Members gathered for a weekend of fun, fellowship, and organizing to protect the things we value most.

The fight for clean energy

Throughout the winter, members stepped up all over the state to demand more clean energy for Montana while holding energy companies accountable for expensive, backward-looking plans and a lack of transparency.
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
$1200+ Rider of the Big Sky
$600 - $1199 Bottom Line Rider
$51 - $599 Rider
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Endowment
The Northern Plains Endowment is a permanent fund established to help sustain Northern Plains’ work into the future. If you want to make a donation, a memorial gift, or a bequest to this fund, please contact the Northern Plains office.

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

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Greetings from the East Fork of Hanging Woman Creek.

Being your Chair is a tremendous honor, full of responsibility and challenge. I’m immensely proud to be one of you, and grateful for the opportunity to give back to the organization that, for as long as I can remember, has been part of my family’s life and work.

I think I was 5 or 6 years old when my parents (Carolyn Walker and Irv Alderson) gathered with neighbors in our living room to discuss what they had learned at a meeting in Colstrip where the North Central Power Study was laid out in all of its terrifying detail.

They knew what the vast plans for mines, power plants, slurry lines, and railroads meant for their land, water, and livelihoods. From the beginning, my folks and their neighbors had the foresight and courage to know that if their ranches and way of life were to continue, they couldn’t just sit still and take what was coming.

They knew that they needed each other, and they reached out to their friends in the Bull Mountains and on the Rosebud. Together they built the organization we have today.

Even as a kid, I understood that Northern Plains was our community, and that our livelihood and home depended on the organization and the good people who worked so hard to keep it going.

As an adult, I came home to my family’s ranch, in part to help fight the Tongue River Railroad that proposed to cut through our valley. In 1995 I joined the Northern Plains board of directors. I am ineffably grateful to Northern Plains because, all these years later, my family is still here, we are still ranching, and we are still meeting with neighbors and allies.

Right now, family ranches and farms across Montana and the country are in crisis. While we’ve heard on news and social media about declines in other industries, many do not know that last year 17,000 ranches across the country went out of business.

It seems like our country is irreparably divided; so much so that finding solutions seems next to impossible, and many of the values we hold dear at Northern Plains are threatened.

Accelerated changes to our climate are manifest in drastic weather events, reminding us daily of the urgency of action toward more renewable energy and conservation.

Yet in the face of all of this, the courage, tenacity, and wisdom of our founders is still with us today. Our talented and hard-working staff and members remind us that we can get together and get things done.

Please read all about the Annual Meeting. While Mike Callicrate spoke to very specific solutions for those of us in ranching and farming, his words on the injustice in livestock agriculture were a guide for almost any of our issues or efforts. He reminded us to “raise hell,” to involve consumers, and to remember the power of collaboration and creativity.

Teresa’s wonderful talk about the lessons of organizing lifted us up and reminded us of her unique, wise, passionate leadership and all that is best about Northern Plains.

What really stood out to me was the truth that solutions to seemingly impossible problems lie in our courage to reach out and work with others, our creativity, and our diversity.

-Jeanie Alderson Chair
People of the Plains

Emma Kerr-Carpenter sees social justice, environmental sustainability as one cause

Climate change affects all of us, but Emma Kerr-Carpenter, is especially interested in how it will adversely impact those from marginalized backgrounds. By connecting her work experience in children’s mental health care and her work as a member-leader of Northern Plains, Emma brings a strong voice for justice to environmental sustainability campaigns. “I have always been most concerned by the ways that climate change affects people, in particular people from marginalized communities,” she says.

Emma represents the Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council on Northern Plains’ Board, and she serves on YVCC’s Steering Committee. She’s looking forward to the future of this big-picture thinking, saying “I am excited to be a part of the team because we are on the forefront of helping figure out how Northern Plains can best bring its strength to fights at the intersections of economic, racial, and environmental justice.”

Though she’s involved at the board level, Emma’s work on sustainability and environmental justice started from the ground up.

Emma joined Northern Plains in 2014 at the Wild and Scenic Film Festival, and quickly jumped in to work with the Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council. “My involvement began when the Better Billings Sustainability Committee formed. I began to see how suburban sprawl creates an unhealthy community and how smart growth policy, intentional zoning, and having a denser, healthier community helps build a community that works for everyone, not just folks with money and power.”

Her involvement with the Sustainability Committee began out of an interest in affordable housing and its connection to urban sustainability. Emma later served as the Committee’s Chair, leading campaigns to incorporate sustainability into the City’s Growth Plan and redesigning the Corette industrial site as it transitions from a coal-fired power plant to a city park.

Her work has always been driven by a vision for Billings to become a “vibrant, thriving, walkable metropolis that serves as a model of what a sustainable community can be.”

She describes her time on the Committee as an exciting way to change Billings’ future. “We were talking about things that had the potential to make the quality of life in Billings much better for myself and others.”

In 2018, Emma took a giant leap and ran a successful campaign for state legislature.

It’s partly due to her leadership at Northern Plains that she decided to run for office and serve our state. “I ran for office after watching the 2017 session balance Montana’s budget at the expense of working families, the elderly, and the environment. I thought we can and should do better as a state.”

In her role as Representative for House District 49, she’s worked on legislation to expand health care, preserve public lands access, and protect our environment. As she looks to the future of Montana, she thinks we can be a leader in the country. As Emma so keenly observes, “We lead in the areas of sustainable rural economic development, clean energy development, and just transition for fossil fuel impacted communities.”

- Caroline Canarios

Rep. Emma Kerr-Carpenter speaks at our Clean Power for All rally during the 2019 legislature
On December 10, NorthWestern Energy (NWE) announced plans to buy an additional 25% share of Colstrip Unit 4 from Puget Sound Energy for $1. This announcement was made only one day after a public hearing about the company’s 20-year plan for future energy procurement.

No mention of this purchase was in NWE’s 20-year plan (see page 9 for more information about their plan). Clearly, NorthWestern has been considering this acquisition for at least a year, given that it revives memories of NWE’s failed effort in the 2019 Legislature to hatch a similarly misleading “$1 scheme.” Why would NorthWestern neglect to include this in its 20-year resource procurement plan?

One can only assume the company hoped to avoid public scrutiny and the widespread criticism that its legislative efforts rightfully generated. Ultimately, this scheme would enrich NorthWestern’s executives and out-of-state shareholders while shifting millions of dollars in maintenance, operating costs, and financial risk to customers.

