 2019 Northern Plains Annual Meeting is in Billings on November 8-9. Enjoy exciting sessions with guest speakers, delicious local food, and come hear keynote speaker Teresa Erickson tell stories from her 33 years of working with Montanans from every corner of the state. See pages 12-15 for more!





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.

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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

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TO THE MEMBERS

Montana's quiet revolution

There's a quiet revolution occurring across the Montana landscape. Who, you ask, are the revolutionaries?



They are Montanans – family farmers and ranchers, wage-earners, elders, youth, city-dwellers, and those from rural communities. Grassroots people are leading Montana into a clean energy future. They believe in a future that is sustainable, solar powered, and accessible to all. They not only believe in this future, but they are taking action to create this future in the present moment.

Over the last 5-plus years, Northern Plains affiliates have been solarizing their local communities, raising funds to put solar arrays on local schools, libraries, senior centers, art centers and their local Boys and Girls Clubs.

Affiliates have sponsored events to educate their communities on solar opportunities and installation. Central Montana Resource Council partnered with Fergus Electric Cooperative on a community solar seminar. It was so successful that Fergus Electric built a community solar project and all 324 panels were sold. Community solar is an example of success in building relationships with rural electric co-ops and expanding people's access to solar power.

Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council launched a Solarize Livingston campaign that came to a successful close with nearly 20 Livingston households getting rooftop solar arrays!

And let's give a shout-out for Northern Plains' 24-kilowatt solar array over the Home on the Range parking lot. With this and the 10-kilowatt array on the building's roof, Home on the Range is 100% solar powered.

Montana is becoming solar powered through grassroots power. Our grassroots-powered affiliates are opening doors to solar power across Montana and, as change to a new energy economy accelerates, so does the resistance to this change by NorthWestern Energy. Montana's largest public utility is proposing to create a separate (and arbitrary) rate class that penalizes customers who install solar on their homes. The company is laying out its plans for the type of energy it will procure for you to use in the future, and it doesn't want you to have the freedom to install solar collectors on your home.

We are Montanans who stand shoulder-to-shoulder and stand up for what we believe in. We will hold NorthWestern accountable to the ratepayers for taking away the option for a renewable energy future. We are holding rallies, writing letters, and talking to the Public Service Commission about the future we not only believe in, but the one we demand. In the country and in town, we continue our grassroots revolution for a clean energy future, solarizing our local communities for our children's, children's, children.

The care of the Earth is our most ancient and most worthy and, after all, our most pleasing responsibility. To cherish what remains of it, and to foster its renewal, is our only hope.

-Wendell-Berry

This will be my last column as chair of Northern Plains. It's been a visceral experience connecting to Northern Plains' roots of family farms and ranches. Our founders heard the voice of the land calling to them for protection and responded to that call. The voice of the land, the whisper of the air, the roar of the water... they continue to call, and I see all you grassroots members responding to their call. Thank you for providing me the privilege of being your chair.

-Becky Mitchell
Chair



PEOPLE OF THE PLAINS

From caring to acting to leading, the journey of a grassroots leader

Northern Plains member Rachel Torres's story starts with dirty dishes.

Back in 2015, Rachel was home in Glendive, washing dishes after dinner. "I could smell something gassy," she said. "Like I was pumping gas in the kitchen."

Rachel soon learned there had been an oil spill in the Yellowstone River, upstream from her family's home and the city's water intake.

"I immediately felt a pit in my stomach," Rachel said. "I knew without a doubt there was oil in our water."

So she got on the phone, and started calling. The police dispatcher told her it was the first they'd heard of it, and it must be something isolated to her house. The town sanitarian and the newspaper both said there was "no way" the oil from the spill could have gotten in Glendive's water. The Department of Emergency Services told Rachel that they couldn't tell her much.

Fast forward a few days. Suddenly, the Environmental Protection Agency was in town and a citywide water advisory was issued. Glendive's drinking water had been contaminated with benzene and other hydrocarbons.

For Rachel, this experience was a wake-up call. "I've always cared about the environment," she said. "My kids deserve to grow up in a safe community and on a healthy planet."

But after the oil spill, she knew that caring wasn't enough. "It taught me that health and safety and good stewardship don't just happen on their own," she said. "And that our government is not guaranteed to make good decisions."

Instead, she said, "I need to be a part of that decision-making process." Rachel decided to get involved, and start demanding the world she wanted to see for her kids.



Rachel Torres speaking at Dawson Resource Council's Summer Picnic in June.

That meant joining Dawson Resource Council, the Northern Plains affiliate in Glendive. "I joined because I could see how much this organization had helped my community fight for protections for eastern Montana for decades," she said. Rachel got active in Northern Plains' campaign to create strong rules for the disposal of radioactive oil waste, even traveling all the way to Helena to testify on the proposed rules.

Since then, Rachel became the chair of DRC. She also represents DRC on the Northern Plains board.

Rachel has played a major role in DRC's effort to bring recycling options back to Glendive—an effort that has blossomed under her leadership.

Since the campaign began in 2017, DRC has tripled in membership, held monthly cardboard drives for the better part of a year, and fundraised nearly \$30,000 to build a small recycling facility.

"I'm so grateful to DRC for encouraging me to become a leader that I never knew I was," said Rachel. "Sometimes you have skills you don't know about—it just takes the right people and circumstances to pull it out of you."

What's ahead for Rachel and her organizing? All she knows is she's hooked. "Northern Plains has done so much to empower us, help us organize successfully, and help us shape our community for the better," she said. "I'm a member for life."

-Caitlin Cromwell 

MEMBERS ON THE MOVE



Ressa Charter of Shepherd speaks with Senator Jon Tester at a community town hall on MSU Billings campus on October 3. Charter asked the Senator how Montanans could work with federal legislators to restore Country-of-Origin Labeling for beef and also asked what could be done to enforce anti-trust laws in the agricultural economy to revive competitive markets for family farms and ranches.

