SHINING A LIGHT ON A CORRUPT MARKET

Record Beef Prices, but Ranchers Aren’t Cashing In

"You're feeding America and going broke doing it." After years of consolidation, four companies dominate the meatpacking industry, while many ranchers are barely hanging on.

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C-PACE IS LIVE!

Learn how to bring this innovative clean energy and energy efficiency program to your county.

MEMBERS DEMAND ACTION TO REPAIR BROKEN CATTLE MARKET SYSTEM

What we need to see for upcoming revisions to the USDA’s 1921 Packers and Stockyards Act.


KEEP OUR RIVERS CLEAN

State officials are trying to weaken water pollution protections. Find out how to take action today!

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Northern Plains Resource Council is a grassroots conservation and family agriculture group. Northern Plains organizes Montana citizens to protect our water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life.

### Northern Plains Board of Directors

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<tr>
<th>CHAIR</th>
<th>Joanie Kresich, Livingston</th>
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<td>VICE-CHAIR</td>
<td>Edward Barta, Billings</td>
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<td>Simon Cecil, Billings</td>
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<td>SECRETARY</td>
<td>Deb Muth, Red Lodge</td>
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<td>Rachel Torres, Glendive</td>
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<td>PAST CHAIR</td>
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### At-Large Board Members

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### Affiliate Board Members

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<td>Nellie Isreal, Silver Gate/ Joliet</td>
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<td>Ellen Pfister, Shepherd</td>
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<td>Steve Charter, Shepherd</td>
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<td>Julie Holzer, Red Lodge</td>
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<td>Cottonwood Resource Council</td>
<td>Charlie French, Big Timber</td>
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### Central Montana Resource Council

| Josh Wright, Lewistown |
| Noel Birkland, Lewistown |

### Dawson Resource Council

| June Peterson, Glendive |
| Melissa Mittelstaed, Glendive |

### Rosebud Protective Association

| Clint McRae, Forsyth |

### Sleeping Giant Citizens Council

| Norane Freistadt, Helena |
| Mic Smith, Helena |

### Stillwater Protective Association

| Edward Barta, Billings |
| Tom Heyneman, Fishtail |

### Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council

| Joanie Kresich, Livingston |
| John Gayusky, Livingston |

### Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council

| Emma Kerr-Carpenter, Billings |
| Kris Glenn, Billings |

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The Plains Truth

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

**Membership Dues**

- $1200+ Rider of the Big Sky
- $600 - $1199 Bottom Line Rider
- $51 - $599 Rider
- $50 General Member

**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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Northern Plains Staff

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Paula Berg, Director of Finance & Administration

Jim Cooper, Facility Manager

Caroline Canarios, Legislative Organizer

Caitlin Cromwell, Deputy Director of Organizing & Campaigns

Maggie Gordon, Executive Director

Danielle Jordan, Grant Writer

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Mikindra Morin, Lead Organizer & GNA Manager

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When past board chair Jeanie Alderson passed the baton to me, much more than a friendly “Your turn now” arrived in my hands. True to her deeply thoughtful ways, Jeanie passed along important tips that she knew would save me some stumbles. And along with Jeanie’s knowledge, I received the collective learnings of fifty years of member-leaders and staff.

How can an organization founded decades ago by a small group of ranchers and farmers in eastern Montana be playing such a critical and important role in 2022? For that answer we have to look at the values that are embedded in the ways we work.

Although the small group of Northern Plains founders often described themselves as isolated (and indeed isolated accurately described their daily working lives), they knew they could never prevail as individuals. They needed to come together to have any chance of defeating the big plan to grab the oil and gas in eastern Montana - “rip and run” - a plan that would shake the very foundations of their lives and livelihoods.

Teresa Erickson, staff director for 33 years, tells me in a long phone conversation that those early leaders were absolutely committed – not to consolidating – but to spreading power to as many people as possible. The forming of local affiliates began almost immediately as a way to share leadership horizontally and expand our strength across the state. This is the kind of power we affectionately call “grassroots”. We know that word can be thrown around casually, but, as Teresa noted, the formation of Northern Plains was truly grassroots: it emerged from the ground; from regular people who organized right where they stood, lived, and worked; from people who saw what was needed to protect their communities (and the land upon which all depended) and took action. The actions they took are still reverberating more than fifty years later.

At our fall Annual Meeting, Marshall Ganz, a revered teacher of organizing, praised us: “You folks have been at it a long time. It’s really much to be honored.” We’ve all watched groups wax and wane, but Northern Plains has come through the decades stronger because we’ve built from the core of our values. We’ve grown when local people see unaddressed needs and come together to “use the resources they have to get the power they need to make the change they want”, as Ganz says. Right now that process is beginning again in the Great Falls area as a new affiliate there is emerging (See page 20 to learn more).