If approved by regulators in Washington state and by Montana’s Public Service Commission (PSC), NorthWestern’s additional 25% purchase would make them the majority owner of Colstrip Unit 4 (they currently own 30% of the unit). From this position, they could force the unit’s other owners to pay for upgrades to keep the unit running beyond the other owners’ expected departure dates at the end of the decade. It is reasonable to expect that the other owners (Avista, Portland Gas and Electric, and Pacificorp) would sell their existing shares to NorthWestern within a decade. With Unit 3 expected to be decommissioned within this same time frame, this would leave NorthWestern as the sole owner of any operating Colstrip units.

NorthWestern Energy recently announced plans to increase its Colstrip ownership despite no mention of the proposal in its 20-year energy forecast.

This is a bad deal for Montana ratepayers. The price of coal is expected to increase and the aging unit will require tens of millions of dollars in maintenance and upgrades over the next several years.

Since the Colstrip power plant is so uneconomical — other owners can’t seem to get out fast enough — why would NorthWestern want it?

Because as a regulated monopoly utility under Montana law, the PSC can allow NWE a guaranteed return on investment (probably 8-10%) for any generating facilities that it owns. NorthWestern is betting that — no matter how expensive generating power with Unit 4 becomes — its shareholders will get paid. Out-of-state investors get the profit, Montanans get stuck with an old power plant well past its expected operating life, as well as an enormous financial obligation for cleaning up polluted groundwater.

Montanans could be on the hook for hundreds of millions of dollars, all because NorthWestern spent one dollar to buy this aging facility.

-Cody Ferguson

What legacy would you like to leave the world?
(It’s not as hard as you might think.)

We can send you a lawyer-reviewed brochure with solid information on how to make a legacy gift that puts your values to work in the world.

Just call (406) 248-1154 and we’ll mail you a copy. Or you can email steve@northernplains.org.
The vast majority of coal mining in Montana and Wyoming is done by currently or recently bankrupt companies. Panelists at Northern Plains’ Annual Meeting laid out how coal companies have used those bankruptcy proceedings to successfully abandon $5.2 billion in reclamation and retiree obligations.

Here’s how it works: Bankrupt coal companies create new “reorganized” companies, some of which hold their profitable assets and some of which are underfunded subsidiaries designed to hold their debts. They then spin off and liquidate the debt-holders in order to abandon their obligations to reclaim mined lands and provide health care and pensions to retired miners.

While companies have abandoned workers and the environment, compensation to shareholders and executives has generally been preserved in bankruptcy reorganization. “In 2005, Peabody Coal paid out $130 million in executive bonuses while canceling $1.2 billion in pension obligations,” recounted panelist Joshua Macey. Macey teaches at Cornell University and is the country’s only energy bankruptcy law professor.

The session’s other panelist, Powder River Basin Resource Council staff attorney Shannon Anderson, noted that, in times like these, coal workers and conservationists have common cause against the actions of CEOs who are attacking both of their interests. “The latest round of bankruptcies has changed the narrative about coal – it is now about miners versus management executives,” she noted.

The panelists’ message of how bankruptcy is designed to protect big money instead of communities was sobering. They also, however, offered words of advice. Workers and the environment do better when they are at the table during bankruptcy proceedings, and communities can take steps to protect themselves by getting engaged. Anderson added that “bankruptcy is one big negotiation.”

Both panelists also spoke to the need for coal communities to diversify their economies and to keep in mind the job potential in reclaiming mined lands.

-Svein Newman

Colstrip ash ponds, then-and-now

“DEQ promised Colstrip would be gone in 30 years.”
- Ellen Pfister, describing the coal boom in the early 1970s

How does the Coal Task Force compress 40 years of corporate negligence into a ten-minute Annual Meeting flash talk? Answer – a bit of storytelling and some trivia. Ellen Pfister and Becky Mitchell delivered a “then-and-now” take on the Colstrip coal ash ponds, with Ellen recalling her experience as Northern Plains Chair in 1973 and Becky moderating trivia with the audience. Did you know these ponds are 3 times the size of Disneyland?

-Alex Cunha
Coal

Colstrip cleanup: Your move, DEQ

What we did: Northern Plains members submitted more than 1,100 individual comments on Colstrip ash pond cleanup during the Montana Department of Environmental Quality’s (DEQ) public comment periods this fall – a showing of real grassroots power! In the coming months, DEQ will rule on Talen Energy’s proposed plans to clean up a groundwater pollution plume high in boron, sulfates, manganese, and heavy metals. The plume exists due to decades of leakage from tailings ponds outside of town that store roughly 27 million tons of toxic coal ash.

Northern Plains’ formal comments included a historical timeline that documents the work our members in Rosebud County have done through the decades to hold the Colstrip owners and state agencies accountable. In comparing old testimony with our recent comments, it’s clear Northern Plains had the same message in the early 1970s as we do now: “Store this stuff dry, lined, and away from groundwater!”

A special shout-out for this comment period goes to the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, who not only submitted lengthy comments but joined us for a recent meeting in Helena with DEQ staff.

What the next several months look like: At time of printing, DEQ is expected to issue a decision any day now for the Units 3 and 4 ponds, so cleanup activities will start there in the coming year. A critical piece to watch is how successful the Colstrip owners are in draining these massive ponds that blanket 416 acres in the Rosebud Creek drainage.

What needs to happen: The older ash ponds associated with Units 1 and 2 will be up for a final decision this spring. These ponds sit below the water table, within a mile of Armells Creek, and MUST be removed to control future pollution. A final comment period for the Units 1 and 2 ponds will open in the next few months. We’ll keep you posted!

-Alex Cunha

State grants NTEC extension on deal to operate Spring Creek

Last year, Cloud Peak Energy (which was America’s 3rd largest coal producer) declared bankruptcy and sold its coal mines, including Montana’s Spring Creek Mine, to a little-known coal company called Navajo Transitional Energy Company. The sale came as a surprise to many, including the Navajo Nation. While NTEC is owned by the Navajo, the company is run by white coal executives who did not inform the Navajo Tribal Council that they were purchasing Cloud Peak’s mines until after they had done so.

In order to fully acquire the mine and its permit, NTEC must still do two things: (1) post a bond to cover the cost of reclaiming the mine in case the company goes out of business or abandons the site, and (2) strike a deal with the State of Montana around what laws will apply to the company. There is uncertainty on both fronts.