See page 18 for more on the current crisis in agriculture.

Emma Kerr-Carpenter of Billings speaks to Northern Plains members and others at the Ratepayer Rebellion Rally on Oct. 4. The rally was held to demand that NorthWestern Energy expand its energy portfolio to include more renewable energy sources and stop their efforts to penalize residential solar customers with excessive, punitive fees.

See page 9 for more on holding NorthWestern Energy accountable.



Laurel Clawson of Plentywood testifies to the DEQ in Glendive on Sept. 24 making the case for stronger radioactive oil waste disposal rules. Clawson was joined by dozens of other Northern Plains members and concerned community members who packed the hearing room demanding answers and stronger rules to prevent eastern Montana from becoming North Dakota's radioactive oil waste dumping grounds.

See page 10 for more on this heated radioactive oil waste hearing.

DEEPENING OUR ROOTS

Due time for a (modest) dues increase

As a grassroots organization, Northern Plains was founded on the idea of belonging and acting together with others who share similar goals... in a word, **membership**.

Over the past almost-50 years the Northern Plains body of membership has led us to many victories despite being seriously outspent by the opposition. Those who joined together to found Northern Plains believed that members should truly lead the organization in governance, strategy, and financially.

In order to keep ourselves strong enough to achieve success across all our issues, **the Northern Plains board has decided that we must increase general membership dues by \$10 to \$50 per year, effective January 1, 2020** (our first increase in ten years).

More than half of Northern Plains members already choose to pay higher than base-level membership dues each year, and will not be affected by this change. And, for those experiencing financial difficulty in paying membership dues, **always remember that you matter to us!** Northern Plains will not turn away anyone who wishes to become a member. And if it helps to stretch out your dues over the year, you can become a monthly donor for as little as \$5 a month.

Northern Plains continues to grow our power across Montana. We have more members, we're taking on bigger campaigns, and we are making deeper change in our communities. All of this power demands more capacity for developing leaders, trainings, campaign plans, and technical assistance. Raising our dues is one thing we can do to make sure this power persists so that we can make the long-lasting change we want to see in our state!

Many Northern Plains affiliates will also be increasing dues during this process. If you are an affiliate member, please be on the lookout for a small increase in dues for 2020.

One more thing: **If your membership comes up for renewal early in 2020, you can save money by renewing before the end of 2019.** (NOTE: your renewal date is visible on the address label of this Plains Truth.)

-Caleb Lande 

A bequest to Northern Plains is a wonderful way to ensure that your values endure beyond your lifetime.

If you'd like information about how you can leave your mark on Montana, contact Steve:

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

KEYSTONE XL

Hearing & rally on the Keystone XL pipeline #SaveTheMissouriRiver #NoKXL

The US Department of State recently released a new Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the long-beleaguered Keystone XL tar sands pipeline. The only hearing in the nation will take place in Billings on October 29th, 4:30pm-7:30pm.

We've gone through so many rounds of commenting on multiple EISs... You may be wondering, is it important to pay attention and participate in this particular comment period?

Yes, it is! We learned that this comment period is serving as the basis for the approval of two remaining permits by cooperating agencies, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Both affect Montana, but it's the Corps of Engineers permit that has the greatest potential to damage our water.

The Army Corps' "408" permit pertains to the pipeline's crossing of the Missouri River. This huge tar sands pipeline is slated to run a dangerous path, just barely downstream from the Fort Peck dam and the spillway that releases water with enough intensity to erode the river bed from time to time. As Montana's Yellowstone River has learned the hard way – twice – an exposed pipe on the river bottom is a pipe that will eventually crack and leak. Water users along the Missouri River, including the tens of thousands of Montanans on the Fort Peck Reservation and further into northeastern Montana, should be very concerned for their rural water supply system should Keystone XL ever have a spill in the Missouri.

We need Montanans to show up to tell the Army Corps: "You do NOT have our permission to approve this risky project. There is nothing more precious than clean water."

You can comment on the EIS through November 18; check our website for details. Your help means a lot!

Please keep an eye on your email for more details about a press conference and rally we're planning in Billings with Western Organization of Resource Councils on October 29. Contact David Wieland at WORC with questions: (406) 252-9672.



Northern Plains member and Fort Peck resident, Bill Whitehead, speaks to the media in front of the Missouri River, explaining the dangers that the Keystone XL pipeline present to drinking water for his community and others in northeastern Montana.

-Olivia Stockman 

CLIMATE CHANGE

Next generation demands climate action now

Inspired by the youth of Montana and all over the world, Northern Plains members and staff stood in solidarity with the September Climate Strike movement at rallies around the state.

When Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg sat outside the statehouse in Stockholm in 2018, holding a sign that said “School Strike for Climate,” she set in motion a global response that spread even as far as Montana. One year later, thousands of Climate Strike events took place all over the world and in Bozeman, Billings, Helena, and Missoula.

“It’s a complete privilege to participate in events where the youth are leading the way,” said Northern Plains Clean Energy Task Force member Joan Kresich, who attended the Bozeman Climate Strike. “They are inheriting this world and they have a clarity about what needs to happen that has been missing from the movement for swift climate action.”

-Sydney Ausen 



High school students demand climate action on the Capitol’s steps in Helena.

Member voices

How climate change affects me



Joe Stockburger strives for efficiency in his carpentry business to save energy and materials.

I have been in the home building industry for about 17 years, starting with taping sheetrock. For the past 10 years, I’ve been a carpenter and currently own my own small business - Stocky’s Custom Carpentry. Working in these trades has given me a skillset that allows me to make a pretty decent living. While finishing a project leaves me with a sense of satisfaction, being part of building homes in Billings has also shown me just how much waste is created in the process. This waste is not only an unnecessary use of resources, it also contributes to climate change given the excess energy used to create materials that end up in landfills.