During this moment when our Democracy is threatened, our commitment to small “d” democracy and democratic principles remains embedded in all we do. We support people to identify their needs, to advocate for their communities, and to work toward common goals with mutual respect as the binding force. We don’t just build campaigns, we build leaders.

I am deeply honored to be working alongside each of you. In the midst of great challenges before us, I wake each morning with a sense of hope and possibility. I can trace that right back to all of you, to your fearless commitment to facing what must be done and finding endlessly creative ways to take on the big forces. We’re an unstoppable collection of Davids! And we’re stepping into 2022 as powerful and strong as we’ve ever been. Goliath beware!

- Joanie Kresich
Chair
A lifelong love of Montana, the outdoors drives Edward Barta’s work

By Tai Koester

As a Montanan born and raised, Edward Barta speaks passionately about the outdoors. He cites days hunting and fishing with his grandfather on the Musselshell River as formative moments: “Days spent fishing and hunting with my grandfather were some of my most cherished childhood experiences. They were primal, essential events that formed my developing passion for the outdoors and rivers – fishing, canoeing, photographing – just appreciating the natural surroundings.”

That love for Montana and the outdoors continued even as Edward’s career as an educator took him abroad. Between teaching stints in distant places like Poland and Tunisia, Edward always enjoyed his visits back home. “I taught overseas for over 20 years, and whenever I got off the plane and came home to Montana, I always appreciated the clarity of the air,” he recalls. “Pine-scented air if you will.”

Now retired, Edward splits his time between Billings and the small community of Nye in Stillwater County. A lifelong photographer, Edward enjoys shouldering a large format camera to take black and white images of Montana’s riveting natural scenery. His love of Montana and concern about threats to his beloved state – particularly from oil and gas development and climate change – drives his involvement with Northern Plains. “We need wild places for spiritual reasons,” says Edward. “They’re part of who we are, and I feel that we’re losing them relentlessly.”

Edward first got involved through Northern Plains’ Stillwater County affiliate, Stillwater Protective Association (SPA). In 2014, SPA members nominated and elected Edward to be their representative on the Northern Plains Board of Directors. “I think that my enthusiasm for Northern Plains started then,” Edward recalls. “There was just so much going on.” That initial involvement has blossomed into work on Northern Plains’ successful campaign to establish radioactive oil waste rules for Montana, helping lead our campaign to stop NorthWestern Energy’s proposed Laurel methane plant, continued organizing with SPA, and serving as Northern Plains’ current vice-chair.

More recently, Edward’s involvement with Northern Plains’ work on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion has led him to launch a “racial justice reading group” for members. Currently, members are reading Jubilee by Margaret Walker, a story about a biracial woman enslaved during the American Civil War. When asked about what prompted starting the reading group, Edward points to the power of narrative: “I’m a retired teacher, so I’m a strong proponent of using literature to teach life lessons. I’ve taught kids at all levels, and you can talk to them endlessly, but when you find a good book or a good story, that’s what they remember. Books and stories speak to our sensibilities as people.”

Ask Edward why he chooses to dedicate his time to Northern Plains, and he points to the organization’s track record and staff: “I have a deep appreciation for Northern Plains, its solid history, and admiration for all the people that are involved in it.” He adds, “Many of us [members] never thought we’d be in the position we are: speaking publicly at hearings, testifying at the legislature, writing letters to the editor in the paper. Northern Plains sets up everyday people to be in the right place, at the right time, with their message.”

Right: Edward’s large format picture of the Stillwater River near Nye.
The founding members of Northern Plains probably never pictured that nearly 50 years after their first meeting over one hundred people would gather on little screens from all across Montana (and beyond) to cheer the work they set in motion and to unite over carrying it on. For the second year in a row, our Annual Meeting was hosted online and, while the meeting format and issues may be new, the founding values remained true. Our sessions and guest speakers spoke to the core of who we have always been: an organization of neighbors standing side-by-side to speak truth to power and protect, land, air, water, and the rights of everyday people.

One session walked us through problems of investor-owned utilities and the harmful impacts of methane pollution in light of the methane power plant NorthWestern Energy is attempting to build outside of Laurel. This is an urgent issue, as oil and gas production must begin declining immediately for our planet to stay below the 1.5 degree warming threshold, and a crucial one, as “Reducing methane is the easiest knob to turn to change the path of global temperature in the next 10 years” (per the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report 2021).

The continued fight against corporate consolidation in another sector – agriculture – was brought to life in a session with members Gilles Stockton and Steve Charter. Steve, a rancher in Shepherd, spoke to the need for “a coalition of producers, consumers, and those who work in the food industry” because the system as it is now hurts everyone.