Navajo Nation announced in November that the Tribe would not back NTEC’s bonds, citing the company’s lack of integrity and transparency, and accusing the company of seeking to saddle the Tribe with hundreds of millions of dollars of liabilities without consulting them. The company must now attempt to seek bonds on the market.

On the legal front, because the company is owned by the Navajo, it has sought to use the tribe’s sovereign immunity to prevent the enforcement of state and federal environmental, labor, and tax laws. DEQ and the company are in negotiations on the matter. On January 7, the parties announced a 65-day extension to find an agreement.

-Svein Newman
Jake Schlacter came to the Northern Plains annual meeting to tell the story of a revolution underway. At the heart of this revolution are an unassuming bunch of hell-raisers: the member owners of rural electric cooperatives.

A product of the New Deal, rural electric cooperatives were started by farmers in the rural parts of the country where large investor-owned utilities did not see profit in providing power. At the core of rural electric cooperatives are values of justice, concern for community, democratic participation, and equity.

These rural electric cooperatives are owned by their membership, each of whom has a vote and a voice in the performance of their cooperative. “All of that democratic, innovative, and entrepreneurial opportunity started to peter off in the 1970s and, by the 1980s, basically stopped, and became the business model we have today,” Schlacter recounted.

Today’s rural electric coops have strayed from their values. Entrenched in “good ol’ boy” networks, defrauding their membership, and limiting member participation at every level, many rural electric cooperatives have come to resemble the corporate greed and ineptitude of investor-owned utilities. But it doesn't have to be that way. “Rural electric cooperatives can be the driving force behind a clean energy revolution,” he said. “But we can’t wait for the electric cooperatives to come around. We have to change who’s making the decisions at them.”

Jake founded the organization We Own It in 2015 to build a national network of cooperative owners all across the country, with the aim of putting the power back in the hands of the people who really control them: the members.

But Schlacter’s vision goes beyond that. “If we are going to pass any federal climate legislation, it’s going to be because the electric cooperatives are on our side. To get them on our side, it’s not persuading them, it’s going to changing the leadership in them,” he asserted. And it’s not impossible. It’s happening, all across the country:

- After 30 years, Roanoke Electric co-op is the first to have a majority African-American board.
- Delta Montrose Electric Coop has a rural broadband program. Not because the leadership changed their minds, but because the people who wanted that program are the people now on the board of the co-op.
- New Hampshire has an outstanding net-metering policy, because their member owners wanted it to be that way.
- The members of Delta Montrose and Kit Carson Electric Cooperatives wanted to power their co-op with more clean energy. They elected board members who wanted that too, and were the first co-ops to get out of lengthy, costly, fossil fuel contracts.

A cleaner, more affordable, and just energy future is possible in Montana. And if we put the power back in the hands of the members, our cooperatives can lead the way. So let’s get after it, Montana!

-Jake Schlacter

--Sydney Ausen
In a much-anticipated decision right before Thanksgiving, the Montana Public Service Commission (PSC) voted unanimously to reject a proposal from NorthWestern Energy that sought to place unfair charges on Montana’s residential solar customers.

The decision comes as a part of the 2019 Rate Case filed last spring by NorthWestern Energy. Northern Plains members have spent the past year urging the PSC to reject NorthWestern Energy’s proposal for a new rate structure for residential solar customers, known as net-metering customers.

“We’re elated with the decision,” said Northern Plains member Ed Gulick of Billings. “We’ve always agreed that all customers need to pay their fair share for the services they use, but the rate changes proposed by NorthWestern Energy were an attempt to place punitive charges on net-metered residential solar systems that have nothing to do with actual impacts to other ratepayers. Their intent clearly is to prevent any new residential solar systems from being installed and today’s decision from the PSC is perhaps a signal that NorthWestern’s days of regulatory capture are over.”

After months of writing comments, making calls, sending postcards, and testifying in person, Northern Plains members and allies packed into the PSC on November 25 to give public comment and bear witness to the decision from the Commissioners.

“This decision is an example of what can happen when people come together to stand up against the interest of corporations and demand a say in the decisions that impact their lives,” said Northern Plains board member Roxa Reller of Helena.

Northern Plains members celebrate a victory for rooftop solar outside the PSC.

Members speak out against NWE’s fossil-fueled resource plan

Northern Plains members showed up in force to demand that NorthWestern Energy prepare for a renewable energy transition.

Throughout December and early January, the Montana Public Service Commission held public listening sessions on NorthWestern’s Integrated Resource Procurement Plan. The plan serves as a guiding document for NorthWestern as the company projects how to meet customer energy demand for the next 20 years. Unfortunately, NWE has developed a 20th century playbook – more natural gas plants and more risky fossil fuel purchases – with no investment in wind, solar, battery storage, or energy efficiency measures.

The public outcry was intense. With neighbor states like Idaho committing to 100% renewable energy by 2045, and Wyoming doubling down on large-scale wind development, why does NorthWestern want to leave Montana stuck in the past?

NorthWestern excluded its intent to purchase more of Colstrip from its 20-year plan. From hearings in Helena, Missoula, Bozeman, Billings, and Lewistown, it was clear that NorthWestern’s customers want their investor-owned, monopoly utility to do better. They are “captive” customers, and they want the PSC to act in their interests by requiring NorthWestern to provide cheaper and cleaner energy sources.

With public comment now officially closed on NorthWestern’s 20-year plan, the next step for us is to remain alert to PSC proceedings. Over the next few months, the PSC will determine if NorthWestern Energy is allowed to pass the costs of acquiring an additional 25% ownership of Colstrip Unit 4 on to ratepayers.

Stay tuned… we will make sure you’re looped in so you can employ the tools of democracy and have a say in the energy decisions that impact your lives and your children’s lives for decades. To stay informed on this ratepayer issue, contact Makenna at makenna@northernplains.org

Let the sun shine in!

Stay tuned... we will make sure you're looped in so you can employ the tools of democracy and have a say in the energy decisions that impact your lives and your children's lives for decades. To stay informed on this ratepayer issue, contact Makenna at makenna@northernplains.org

-Clean Energy

Northern Plains members celebrate a victory for rooftop solar outside the PSC.
“Have you ever thought about what it would take to make you leave your home?”

Former mayor of DISH, Texas, Calvin Tillman posed this question to the Annual Meeting audience. Of course, many Northern Plains folks know well this very question – in fact, our organization was founded upon it.

As mayor of DISH – a town named after the major satellite network in exchange for ten years of free DISH network access – Tillman watched his home change dramatically when natural gas companies moved in. The industry laid miles of pipelines and constructed multiple natural gas compressor stations in the tiny West Texas town of 200.