Before starting my own carpentry business, I was lucky enough to be trained by someone who took immense pride and care in the building of his homes, including the efficient use of materials. Not all homes in this town are built with that same level of concern and detail.

As I take my homebuilding experiences with me, I don’t plan to dwell on the anxiety that comes with the building of a house, (i.e. the amount of wood and energy used to make it, etc.) Instead, I plan on doing what I can to be as efficient as possible in all aspects of not only my business, but in many aspects of my life as well.

-Joe Stockburger
Northern Plains member 

CLEAN ENERGY

NorthWestern Energy moves backward

Montana's largest investor-owned energy company – NorthWestern Energy (NWE) – has two major decisions pending before the Public Service Commission (PSC) that will drastically affect how our energy supply landscape looks in Montana.

One decision is the NorthWestern Energy “rate case,” which puts residential solar on the chopping block. The other is the 2019 Electricity Supply Resource Procurement Plan. We anticipate hearing final decisions from the PSC on both these topics in November or December (later than expected in the last Plains Truth).

You've heard a lot about the rate case this year – NWE wants to restructure how rooftop solar customers are charged for the electricity they use by adding an arbitrary “demand charge” to residential solar systems.

If NWE's proposal is approved – according to the Montana Renewable Energy Association – rooftop solar customers could see their bills increase by 28% on average, drastically reducing their ability to save money with solar. This move could decimate the solar industry and the jobs that come with it, so it's important that we as citizens contact our Public Service Commissioners (they work for you!) and urge them NOT to approve this demand charge for net metering customers.

Next up we have NWE's Resource Procurement Plan. This plan is intended to be a forecast of how NorthWestern Energy will meet energy demands for the next 20 years. But the plan doesn't stack up when compared to the plans of other utilities, which at least recognize the need for a clean energy transition. Here are some of the problems in the plan that you can reference when talking to your Public Service Commissioner.

- **NorthWestern didn't model for the closure of Colstrip Unit 4 in its plan, although every other Colstrip owner did.** This includes Puget Sound Energy, Avista, Portland General Electric, and PacifiCorp.
- **NorthWestern's plan is focused on building more gas-fired power plants.** However, the cost comparison doesn't include the costs of additional pipelines or buildout. It's a step backward when the climate crisis is bearing down on us.
- **NorthWestern's plan didn't analyze the cost-effectiveness of existing power plants.** A number of other utilities, including MDU, analyze their existing resources to ensure that the cost of operating is not an undue burden to customers.
- **NorthWestern treated wind, solar, and storage as separate resource possibilities and declared them each insufficient to meet Montana's energy needs.** NorthWestern should be evaluating renewables together, in combination with storage, efficiency and demand response.

The PSC will open a comment period on this backward-looking resource plan any day now. When they do, we will be in touch! If you have a question about NorthWestern Energy's resource plan, or would like to write a comment, contact Makenna at 406-248-1154 or makenna@northernplains.org.



Northwestern Energy falls short of other utilities when planning for a clean energy transition.

-Makenna Sellers 

DEQ hears from eastern MT residents *Northern Plains members demand accountability for weak radioactive oil waste disposal rules*

One September night in Glendive, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) had a rough evening. Agency staffers had journeyed out to Glendive for the first of two public hearings on DEQ's draft radioactive oil waste rules.



DEQ officials face tough questions from eastern Montanans during a Glendive hearing on the latest draft of radioactive waste disposal rules.

These rules, when finalized, will govern the management and disposal of radioactive oil waste in Montana. Only one landfill in Montana currently takes this type of waste—Oaks Disposal near Glendive—though three others have been permitted to accept it (two remain unbuilt, while the fourth, Missoula's Republic Services, has not yet taken any radioactive oil waste).

Earlier this fall, Northern Plains and landowners around Oaks Disposal learned about contamination in the groundwater around Oaks Disposal. The landfill's most recent monitoring report, written by a third-party and submitted for reporting to the DEQ back in February, said:

- “Significant increases in chloride concentrations were observed” in water samples collected at two monitoring wells, and again in verification resamples.
- “The sum of radium-226 and radium-228 was well above the groundwater standard” at another monitoring well.

Needless to say, Northern Plains members were concerned—and had questions.

At the Glendive hearing on September 24, 70 people filled the room, ready to hear answers. Not only did we wonder about the contamination, we also wanted to ask why DEQ was proposing to quadruple Montana's radioactivity limit. A move like that would position eastern Montana as North Dakota's dumping ground forevermore.

Glendive member Seth Newton spoke up that night. He asked DEQ directly, “When did you learn about the ground water contamination at Oaks, what have you done about it, and when were you planning to tell landowners in the community?”

DEQ staff stared back, blankly. “Ground water contamination?”

Seth named and dated the report. “It's even stamped ‘DEQ’ on the top of it,” he added.

The staff looked nervously at one another and stuttered several half-sentences. Finally, DEQ staffer Rick Thompson said, “I'm not tracking on that.”

You could've heard a pin drop. At that moment, the collective anger in the room shot through the roof. — *Continued*

OIL & GAS

Continued from previous page



Northern Plains member Seth Newton testifies before the DEQ.

For the rest of the night, DEQ heard no end of it. In testimony after testimony, incensed eastern Montanans excoriated the agency and its proposed rules. Testimony included pointed criticism of DEQ's indifferent or incompetent oversight, its eagerness to raise Montana's radioactivity limit and position us as North Dakota's dumping ground, its inability to answer questions substantively, its failure to make eastern Montanans feel heard—everything was on the table.

Some highlights from testimonies:

"I'm so sick of hearing about coffee grounds and banana peels. Last I checked, banana peels aren't full of human carcinogens like benzene."