In the session “Getting to the roots of ‘Grassroots’”, Chrysti the Wordsmith brought the etymological chops of her daily radio program to explore a word at the core of our identity: “grassroots.” So ubiquitous it’s found all over the planet, one can overlook that “grass and its roots, as we know, stabilize the very soil we live on.” The word “paints a picture of more power in numbers than in form or appearance.” A history presentation led us through half a dozen stories of grassroots triumphs, challenges, and strong leaders throughout our history, all of which revealed, as newly-elected Chair Joanie Kresich said: “An organization with a plan...with a purpose...with a spine.”

We were also thrilled to welcome two powerhouse keynotes to the virtual stage: climate scientist Katharine Hayhoe and organizing scholar Marshall Ganz.

Weaving together facts about the changing energy economy with data on how climate change is “loading the weather dice,” Katharine Hayhoe also spoke to the communication challenges of facing climate change. Dire as the situation is, it turns out we fall on a spectrum where most of us are actually alarmed, concerned, or conscious about climate change. So how do we move our neighbors to take meaningful action? Hayhoe’s research suggests we talk about “Here, now, and in ways that are directly relevant to us… Start with your heart and not your head - talk about what you’re passionate about, talk about where and who and what you love.”

Katharine Hayhoe, our Friday keynote speaker, spoke to the ways we can meet the challenge of communicating about climate change.

Continued on page 6.
Continued from page 5.

Marshall Ganz gave a flash course on organizing theory and practice that was even more excellent than we could have imagined. We highly recommend you find the recording on our YouTube channel on any day you need a push. For a taste, he spoke of the balance needed between criticality - seeing, knowing, feeling the world’s hurt - while at the same time, accessing the world’s hope: “And I don’t mean flowers in May. Hope is belief in the plausibility of the possible as opposed to the necessity of the probable. To be a realist, it is always probable that Goliath will win. But sometimes David does. It’s that sense of the possible between fantasy and certainty. That’s where hope lies.” Through all our presenters, a natural theme arose celebrating leadership that speaks to the head and the heart – leading from a place of rationality but always imbued with values, compassion, care, and emotion. We’ll be holding on to this in the year ahead and appreciate each of you who represent this ethos every day.

Thank you to everyone who joined the Annual Meeting and to all who helped prepare or present sessions! If you missed the meeting or want to revisit any of the programming, you can find recordings of all the sessions on our YouTube channel at this link: northernplains.org/2021meeting

As we welcome 2022, we also enter our 50th year as an organization. We look forward to marking the occasion in several ways and are excited to invite you to a 50th Anniversary celebration June 4th in Billings. It will take place outdoors and offer a chance for us all to mingle and reunite in person (we hope). More details coming soon – we hope to see you there!

Annual honors awarded for spirit and determination

By Claire Overholt

Bob Tully Spirit Award – Deb Muth

Each year, Northern Plains recognizes two members with our annual awards.

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. Last year’s recipient Joanie Kresich presented the Bob Tully Award this year to Deb Muth of Red Lodge.

Deb was nominated for her experience, hours of dedication, and inspiration to Northern Plains members:

“Deb’s leadership and enthusiasm was one of the things that led me to become involved in Carbon Country Resource Council. She is truly dedicated to protecting the environment not only in her work with Northern Plains but in her everyday life as well. She talks the talk but also walks the walk.”

Deb has served on the Northern Plains Board over the past seven years as assistant secretary, assistant treasurer, and this year as secretary. She is also a member of the Organization and Finance Task Force, collaborates with the Oil and Gas Task Force, served on the WORC Board, and for the past six years has been the secretary of the Agriculture Task Force. Deb has been continuously involved with Northern Plains affiliate Carbon County Resource Council for the past 22 years, serving in nearly every leadership role, including chair.

Deb is also dedicated to her hometown of Red Lodge – attending planning board and City Council meetings and staying involved in campaigns for farm to school, solar energy, recycling, climate protection, and child wellness. Thank you for your hard work and dedication, Deb!
Mary Donohoe “Tell it Like it Is” Award – Emma Kerr-Carpenter

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.

This year, that member was Emma Kerr-Carpenter of Billings. Last year’s winner, Ed Gulick, presented the Donohoe Award to Emma as a member who was not afraid to speak the truth forcefully in the high stakes and often contentious environment of the state legislature.

Emma has testified in Helena on behalf of our issues and fellow members, and also went to bat for a number of our issues by carrying our message as a state legislator, representing Billings’ 49th House District. This last legislative session was tough, but Emma kept us in the loop, helped develop strategy, and didn’t beat around the bush about difficult situations (telling it like it is to legislators, members, and our lobbying team). She also demonstrated her commitment to include everyday people in public processes as she and another legislator led regular video updates to help the public follow along at the legislature.