This wasn’t a matter of the residents “not being used to it,” Tillman noted. Born in Oklahoma, an early adopter of fracking, “you couldn’t be more used to it than I was.”

The first thing Tillman and others noticed was the noise. “It sounded like a diesel tractor in your front yard, 24/7,” he said. Next, offensive smells quickly rose on the list of complaints. “Sometimes the smell was so bad, you couldn’t go outside.”

So Tillman got to work – as mayor, as a resident of DISH himself, and as a father. He pushed for a thorough air quality study, but was disappointed when the natural gas industry threw together a flimsy report and declared everything fine.

Tillman and the town of DISH decided to take matters into their own hands, and conduct their own study. What turned up this time? High concentrations of carcinogenic and neurotoxin compounds.

As a result of Tillman’s study, the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality agreed to install an air quality monitor in DISH. The Texas Department of State Health Services also agreed to test residents for toxins, and found higher levels in some individuals.

For Tillman, “this work is a start. It’s something.” But he doesn’t consider his work done. Though Tillman and his family moved from DISH in 2010 – after his sons began waking up with nosebleeds -- Tillman continues his efforts by way of a nonprofit he founded, ShaleTest. ShaleTest conducts environmental monitoring in low-income communities that are being impacted by industry.

In leaving Northern Plains members with a final thought, Tillman said this: “Together we bargain, divided we beg – and if you do nothing, my trip is wasted.”

Wondering how to “do something”? Join Northern Plains’ campaign for mandatory baseline water testing around oil and gas development in Montana. If our neighbors in other states have it, why shouldn’t we, too?

To learn more or get involved, contact Caitlin at caitlin@northernplains.org or (406) 248-1154.

-Caitlin Cromwell
Good Neighbor Agreement

Tailings, traffic, and water: “One hell of a job.”

As the Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA) approaches its 20th anniversary this year, longtime Northern Plains member Paul Hawks gave Annual Meeting attendees a review of the Agreement’s basic issues and its status today. Paul was a member of the original GNA negotiation team and continues to serve on our Good Neighbor Agreement Task Force.

As the Sibanye-Stillwater operation grows, issues with mine tailings have expanded, traffic has increased at both mines, and we are continuously keeping an eye on water quality. Paul highlighted the extent of the water monitoring wells and explained how this web of wells supports the goal of the GNA to be precautionary and proactive. With the newly adopted Adaptive Management Plan, we will be able to detect water quality changes at the earliest possible time.

Jerry Iverson, Good Neighbor Agreement Task Force Chair, and Charles Sangmeister, GNA Task Force member, were available to answer questions from the audience. What we all learned is that the Good Neighbor Agreement is going strong but, like so many campaigns at Northern Plains, it takes an enormous amount of time, dedication, and education. Thankfully, these guys are in it for the long haul, even if they didn't necessarily know from the beginning they were signing up for a decades-long campaign. As Paul so perfectly summed up, “We signed on to one hell of a job.”

-Mikindra Morin

Northern Plains stalwart Paul Hawks - a member of the original GNA negotiation team - reviews the Agreement’s history and status at the Annual Meeting.

Soil

Using goats to heal the land

Managing goats is an art. Herding mimics the story of land from hundreds of years ago, allowing our land to both be worked and to rest,” Ivan Thrane told Annual Meeting attendees. Ivan and Chia Thrane ranch just north of Red Lodge using historic management knowledge combined with the concepts of rest, recovery, and rotational grazing to accelerate the health of their soil.

“We began with our goats to manage the knapweed, and in just a few years this heirloom alfalfa from generations ago started appearing.”

While this model doesn't necessarily fit all land, the idea of “listening to your land” and understanding what it needs, can be applied across the spectrum. “On our ranch,” Ivan elaborated, “listening has resulted in attracting wildlife and an heirloom variety of alfalfa, goldfinches, and demonstrable improvement to our soil health. I guess nature wants diversity, and it’s all connected.”

-Maggie Gordon
This year was a record-breaker for the highest attendance yet at an Annual Meeting. Over 300 of you showed up throughout the weekend for the camaraderie, fellowship, and learning that make this such a wonderful tradition.

If you weren’t able to make it this year, here’s a recap:

Members adopted five resolutions during the Meeting of the Membership (see pg 15 for details) and newly elected officers were announced. As part of Northern Plains’ ongoing commitment to member skill development, a workshop on how to run effective meetings led off on Friday morning, followed by the Meeting of the Membership, and a session on how our history, especially with coal, has come full circle.

Former staffers traveled from all over the country for Teresa’s retirement party on Friday night, lending a real “reunion” atmosphere to the weekend! After roasts from long-time friends and members and a surprise skit from current and former staff, The Fossils, a spirited band out of Livingston, rocked the house and ended the night with a dance party.

We were honored this year to host many expert and enlightening speakers and guests. Alaina Buffalo Spirit and Bert Medicine Bull began Saturday’s sessions with an opening song and blessing in the Northern Cheyenne tradition. Mike Callicrate, independent cattle producer and advocate for family farms and ranches, ignited the crowd with a session on restoring fair markets for producers. Calvin Tillman, former mayor of DISH, Texas, shared his town’s story of what happens “When Natural Gas Comes to Town.” Jake Schlachter spoke on “Owning our Power and Utility Accountability” and how rural electric co-ops can be engines for the clean energy future we know is possible. Joshua Macey of Cornell University, the nation’s only energy bankruptcy professor, walked us through “Bankruptcy as Bailout: How Coal Companies Cheat the System,” complemented by Shannon Anderson voicing experience close to home in Wyoming. All spoke to the strategy and power of taking action from the grassroots.

Members Ivan and Chia Thrane inspired by sharing how their soil health heritage has informed land management on their family ranch near Red Lodge. Members Paul Hawks, Jerry Iverson, and Charles Sangmeister reflected on how the Good Neighbor Agreement has been successfully protecting Montana waterways and communities for 19 years.

Other members punctuated the meeting with a series of flash talks: Mary Fitzpatrick left the audience in stitches by sharing her experience putting Northern Plains in her will; Elle Ross brought us into the world of building healthier and wealthier communities through Farm to School, and Becky Mitchell and Ellen Pfister updated us on the Colstrip ash cleanup and preventing a legacy of pollution.

Northern Plains members raise a glass to another successful year organizing communities across Montana to protect the things we cherish most.