– *Dena Hoff, Northern Plains member from Glendive, on the misleading talking points used by industry regarding low levels of radioactivity found in everyday items.*

"I've been asked why should I care? I feel we are caretakers of this land, and should make it better or at least not worse for the next generation. When it comes down to a choice of clean water or money, I will choose clean water every time."

– *Annie Feist, Northern Plains member, Glendive*

"Is there any science to your proposed radioactivity limit of 200 picocuries per gram? Wouldn't it be wiser and more prudent to set guidelines that are more restrictive than not?"

– *Bruce Peterson, Northern Plains member, Glendive*

-Caitlin Cromwell



Take action against EPA's methane pollution proposal

In late August, the Trump Administration proposed yet another round of rollbacks to federal protections that limited the leaking and venting of methane from oil and gas wells, storage facilities, and pipelines.

This time, it's rules from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that are being weakened. Buried deep in the proposal is language that undermines EPA's own authority to limit air pollution from the oil and gas industry. In other words, EPA is arguing against its own authority to perform its mission – "to protect human health and the environment."

"Our communities deserve better," said Northern Plains member Sue Beug. "The climate crisis demands it. The health of our kids depends on it. We won't let this go without a fight."

EPA has acknowledged that its proposal would mean an additional 370,000 short tons of methane are released into the air annually in the United States. You can help fight the EPA's pro-methane proposal three ways.



Northern Plains member Sue Beug speaks to a crowd outside of the Environmental Protection Agency in Washington, DC in 2017.

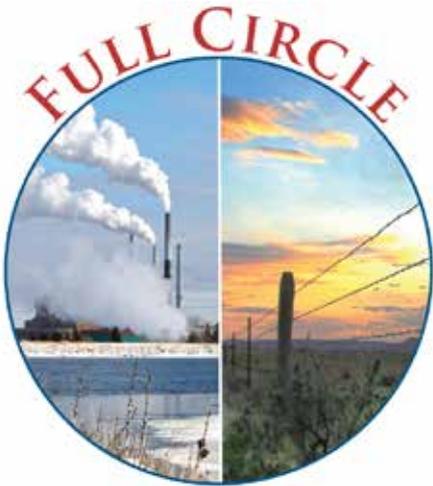
1. Go to www.northernplains.org, scroll down, and click on the methane "action box" to submit your comment.
2. Email your comment to a-and-r-docket@epa.gov.
3. Mail your comment to the EPA at EPA Docket Center, Docket ID No. EPA-HQ-OAR-2017-0757, Mail Code 28221T, 1200 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC, 20460.

-Caitlin Cromwell



2019 ANNUAL MEETING

What you need to know



It's that time of year again – the Annual Meeting is here! We encourage you to join us November 8-9 for the one time a year that our members come together for a weekend of fun, fellowship, and learning.

Our bylaws define the Annual Meeting as a time to conduct Northern Plains' business. It's your best opportunity to help steer Northern Plains through the coming year, and to adopt resolutions on important public policy questions. It's also a time to get to know one another better, learn together from our speakers and programs, and toast a year where our people made a difference for Montana.

This year is especially significant as we reflect on many things coming **Full Circle** – Teresa's time as staff director, our work in Colstrip as the plants prepare to close, and our birth through grassroots democracy and neighbor-to-neighbor relations that now feels more important and more needed than ever.

If you're not able to make it for all the fun, you can register and attend for individual sessions. Let's band together, learn from one another, and enjoy the camaraderie of fellow Northern Plains members working to make our state stronger and more resilient!

Meeting of the Membership

On Friday afternoon, Northern Plains' members are invited to come together in the annual "Meeting of the Membership." Being a member means you have the right to vote on policy resolutions that help guide Northern Plains' work in the year ahead. Because policy resolutions undergo many changes during the course of debate, you must be present in order to vote.

Brochure and Election Ballot

The slate of candidates put forward by the Nominations Committee will appear on a ballot mailed to each member. **If your Northern Plains dues are current, you should have already received your ballot enclosed in the Annual Meeting brochure.** There is also space for write-ins. The seats you can vote on include officers and at-large delegates.

Silent Auction Items

Can you contribute to this year's Annual Meeting auction? Here are some ideas: Homemade foodstuffs...Yum! Products or services from your business! Items you've made with your own hands! Vacation stays and memory-making experiences!

If you can donate an item, PLEASE LET US KNOW AHEAD OF TIME. Even if you can't get the item here until the Annual Meeting, please give us advance notice so we can get the bid sheets prepared ahead of time (by November 1 would be real nice!). Thank you!

Remember that the purpose of our auction is to strengthen Northern Plains' work in the year ahead. We all appreciate whatever help you can give to make it a success! If you have something to donate, please contact Karen at (406) 248-1154, or email karen@northernplains.org.

2019 ANNUAL MEETING

Bringing Children?

We will have childcare available onsite in the DoubleTree Hotel during sessions (free, with donations appreciated). Interested? Contact Claire at (406) 248-1154 or email claire@northernplains.org.

Dessert Auction

We are delighted to reprise a live dessert auction at this year's Annual Meeting, with treats from businesses across the state and homemade goodies from fellow Northern Plains members. If you have a tasty creation you would like to contribute, please contact Claire at (406) 248-1154 or claire@northernplains.org.



Cowboy Supper

Join local affiliate, Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council, at 5:30 p.m. on Friday evening at Billings First Congregational United Church of Christ for their annual Cowboy Supper! (3rd Avenue North & N. 27th Street.)

ANNUAL MEETING DEADLINES

- **Nov. 1** – Last day to make your reduced-rate room reservation, starting \$119 (run-of-house) at the DoubleTree (406) 252-7400. There are a limited number of these lower-priced rooms available, so reserve early!
- **Nov. 1** – Deadline for early-bird registration. **SAVE MONEY! REGISTER EARLY!** Call Northern Plains at (406) 248-1154 or email karen@northernplains.org, or register online at www.northernplains.org/register
- **Nov. 7** – Election ballots must be returned to Northern Plains' office. **BALLOTS WILL NOT BE AVAILABLE AT THE ANNUAL MEETING.**

A NOTE ABOUT RESOLUTIONS:

The deadline to submit resolutions to the Resolutions Committee has passed. If you wish to introduce a resolution at the Annual Meeting, the members present need to vote to add it to the meeting agenda. You also need to bring enough copies of your draft resolution so that everyone can have one to reference during debate.

2019 ANNUAL MEETING

Keynote Speaker Teresa Erickson

“**H**ope is not a strategy.” - *Teresa Erickson*

Get ready to be inspired, entertained, and moved when Teresa Erickson delivers the keynote speech at this year's Annual Meeting. If you are one of the lucky ones who has joined Teresa in a meeting, on the road, or worked with her over the years, her strength, creativity, and directness will not surprise you.

As our Staff Director, Teresa has served as a role model for others. Her determination, persistence, sense of humor, strategic thinking, and grace -- not to mention high levels of energy and enthusiasm -- are ever-present, no matter the occasion. It's not uncommon for Teresa to surprise us with a joke one moment and deliver a cutting insight the next.

The daughter of a hard rock miner and a domestic worker, Teresa Erickson grew up in Montrose, Colorado. She earned a degree in Geography from the University of Northern Colorado and helped to found the Western Colorado Congress, a citizens organization, in 1980. Teresa served as its original staff director until she moved to Montana in 1986 to lead Northern Plains' staff.

Since then, she has overseen: the defeat of the Tongue River Railroad (a 38-year campaign), a successful legal challenge to halt the Keystone XL Pipeline, the negotiation of the landmark Good Neighbor Agreement between a major mine and local residents, the growth of our membership, partnering with organized labor to build a just transition as Colstrip's plants shut down, and meaningful advancements in clean energy, soil health, groundwater protection, family agriculture, grassroots democracy, and more. Controversy comes with the job because Northern Plains often challenges the plans of the very powerful. Through it all, though, Teresa has built bridges that allow different kinds of people to work together.

After 33 years as Northern Plains' Staff Director, Teresa has rarely stood at the microphone. Please join us for this time of reflection and transition (and lots of laughs and insightful stories) as we look back together and learn.

-Claire Overholt 



Teresa's Retirement Party!

Friday, Nov. 8 • 7-10 p.m. (offsite from Annual Meeting)

Please be sure to join us for a celebration Friday night of the Annual Meeting as we throw Teresa a retirement party! This will replace Friday night's typical Theatre of the West entertainment this year and will be held offsite from **7-10 pm**. Free admission with donations appreciated. We'll have plenty of fun in store with drinks, friendly faces, and a dance party. Join us as we celebrate Teresa's tenure and send her off with the best retirement party on the plains!

2019 ANNUAL MEETING

Schedule

BACK THIS YEAR! We will feature a number of exciting “flash talks,” short presentations on specific topics, in addition to our in-depth, full-length session exploring issues important to Montana (and beyond).

Friday, November 8, 2019

- 9:30-11:30** **Workshop: How to Run Effective Meetings**
12:00 **Registration Opens**
1:00 **Meeting of the Membership**
4:30-5:00 **Special Session: Full Circle History with Teresa Erickson**
5:30 **Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council Cowboy Supper**
7-10:00 **Special Reception to celebrate Teresa’s retirement**

Saturday, November 9, 2019

- 8:30** **Registration Opens**
8:45 **Opening Remarks**
9-9:45 **Session 1: Defending Family Farms and Ranches with Mike Callicrate**
9:45-10:30 **Session 2: When Natural Gas Comes to Town**
10:30-10:45 **Break**
10:50-11:00 **Flash Talk 1: Leave Your Mark**
11:00-12:00 **Keynote Speech: Teresa Erickson**
12:00-1:15 **Luncheon (and awards)**
1:15-2:15 **Session 3: Owning our Power and Utility Accountability**
2:15-2:30 **Flash Talk 2: Healthier and Wealthier Communities through Farm-to-School**
2:30-3:00 **Session 4: Soils 101 and The Land You Manage**
3:00-3:15 **Break**
3:20-4:20 **Session 5: Bankruptcy as Bailout: How Coal Companies Cheat the System**
4:20-4:30 **Flash Talk 3: Colstrip Coal Ash Cleanup**
4:30-5:00 **Session 6: Basics of the Good Neighbor Agreement**
5-5:10 **Children’s Feature**
5:10 **Social Hour**
5:30 **Live Dessert Auction**
6:00 **Northern Plains Rendezvous & Banquet**
7:00 **Silent Auction Section 1 closes**
7:30 **Silent Auction Section 2 closes**
7:45 **Annual Meeting closing & adjournment**
8:00 or so **Celebration time!**

Schedule subject to change.

COAL

Colstrip ash pond comment periods now open

Cleanup is a first step to a new future

We are in the middle of two big comment periods in our campaign to restore groundwater and create hundreds of jobs at Colstrip's coal ash ponds. The plant's owner/operator, Talen Energy, lobbied DEQ (Department of Environmental Quality) extensively through the summer for weaker cleanup standards.