Bert Medicine Bull and Alaina Buffalo Spirit open Saturday’s session with a Northern Cheyenne traditional blessing.
Childcare was again offered on-site and, as the adults spent a day learning, the children did too: hosting a guest instructor from the Montana Audubon Center, getting smoothies and collecting food for a hands-on compost lesson, and watching The Lorax.

After a jam-packed day of education and inspiration, attendees capped the weekend with a live dessert auction, featuring desserts handmade by members and local businesses, the traditional silent auction, and a banquet dinner.

This Annual Meeting is at once a business meeting, an educational weekend, a fundraiser, and a celebration, and this year also felt more like a family reunion than ever. Thank you to everyone who joined and contributed to make the 2019 Annual Meeting a smash! We hope you learned something, and had a good time to boot.

Teresa Erickson was the reason for many sore feet November 9th, with a packed ballroom and a crowd that spilled out into the hallway for her keynote speech. After 33 years as Northern Plains Staff Director, Teresa used her keynote to share some of the lessons she has learned as an organizer.

This started with her family. Teresa’s dad was an underground miner who “was ground up and spit out by the companies he worked for.” Since he worked away from home so much, she was mostly raised by her mother and two aunts, who taught her to respect living things: “My sister and I knew at a very young age that we loved the earth and that it was our job to protect it.” That feeling grew, and since then this self-described “organizer by nature” has learned many lessons, including:

Community organizing is not the easy path
“Community organizing is neither easy nor efficient, but it is the longest-lasting for making change... You need to be prepared at all times to take advantage of ‘luck’ or opportunities – you need to master the art and science of getting common agreement among a group of people.”

Justice doesn’t happen by doing nothing
“The phrase that drives me crazy is ‘everything will work out for the best.’ It WILL work out very nicely for some, but not for others. For it to work out for you or for justice or for those you care about, you must get involved.”

Recognize the beauty all around you
“Recognizing the beauty of organizing helps me love my job. I have often paused to appreciate that my work takes me to some of the most beautiful places that are still unspoiled and that I work with people who are the cream of the crop – members who give so much of themselves and work tirelessly to improve their community or their world.”

- Claire Overholt
Beug, Stockton Win Annual Honors

**Bob Tully Spirit Award – Sue Beug**

The Bob Tully Spirit Award recognizes an exemplary leader who has displayed courage, strategic thinking, and a sense of humor in longtime service to Northern Plains. 2019 recipient Jean Dahlman presented the Tully Award this year to Sue Beug of Red Lodge, noting Sue's determination and commitment as a strategist, writer, and lobbyist: “She’s got great humor and great heart.”

“You are my family,” noted Sue in her acceptance speech, “… a community I have come to know, love, depend on, and want to fight for.”

Sue chairs her affiliate (Carbon County Resource Council), serves on the Northern Plains board, the Oil and Gas Task Force, the Soil Task Force, and the Organization & Finance Task Force. She has frequently testified on oil and gas issues at the legislature; the Board of Oil & Gas; in Washington, DC; Denver; and even Dallas.

**Mary Donohoe “Tell it Like it Is” Award – Gilles Stockton**

Mary Donohoe was a longtime member known for her spirited determination and her willingness to speak up for Northern Plains. This award recognizes a member who, in the past year, wasn’t afraid to tell it like it is. Last year’s winner Dena Hoff presented the Donohoe Award to Gilles Stockton of Grass Range, noting that Gilles has lived his work, “presenting solutions gained from both study and life experience”, and sending foes of family agriculture “scurrying off to their far corners.”

A member since 1986, Gilles has been a longtime spokesperson and leader on Northern Plains’ Agriculture Task Force, particularly in our work on monopolization in the livestock industry. In addition to having “long been a thoughtful and informed voice for the COOL [Country of Origin Labeling] effort,” Gilles has testified at home and across the country, written extensively about livestock issues, and been involved at the WORC network level on captive supply reform.

Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council won the “Most New Members” award. Central Montana Resource Council was presented with the “Largest Percentage of New Members” award.

-Sue Beug wins the 2019 Bob Tully Spirit Award.

-Sue Beug wins the 2019 Bob Tully Spirit Award.

-Gilles Stockton wins the 2019 Mary Donohoe “Tell it Like it Is” Award.

-Gilles Stockton wins the 2019 Mary Donohoe “Tell it Like it Is” Award.

**New officers elected**

Please welcome our new board members Roxa Reller of Helena (Assistant Treasurer) and Tom Mexicancheyenne of Lame Deer (At-Large Rep.). Thank you for your service as board members: Becky Mitchell (outgoing Chair) and Alaina Buffalo Spirit (At-Large Board Representative.)

-Say hello to our 2020 officers!

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

- **At-Large Board Representatives**
  - John Brown, Shepherd
  - Jean Dahlman, Forsyth
  - Tom Mexicancheyenne, Lame Deer
  - Karen Stevenson, Miles City
Since Northern Plains’ founding, we have been dedicated to making democracy work at all levels. For Northern Plains this begins with how we decide what issues we work on and our positions on those issues. This core principle was on full display during the resolutions portion of the meeting of the membership at this year’s Annual Meeting. Members in attendance considered five resolutions put forward by the Clean Energy, Soil, Coal, and Oil and Gas Task Forces. While all passed, some spurred the healthy debate and underwent a fair amount of amending before receiving the support of the members present.

Here is a short summary of each of the resolutions that were presented and passed. Full text is available by contacting the office at 406-248-1154.

**Resolution No. 2019-1**, introduced by Ed Gulick and Jim Amonette (at the request of the Clean Energy Task Force and Soil Task Force) resolved that Northern Plains support H.R. 763, currently introduced in the U.S. House, which proposes to reduce climate change-causing carbon pollution by attaching a fee to carbon that would be returned to American taxpayers in the form of a dividend – “tax and dividend.” Changes in the bill acknowledge the importance of agricultural carbon sequestration and provide funds for research into soil carbon sequestration.

**Resolution No. 2019-2**, introduced by Deborah Hansen (at the request of the Oil and Gas Task Force) resolved that Northern Plains request the Montana Board of Oil and Gas Conservation to undertake rulemaking that would require mandatory baseline water testing – prior to development – within one mile of a proposed oil and gas development, to be paid for by the oil and gas industry. Should the Board of Oil and Gas Conservation fail to take up this rulemaking, the resolution directs Northern Plains to pursue the issue in the 2021 Legislature.