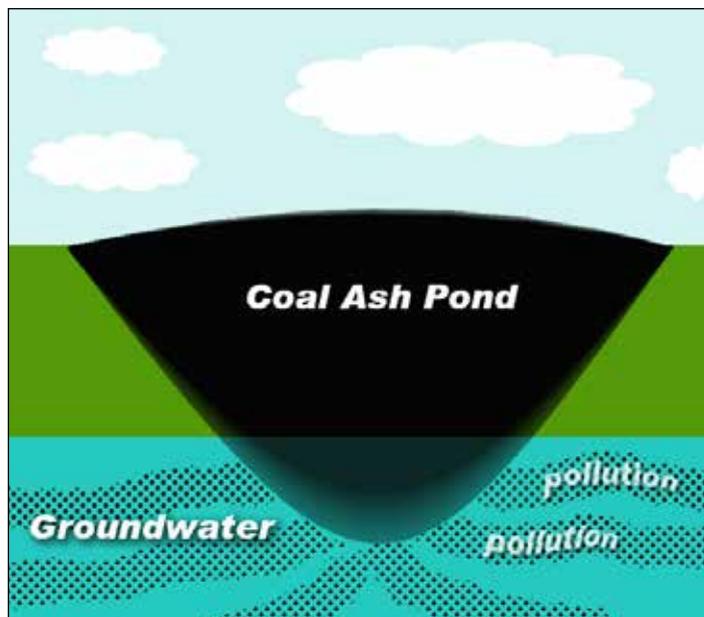
In response to Talen's lobbying, we're looking to these comment periods as a chance for Montanans to push DEQ to require a good cleanup of the leaking coal ash ponds. After the comment periods, DEQ will issue two of its three major decisions on cleanup, with the third coming sometime in the spring of 2020.

The public comment period for the Units 3&4 ponds, which total 462 acres, is open through Nov 22 (extended from the original date of Nov. 1). We are urging the DEQ to require full dewatering of those ponds and enough bonding to cover the costs of long-term pumping.

Talen will submit its draft plan for the Units 1&2 ponds – which total 330 acres (or three times the size of Vatican City) – in two phases. The first phase came out on Oct 1 with a comment period running Nov 1 – Nov 29. The second phase comes out in April 2020. These ponds sit below the water table, and we are pressuring DEQ to require that the plant owners excavate coal ash there and store it in a lined landfill on Talen property.

We are holding house parties this October in Missoula, Billings, and Miles City as part of a statewide push during the comment period to support our “high and dry” solution that keeps pollution away from groundwater.

-Alex Cunha 



Some of Colstrip's coal ash ponds are in contact with groundwater, leaking pollution into the aquifer. This coal ash must be excavated and stored “high and dry” to permanently repair and protect local groundwater.

Perspectives on Colstrip cleanup

“These workers have done nothing wrong; they’ve worked long hours in hard conditions and now are caught up in a changing market.” - *Del Dinstel, Northern Plains member and former Colstrip miner*

“You can’t cap a rotten tooth, it needs a root canal.” - *J.R. Bradley, Northern Plains member from Colstrip, talking about the need for excavating and relining the coal ash ponds.*

“It’s time to stop passing the buck; remedying the groundwater problem is going to be expensive and it’s time to stop the source of the problem.” - *Ian Magruder, hydrologist hired by Northern Plains to review cleanup plans submitted by Talen Energy*

By the numbers - Colstrip coal ash ponds

Average level of Sulfates in ponds:

37,400 mg/L - 12 times above fatal limits for livestock

Average level of Boron in ponds:

296 mg/L - 175 times above drinking water standards

Total size of coal ash ponds:

837 acres - 7 times the size of Disneyland

Total amount of coal ash:

17,181 acre-feet - 18 times the volume of the Houston Astrodome



Where to submit your Colstrip ash pond cleanup comments:

Montana DEQ
Attn: Sara Edinberg
P.O. Box 200901
Helena, MT 59620-0901
deqcolstrip@mt.gov

DEQ ignores climate impacts of coal mining as Spring Creek mine faces ownership change

September 26th marked the end of the comment period for a proposed 977-acre expansion of the Spring Creek coal mine, located in Big Horn County along the Wyoming border.

The expansion would lead to the mining of approximately 72 million additional tons of coal, yet the Montana DEQ's analysis of the expansion contained absolutely no consideration of the climate impacts of the expansion.

Northern Plains Coal Task Force chair and Miles City rancher Mark Fix testified at a DEQ hearing on the expansion, citing a Montana Farmers Union report that found climate change could cost Montana agriculture roughly 25,000 jobs and \$726 million over the coming decades. He also called for careful scrutiny of the project's reclamation bonds in light of the mine's uncertain future.

Spring Creek's owner, Cloud Peak Energy, declared bankruptcy in May. In August, the mine was sold at auction to Navajo Transitional Energy Company (NTEC), a corporation owned by the Navajo Nation.

The sale has yet to be finalized, but NTEC executives appear to have proposed the deal without consulting with Navajo Nation leadership. The deal contradicts Navajo energy policy, which calls for post-coal modernization and comes in the wake of a tribal decision to close the coal-fired Navajo Generating Station this year.

-Svein Newman 

AGRICULTURE

As cattle and crop prices plummet, farmers and ranchers come together to demand a fair market

A new farm crisis is emerging in the United States. For the past several months, cattle markets have taken a turn for the worse, following a long line of commodity price drops and farm loss, especially in dairy. Soybean, corn, and grain farmers face similar market stresses, with impending impact to our rural communities.

Currently, prices paid to producers are significantly lower than the previous 5-year averages and are always subject to price manipulation inherent in a monopolized market. When President Theodore Roosevelt broke up the “beef trust” in 1905, using the Sherman Anti-Trust Act, six beef packers controlled 50 percent of the market. Today, just four international corporations control more than 80 percent of U.S. beef!

“Cattle prices are far below the cost of production; we’re losing over \$100 per head we sell, but the meatpackers are reaping record profits. What’s wrong with this picture?” said Ressa Charter, Northern Plains member whose family ranches near Shepherd. “This corporate meatpacker monopoly is illegal, a clear violation of anti-trust law, but nobody is doing anything about it.”

Ranchers aren’t staying silent, though. We once again find ourselves calling on our elected and appointed officials to stand up for family farmers and ranchers. In recent weeks, several campaigns have launched across the U.S. to raise awareness of the markets and demand that Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue, along with President Trump, stand up to the meatpackers and enact policies to restore fair prices. There has yet to be a response from the administration.