**Resolution No. 2019-3**, introduced by Ken Medicine Bull (at the request of the Coal Task Force), resolved that Northern Plains work diligently to support a remediation plan for the Colstrip coal ash ponds that includes removal of all coal ash that is polluting or in contact with groundwater, full dewatering of all coal ash ponds to prevent future pollution, long-term storage of the coal ash in a lined landfill above the water table, and financial assurance to ensure the Colstrip Power Plant owners cover the costs of perpetual groundwater pumping at the Colstrip site.

**Resolution No. 2019-4**, introduced by Ed Gulick (at the request of the Clean Energy Task Force), resolved that Northern Plains should educate our members, allies, and the public about the benefits and challenges of public ownership of the electric power grid.

**Resolution No. 2019-5**, introduced by Ed Gulick (at the request of the Clean Energy Task Force), resolved that Northern Plains will educate our members, allies, and the public about energy storage technologies that can help contribute to a clean energy future in Montana.

-Cody Ferguson

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Ken Medicine Bull presents a Coal Ash Remediation resolution at the Meeting of the Membership.
Last year was especially troublesome for livestock markets, and producers have suffered while the federal government has failed to develop solutions. Leadership is instead coming from the grassroots.

Country-of-origin labeling has gained new visibility in local, regional, and national news outlets. Northern Plains has held many state legislators accountable for failing to support COOL during the 2019 legislature. Support for COOL is building, and Northern Plains intends to carry our campaign through 2020.

Mike Callicrate, livestock activist and food system entrepreneur, spoke to our membership at the Annual Meeting in November. He told the story of how corporations gained control of livestock markets and how we need to restore power to ranchers in order for them to have a fair chance in the marketplace.

Though auction and sale season prices plummeted in 2019, price issues aren’t new. Mike told of producers approaching him after a speaking engagement years ago to talk about losing their farm. “They were ashamed,” he said, “and they shouldn’t be ashamed because it wasn’t their fault that they were going bankrupt on their farm.”

Callicrate added that it’s not just corporate control that has narrowed profit margins for farmers and ranchers, but growing input costs and misinformation from our extension programs. He said, “When you graduated from Colorado State University in 1975, you were told, ‘don’t be afraid to borrow all the money you possibly can because you’re going to feed the world and you’re going to be super successful in this wonderful industrial model of farming and ranching and food distribution.’”

If there’s one thing we’ve learned since then, it’s that this industrial model isn’t working for producers or consumers. “Where in the world are people and the policy makers at, when we are losing our food system and, today, are a net importer of food on a value basis?” Callicrate asked the crowd.

But the question remains, how do we make change against such a powerful corporate structure that has become so entrenched in our society? Callicrate’s answer was to continue organizing. “We have to raise heck. We have to get on national press. We have to stop letting them work us against each other.”

Working against each other has been a chronic problem because some ag groups consistently stand with the big packers and oppose country-of-origin labeling at every turn – state and federal. The voices of real livestock producers (and the American consumers who want to support American agriculture) need to be heard. Northern Plains is working to make that happen.

Fair markets for producers and honest labels for consumers (that means mandatory Country-of-Origin Labeling for beef and pork) will make a huge difference in the survival of ranching in this country.

If you are interested in raising heck with us on livestock issues, contact Caroline at caroline@northernplains.org or by calling 406-248-1154.

-Caroline Canarios

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-Caroline Canarios
In 1910, farmers and ranchers received 60¢ of each dollar spent on food; today, their share is 7¢.

The local foods movement has addressed this gap, resulting in more farmers markets, more funding for local food procurement in schools, and more awareness that local foods are good for our health, our climate, and our communities.

As more Americans understand the value of local foods, a movement has gained traction to bring local foods back into schools. Farm to school, as it’s known across the country, includes programmatic and policy efforts to increase the presence of local foods on school menus, as well as school gardens and curriculum about local food in K-12 schools.

Today, more than 40% of US schools have farm to school programs. In Montana, farm to school has exploded with the help of coordinated statewide efforts led by our Montana Farm to School Coordinator, Aubree Roth, who works out of Montana State University.

In our work at Northern Plains, we have been building support to pass local school board policies that explicitly commit to local food procurement in their meal programs. We’re working with central and eastern Montana school administrators, teachers, and parents to help them take their first steps in supporting local producers.

We’re lucky that examples of farm to school programs exist throughout our state. To date, Montana has nearly 200 established farm to school programs. At the Northern Plains Annual Meeting, Elle Ross – farm to school coordinator for Hardin Schools – told our membership about the Hardin program and its impact on the broader Hardin and Crow communities.

For Hardin, located just north of the Crow Reservation, food sovereignty and traditional foods guide much of their program. “We try to make sure that we’re incorporating local and traditional recipes,” Elle said. “I’m from St. Louis and I am not Native, so we rely on relationships in the community for this.”

Some lucky Montana kids enjoy meeting a different kind of kid during a local farm tour.

Elle works with community leaders to share traditional recipes and, recently, Hardin schools planted a native orchard where students and community members can learn about traditional foods.

The strides made by farm to school programs have led to its expansion to early childcare centers as well as hospitals and health care facilities.

Here are a few facts about Montana Farm to School:

- 40% of school districts surveyed by the USDA in 2014 report participating in farm to school
- Over $1.6 million has been invested in Montana local food through farm to school programs
- At least 55 school gardens are growing food across Montana
- 41% of schools plan to increase local food purchases in future years.

To learn more about our farm to school work, contact Caroline at caroline@northernplains.org or (406) 248-1154.

-Caroline Canarios
Kit Muller, one of Northern Plains’ original staffers, spoke about his experience with a current Trump Administration appointee who was also a thorn in our side back in the 1980s. Kit worked at the BLM during the Reagan years, when William Perry Pendley was appointed as Deputy Assistant Secretary for Energy and Minerals in the Department of the Interior.

In 1984, a federal commission faulted Pendley, along with other high-ranking officials, for under-pricing coal mining leases in the Powder River Basin. Pendley was a key architect of the sale of 1.6 billion tons of federal coal in the Powder River Basin, the largest such sale in U.S. history. The sale spawned multiple investigations, including a General Accounting Office report which estimated that the sale cost American taxpayers $100 million.

Back like a bad penny, Pendley is now the Trump Administration’s acting director of the BLM. Under Pendley, key western land decisions are being made by political appointees in Washington, while the agency’s most seasoned personnel are being scattered to offices 2,000 miles away from where decisions are really being made.

Toni Chew shared her story of fighting the big Colstrip transmission line that threatened her ranch near Deer Lodge in the 1980s. Things looked grim at first, but her life was changed when a Northern Plains organizer came to her door. He had been tasked to engage with landowners impacted by the transmission lines in Boulder, Deer Lodge, Garrison, Gold Creek, Drummond, Maxville, and Missoula. The antagonists in Toni’s story included the Montana Power Company and the Bonneville Power Administration.

She and her neighbors weren’t about to tolerate living with a corridor that had been already decided before any public comment was sought. It was an intense time and, in the end, Toni and her new friends at Northern Plains were able to move the route to a less destructive path. She later became chair of Northern Plains.

Toni said her first lesson was, “just because you do not take an interest in politics, doesn’t mean politics won’t take an interest in you.”

Tom Schneider, former Montana Public Service Commissioner, foremost authority on this transmission system, and the very first winner of Northern Plains’ Bob Tully Spirit Award shared his view of the transmission lines today.

His message was optimistic.

Tom focused on the positive results of the Montana Renewable Development Action Plan, which projects the Colstrip line’s transmission potential to replace coal power from Colstrip with power from renewable energy. He described the once-hated power line’s promise of economic diversification for the Colstrip area as coal-based generation declines.

Tom also discussed the coal transition and the excellent long-term employment in dismantling the plants, reclaiming lands, and remediating fly ash pond pollution of aquifers. Tom concluded by telling us, “Seize on opportunity by concerted leadership and action. The Pacific Northwest energy market is competitive and will be challenging to crack, but Montana resources are also a very good match!”

-Teresa Erickson
As the twisting Keystone XL plotline has unwound during the past decade, Northern Plains members have steadfastly stood for clean water and a healthy climate. This perseverance was evident on a frigid October night when KXL opponents traveled icy roads from across the West – including many from Fort Peck – to stand against the massive and dirty project.

The rally took place outside the Billings Convention Center, site of the nation’s only public meeting on the State Department’s Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for KXL. This SEIS is required, in part, because the original EIS had failed to properly consider spill risks for the proposed Missouri River crossing, which threatens drinking and irrigation water for Fort Peck and surrounding areas.

There was no hearing; the State Department described the event as an “open-house style meeting” where people seeking to provide comment were directed to State Department stenographers in private areas. The Trump Administration’s strategy was obvious: 1) stifle the power of everyday people to speak collectively in public, and 2) fulfill only the lowest legal requirement for public comment.

The rally, organized by Northern Plains and the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC), became the only setting that allowed folks to speak directly to the press. Coverage ranged from local TV and newspapers to NPR and the Washington Post. Despite the State Department’s best efforts to silence public opinion, people’s voices were heard with a clear message: We will not risk our water and climate for this dangerous, foreign-owned, tar-sands pipeline.

During the comment period, an existing leg of Keystone 1 spilled at least 383,000 gallons in North Dakota, underscoring the danger that the much larger KXL pipeline presents.

On December 20, barely one month after the draft SEIS comment period, the State Department issued a Final SEIS. We should expect that the Trump Administration will push forward with new permits, especially given its new attempts to prevent climate change from even being considered in large projects like this. When they do, we will continue to defend our water and climate against KXL in the courts, in the media, in our communities, and everywhere that people power can make a difference.

-Dustin Ogdin

Climate science, KXL legal victories targeted in proposed NEPA rollback

Early in January, the Trump Administration released a proposal to eviscerate the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), one of America’s bedrock environmental laws. NEPA was signed into law in 1970, and requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of their actions (such as issuing permits, building roads, or managing federal lands) before making decisions. NEPA is the law that gave Americans the right to review and comment on such actions. It ensures that democracy is not an abstract concept; it gives us the tools to meaningfully participate in the decisions that affect our lives.

That right has enabled Northern Plains to protect Montana’s air, land, and water. We have used it to challenge the reckless Keystone XL pipeline and to force the environmental impacts of coal strip mining and coal bed methane drilling to be seriously examined.

We successfully argued in federal court that the State Department’s 2017 Presidential Permit was unlawful because it was issued without adequately considering the cumulative climate impacts of the proposed tar sands pipeline (in addition to other failures to follow the law). The Trump Administration is targeting successful legal challenges like this by directing federal agencies to stop considering the cumulative impacts of proposed projects – and to ignore climate change altogether – in their review processes. While Trump’s proposal to slash NEPA attacks environmental protection in multiple ways, climate science is undoubtedly its chief target. Numerous legal decisions have faulted federal agencies for failing to follow the law, and disregarding the impacts of climate change has been a frequent reason.

A 60-day comment period and two public hearings will accompany these proposed NEPA policy changes. Watch your inbox and our website for information about how to defend this pillar of democracy. Rest assured, the people will not stand for this.

-Dustin Ogdin
DRC establishes permanent recycling project in Glendive

Nearly three years on, Dawson Resource Council’s recycling campaign has seen remarkable growth. What started with brainstorming in basement meeting rooms grew to monthly recycling drives, a community-wide coalition, a successful fundraising drive, and thousands of hours by dedicated, hardworking members.

DRC members are proud to launch their recycling effort, GROW (Glendive Recycles Our Waste), as an independent non-profit organization. GROW is poised to acquire a building, set up a recycling operation, and become a permanent project in Glendive for years to come.

DRC will be forever grateful to have played a role in this effort, and for the hundreds of hours of dedicated members who helped get this project from a big-paper brainstorm to reality.

-Caitlin Cromwell

CCRC ensures protections for water, land and wildlife

Carbon County Resource Council members gathered in the Carbon County Courthouse in November to present their arguments for strengthening the county growth plan to further protect clean water, land, wildlife, and the unique quality of life in Carbon County.

CCRC’s comments and participation were met with great support from the County Commission, who voted to adopt all of CCRC’s proposed changes. CCRC members will work to ensure that the changes are upheld in the coming months before the Commission formally adopts the plan.

-Sydney Ausen

View of the Beartooth Front in Carbon County.
At this year’s Annual Meeting, Central Montana Resource Council was proud to be honored as the affiliate that grew its membership by the largest percentage in 2019.

In October, CMRC hosted a seminar on “Living with Oil & Gas in the Rural West.” Scientists from Montana State University gave a presentation on the social and environmental impacts of oil and gas development in rural communities, and the value of collecting water quality data before (and after) a new oil or gas well is drilled. CMRC looks forward to putting this knowledge to use in their campaign for mandatory baseline water testing!