Northern Plains continues to develop our campaign to restore mandatory Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL), and are participating in conversations on other important livestock issues such as mandatory electronic animal ID, the “Product of USA” loophole, and more.

We’ve organized a petition to stand in solidarity with farmers and ranchers to demand a fair market. Please sign in support.

If you would like more information on livestock issues, or to get more involved in our work on livestock markets, reach out to Caroline at caroline@northernplains.org or call 248-1154.

-Caroline Canarios 



Family farmers and ranchers are dealing with a growing crisis in the current agricultural economy.

Stand up for family agriculture

Sign our online petition to stand in solidarity with Montana’s family farmers and ranchers.

Visit: www.northernplains.org/farmer-rancher-solidarity

SOIL & LOCAL FOODS

Snowy Soil Crawl honors ranch heritage

Despite wet September snow, more than 50 people attended our final Soil Crawl of 2019.

Ivan and Chia Thrane cleaned out their 100 year-old barn for attendees to gather indoors with space heaters, hot dandelion tea, and fresh knapweed honey on September 28. Ivan opened the day by sharing the story of his family ranch, the work his grandparents put in to survive the long winters, and the creativity of his neighbors to survive Montana droughts. One family saved their cattle by feeding them nutrient-dense thistle, the only plant growing that year.

This Soil Crawl focused on the importance of every plant and animal on the range. “Everything we do, we want to focus on how we encourage what we want to grow and succeed,” said Thrane, “not on how to kill what we don’t want or understand.”

The Thranes manage their own land – as well as public and private lands across Montana – with goats. While this has been a successful solution on some operations, it’s not right for everyone. Ivan explained, “You really have to understand the history of where you are to understand why things are growing where they are... The same treatment does not do the same thing on different land.”

The Soil Crawl ended with freshly smoked goat meat, neighbors playing bluegrass, dancing and stomping, and a warm fire outside to warm up. It was a perfect way to wrap up a great summer of soil crawls!



Ivan Thrane shows a field where goats eradicated knapweed that just three years ago was overtaken by the plant.

Photo Credit: Neil Carlson

-Maggie Gordon 

Local Food Challenge reaches new participants with affiliate events and Kids Challenge

The fourth annual Montana Local Food Challenge wrapped up at the end of August with high participation numbers and engagement in the weekly challenges.

We’re especially excited by the participation and support from our affiliates. Five affiliates hosted Local Food Challenge events this year: Bear Creek Council, Carbon County Resource Council, Dawson Resource Council, Sleeping Giant Citizens Council, and Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council.

Hannah Strong from Kinsey was drawn as the winner of the \$250 local food gift card. Ariane Hoff from Glendive was drawn as the winner of the Kids Challenge.

Thanks to all of you who took part in the 2019 Local Food Challenge, and thank you to our affiliates and sponsors! Montana’s local food economy continues to grow because of your interest and participation. Northern Plains’ Ag Task Force is already planning for the 2020 Challenge to be bigger and better than ever!

-Caroline Canarios 

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

CCRC prepares for local planning



Carbon County Resource Council members have spent the past year working to ensure that the City of Red Lodge Energy Conservation Plan was passed and implemented. Now another opportunity has come up to ensure that the city moves forward with the goals set forth in the Plan.

The City of Red Lodge will be updating its growth plans – the guiding vision for the city’s direction – and CCRC members are working to ensure that the vision considers a changing climate and sustainability goals in those plans. Similarly, Carbon County is updating the county growth policy and CCRC will be there to ensure that the policy protects landowners who face oil and gas development.

The Beartooth Front has faced oil and gas development in the past, but CCRC fought for stricter local protections in the region.

-Sydney Ausen 

Sleeping Giant vigilant for local energy solutions

This fall, members of Sleeping Giant Citizens Council attended the Kids’ Strike for Climate, spurring a number of community members to take action with us to find local, clean energy solutions for climate change. SGCC’s October 5 Sun Run for solar benefited Helena Public Schools by raising funds to install solar panels on three newly refurbished elementary schools.

SGCC is organizing for another local clean energy campaign by supporting a 100% Renewable Electricity by 2030 resolution that is moving through the city government this winter. Members convened for their quarterly membership meeting with Northern Plains Staff Director Olivia Stockman, and will have their next quarterly meeting in December.

-Makenna Sellers 



Participants enjoy the bike parade, part of this year’s Sun Run and Clean Energy Expo in Helena.

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

Calling all volunteers for YVCC's Cowboy Supper!

It's that time of year again! We are busy planning for our Cowboy Supper, Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council's annual fundraiser, and we are looking for volunteers to help pull off this big event. Last year, close to 30 volunteers helped with everything – setup, selling raffle tickets, cleanup, sign-in and, of course, cooking chili, cornbread, and desserts.

If you love sharing your cooking skills – or if you can help in another way – this is the volunteer opportunity for you! Call Caroline at 406-248-1154 or email caroline@nothernplains.org to sign up.

-Caroline Canarios 



Attendees enjoying food and fellowship at last year's Cowboy Supper.

CRC hosts Annual Picnic & Film Fest



MSU Soil Scientist, Tony Hartshorn, presents at the CRC Annual Picnic

Cottonwood Resource Council hosted their Annual Picnic in August. Tony Hartshorn, a Soils professor at MSU-Bozeman (and a Northern Plains member), delivered a presentation titled “Metals 101: Why sustainable development goals cannot be met without more mining.”

CRC hosted the Homegrown Energy Film Festival in Big Timber in September and is supporting the effort to install a solar array at Sweet Grass County High School.