- Caitlin Cromwell

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**BCC educates community on bison hunt, Crevice mine**

Drawing on the work of Bear Creek Council’s earlier work, members are gaining ground with the Interagency Bison Management Partners (IBMP) over the issue of managing bison carcasses left behind during the annual hunt on the outskirts of Gardiner. The congested nature of the hunt on Yellowstone’s northern border poses safety threats to people and wildlife, and agency decision-makers are paying attention. Bear Creek Council will be a stakeholder group as solutions are deliberated, including the possibility of a carcass compost site.

BCC also teamed up with the Park County Environmental Council to host the Gardiner premiere of “Paradise,” a documentary film by Erik Petersen about the community-wide effort to protect the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem from gold mining (Crevice Mine) on public land. That fight continues.

-Makenna Sellers

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**SPA plans for 2020**

As they ring in a new year, Stillwater Protective Association plans for a busy 2020. This year marks not only the 45th Anniversary of SPA but also the 20th Anniversary of the Good Neighbor Agreement. Both have survived all of these years because of the work of dedicated members.

SPA members involved in the Good Neighbor Agreement have been working diligently to enforce traffic limits, limit man-camps in the valley, and oppose the mine’s efforts to weaken water quality standards via a mixing zone.

-Maggie Gordon

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**CMRC grows its membership**

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-CMRC member and Lewistown rancher Peter Mickelsen accepts the membership growth award on behalf of CMRC.
Council Roundup

SGCC teams up for clean energy

Sleeping Giant Citizens Council and the Northern Plains Clean Energy Task Force made a good team in 2019. From protecting Montana’s rooftop solar users to holding the Public Service Commission and NorthWestern Energy accountable, the Helena affiliate and the statewide task force made big strides for renewable energy. These are big wins worth celebrating!

Beyond the excellent teamwork, SGCC continues to stay diligent on the LED streetlight transition plans with NorthWestern Energy and the city of Helena. Members will be working with city officials in the coming months to schedule a neighborhood street lighting demonstration so residents can determine which lights are best for livability and protecting dark skies.

-Makenna Sellers

SGCC members “Pack the PSC” to stand up for clean energy.

YVCC gears up for a busy new year

Now that the Energy and Conservation Commission has been re-established in Billings, YVCC members are keenly focused on increasing energy sustainability. YVCC member Randy Hafer was selected to chair the Commission.

YVCC is working hard to incorporate more local foods into school district meals. Members have also set their sights on moving toward electric-powered school buses in the future.

Inspired by the success of YBCC’s and CCRC’s Solarize campaigns, YVCC will launch its own Solarize campaign in 2020.

Thank you to everyone who joined us for the Cowboy Supper during the Annual Meeting this year! It was good to see you, and the meals you purchased help support our issue campaigns in the year ahead.

-Tirza Asbell

Inspired by the successful work of other Northern Plains affiliates, YVCC plans to launch a Solarize campaign in Yellowstone County in 2020.
Council Roundup

YBCC welcomes new officers

Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council met in December to celebrate another great year of activism and to elect our leaders for the year ahead. Ken Decker and Joan Kresich will continue as YBCC’s co-chairs and representatives to the Northern Plains Board. Donna Onstott joins YBCC’s leadership as Treasurer and Lauren Dalzell as Secretary. Congrats to our officers! At the meeting, members heard from Jenny Harbine, a lawyer with EarthJustice about what NorthWestern Energy’s 20-year Integrated Resource Procurement Plan means for Montana’s clean energy future.

-Sydney Ausen

Signal Peak Energy fined for failing to monitor springs around coal as BMLA members work for better methods and accountability

Late last year, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality imposed a $115,050 fine on Signal Peak Energy for suspending weekly spring monitoring for three months in late 2018-early 2019. Signal Peak operates Montana’s only underground coal mine, which is located in parts of Musselshell and Yellowstone Counties.

In its order, DEQ noted that the mine missed 73 monitoring commitments. Monitoring is critical in order to provide baseline data to ensure that water bodies damaged by the mine are restored to productive pre-mining conditions.

Bull Mountain Land Alliance members who ranch above and near the mine are meeting with DEQ to advocate for appropriate monitoring and adequate reclamation of mining in the area.

-Svein Newman

CRC finalizes solar project, hosts annual meeting

Cottontwood Resource Council’s long fight to get solar panels installed at Sweet Grass County High School is finally over – they’ll be installed this year! The School Board approved the project in January and has accepted a bid from Harvest Solar.

CRC hosted their Annual Meeting / Potluck in January, where they elected leadership for 2020 and had a Q&A session about the impacts of a Wild and Scenic River Designation on the Boulder. Good food and company was enjoyed by all.

-Mikindra Morin

WHY I’M A MONTHLY SUSTAINER

“From a practical standpoint, you can’t achieve goals without material means. I came in to Northern Plains 35 years ago as part of a personal battle… and through that experience of recognizing that a community has the power to bring a collective balance into discussion and issues, I guess I want to put my money where my mouth is.

I’m on a fixed income and – I don’t want to call it a sacrifice, but – giving monthly is a way for me, personally, to prioritize where my interests lie. I’m still not in the position of having a political or a financial voice but belonging to the Northern Plains community gives me a sense of power. It’s a way of letting my voice speak financially.

Without the experience of being involved with Northern Plains I wouldn’t know where to begin to address issues that are important in my life, I would still be feeling that I am impotent, and I know now that I am not. I credit Northern Plains for really changing my feeling of having a voice.”

-Toni Chew

Visit northernplains.org/donate or call (406) 248-1154 to learn more.

Toni Chew has been a monthly sustainer since 2007.
Northern Plains’ Vision

As 2020 kicks off a new decade and new possibilities for Montana, there is no better time to reflect on Northern Plains’ vision for the future:

We are from the plains and mountains, cities and towns. We are everyday Montanans who love where we live. We stand up, shoulder-to-shoulder, to protect this place we all call home.

We believe that true prosperity begins with healthy land, water, and air. We believe that our families, farms, ranches, schools, businesses, governments, and communities thrive when we are good stewards of these resources. We believe that if we look beyond our fences, listen to one another, and keep our minds open, we will find creative solutions to secure a clean, healthful environment for all.

We are working toward a future where we live in harmony with nature, where our economy serves the people rather than the people serving the economy, where neighbors work side-by-side to build a world that lives up to our ideals of fairness, inclusion, and justice.

To create this future, we must act now. The actions we take today will determine the world that our children and grandchildren inherit. Working together, right now, we can ensure true prosperity for generations to come.