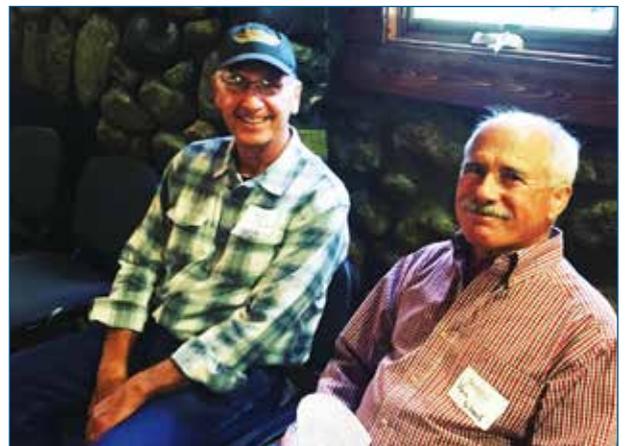
-Mikindra Morin 

SPA gathers neighbors and the mine

In August, Stillwater Protective Association and the Stillwater Valley Watershed Council gathered with neighbors from across the county at the Beartooth Ranch in Nye. The gathering started with a local meal provided by the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub.

Sibanye-Stillwater Mining Company CEO Neal Froneman, visiting from South Africa, spoke and answered questions about the massive growth plans that the Stillwater Mine is proposing for the next 40 years. Residents expressed concerns about traffic, visual impacts of a new staging or “lay-down” area along the highway, and the doubling of the Hertzler Tailings Pond near the shooting range. SPA members are staying engaged and in close touch with the mine through the GNA during these changes.

-Maggie Gordon 



SPA Vice President Hank Lischer (left) and President Van Wood (right) prepare to speak to the group.

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

DRC fighting for strong radioactive waste rules



Dawson Resource Council held a community organizing training for members in Glendive. Members learned about key organizing concepts like power and self-interest, and practiced skills like campaign planning.

DRC helped kick off the Montana Local Food Challenge again this year with a lively party. Attendees brought dishes made with local food, signed up for the Challenge, and celebrated all the local bounty Dawson County has to offer!

On Sept. 24, DRC members turned out in force to testify on the state's proposed radioactive oil waste rules at a public hearing in Glendive. They held the Department of Environmental Quality's feet to the fire on newly-discovered ground water contamination at Oaks Disposal, the only radioactive oil waste landfill in the state. (See page 10 for more on this hearing.)

-Caitlin Cromwell 

DRC member Melissa Mittelstaed testifies to DEQ demanding stronger radioactive oil waste disposal rules.

YBCC Celebrates a Summer of Solar

Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council members wrapped up their Solarize Livingston campaign in August with a Solarize Livingston Celebration. Members, Solarize participants, and members of local government gathered to hear more about the effort that began last January. Andy Scott, who was one of the participants to go solar with Solarize Livingston told attendees, "I've thought about this for years, but I wouldn't have done it without YBCC and Solarize Livingston."

YBCC also took the opportunity to bid farewell to Cameron Tehranchi, the Energy Corps intern who has spent the last year working with YBCC to create more clean energy opportunities in the city and county. Members took turns praising the progress Cam has made and wishing him the best in all future endeavors. Cam will be missed – but we're sure that Livingston has snagged a piece of his heart and we'll see him down the road!



A special "solar cake" helped to send off Cameron, the City of Livingston's Energy Corps intern.

-Sydney Ausen 

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

CMRC racking up wins on water testing

Central Montana Resource Council has been participating in our Oil & Gas Task Force's campaign for water testing around oil and gas development – to great success! CMRC members have presented our proposal to two conservation districts so far, and both of them have signed letters of support for a water testing rule. CMRC is excited to continue coordinating with the Task Force and finding new allies for this campaign.

CMRC tabled at Lewistown's annual Chokecherry Festival once again, and sold a record number of raffle tickets for our annual fundraiser. CMRC continues to keep up the pressure for Country-of-Origin Labeling for beef. Members have submitted letters to the editor, holding our local legislators accountable for their bad votes on COOL.

-Caitlin Cromwell 



CMRC members Linda Roche and Peter Mickelsen tally up CMRC's fundraising totals from this year's Chokecherry Festival.

BCC focuses on conservation films, living with wolves



Attendees gather with popcorn at the ready before the Gardiner Wild and Scenic Film Festival.

Thank you to everyone who attended Bear Creek Council's Wild and Scenic Film Festival this September! More than 100 people attended again this year. In addition to the film festival, BCC continues to hold a series of outreach events called "Living with Wolves" – wildlife forums that dig into the realities of living next to wildlands, and what we can do to prevent human-predator conflict. BCC hosted one "Living with Wolves" forum at the Range Rider in Silver Gate this fall, and will host a second forum on November 4th at the Gardiner Community Center, with special guest and wolf expert Carter Niemeyer.

-Makenna Sellers 

BA hosts Annual Meeting

Beartooth Alliance welcomed Max Hjortsberg from the Park County Environmental Coalition to speak at their 2019 Annual Meeting in Cooke City in August. Hjortsberg shared the background of the new water data system on an online resource called RiverNET.

Following the white fish kill on the Yellowstone River in 2016, local stakeholders gathered at the Upper Yellowstone Watershed Council and worked to fundraise and develop water data collection along several points of the Yellowstone and its tributaries. The data is shared on RiverNET. This data has helped protect all water users along the river, and prevent more potential ecological and economic disasters.

-Maggie Gordon 



BA re-elected officers Ken Cummins, Nellie Israel (pictured), and Dean Bladow



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COME CELEBRATE TERESA ERICKSON for 33 years of dedicated leadership!

Since 1986, Teresa Erickson has been building people power – working with members across Montana – to protect our water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life. We can never fully express our gratitude for her years of service, but we can throw her one hell of a retirement party!

Please join us on **Friday, Nov. 8 from 7-10 p.m.** after the first day of the 2019 Annual Meeting for the biggest bash in the west!