For years, Emma has spoken up for Northern Plains externally at events and rallies and has also been vocal internally, including as a critical voice in the formation of Northern Plains’ Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force. Emma is a straight shooter, a fierce advocate for our values, and always stands up for what’s right. Thank you, Emma, for all you do!

Affiliate Awards

Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council (Billings) won the “Most New Members in an Affiliate” award. Bear Creek Council (Gardiner) was presented with the award for “Largest Percentage of New Members”.

Elections

Please welcome our newest board members: Craig McClure of Polson and Ita Killeen of Bozeman (At-Large Rep.), as well as our new Board Chair, Joanie Kresich of Livingston, and Vice-Chair, Edward Barta of Billings!

To our outgoing Board members...

Thank you for your service and time on the Board: Becky Mitchell (Past Chair), Roxa Reller (outgoing Vice-Chair), John Brown (At-Large Rep.), and Alaina Buffalo Spirit (At-Large Rep.)
Grassroots democracy is woven into everything we do at Northern Plains. Northern Plains members determine our positions and strategy, determine what we’ll work on and how we’ll work on it, and (most importantly) actually carry out the work to advance our campaigns.

Ensuring that everyone has a say in how we do things leads to a more enduring commitment to this work, as evidenced by our reaching the impressive milestone of a 50th Annual Meeting. And while we were sad that this milestone meeting had to be conducted virtually to keep everyone safe, our commitment to democratic processes ensured a lively and robust discussion for our only policy resolution in 2021 despite the challenges of an online meeting.

Resolution 2021-01, which states Northern Plains’ formal opposition to new or expanded fossil fuel projects in Montana, was developed by members who devote a great deal of time and attention to our clean energy work. Many of the members involved in drafting the resolution language have been involved in our campaign to stop the proposed NorthWestern Energy methane plant in Laurel, the first of eight new methane plants NorthWestern wants to build in Montana (see pg. __ for more about these methane plants).

After a summer of record drought and destructive wildfires, after (more) dire warnings from leading climate scientists about the need to transition away from fossil fuels, after seeing Montana’s largest monopoly utility company continue to ignore renewables while pushing for expanded fossil fuel use, and after considering how our mission compels us to “protect our water, land, air, and working landscapes, always considering the next generation,” members were ready to draw a line in the sand. “Enough is enough,” is how Billings member Mary Fitzpatrick summed it up in one conversation about the fossil fuel resolution.

Proponents of this resolution did not take the gravity of this proposition lightly. Members were careful to write a resolution that spoke only to new or expanded fossil projects. Even still, there was an understanding that this resolution was a bold step for Northern Plains.

Ed Gulick introduced the resolution during the Meeting of the Membership, using Robert’s Rules of Order to discuss the draft and consider amendments. True to form, members engaged in a very thoughtful discussion. The conversation was centered on how Northern Plains can best build grassroots power and whether this resolution helps us achieve that goal. After careful deliberation and consideration of multiple perspectives, members voted in strong support of the resolution.

As always, our mission, our values, and our history were the guiding principles in adopting a resolution that helps us “develop an affordable, just, and clean energy future for Montana that meets the demands and challenges of the 21st century.” Those same values were equally important to the process of developing and adopting this resolution, so thank you to everyone who took the time to meaningfully engage with, and embody, the tenets of grassroots democracy.

You can read the full resolution on the next page.
A RESOLUTION OF THE MEMBERS OF NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL STATING OUR OPPOSITION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW OR EXPANDED FOSSIL FUEL ENERGY PROJECTS IN MONTANA.

WHEREAS, our mission compels us to “organize Montanans to protect our water, land, air, and working landscapes, always considering the next generation;” and

WHEREAS, fossil fuel energy production and consumption are the largest contributors to greenhouse gas climate pollution, diminish our air and water quality, and threatens our land and agricultural spaces; and

WHEREAS, Montana communities are today experiencing diminished quality and enjoyment of life in the form of increased droughts, wildfires, impacts to public health, polluted and diminished aquifers, rising water temperatures, and threats to family agriculture due to climate disruption and its effects on air, water, and land; and

WHEREAS, the overwhelming consensus of global climate scientists finds that mitigating the most devastating consequences of climate change will require abstaining from the use of fossil fuels due to the intensity of their carbon pollution; and

WHEREAS, Northern Plains members have ratified resolutions as early as the 5th Annual Meeting in 1976, expressing support for harvesting renewable energy from the sun, the wind, bio-fuels, and other renewable energy sources, and resolutions No. 2007-2 and No. 2019-1 compelling us to support specific government laws and actions intended to address the climate crisis;

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

That Northern Plains’ members formally oppose 1) the creation of any new fossil fuel plants, projects, or pipelines in Montana; and 2) the expansion of any fossil fuel plants, projects, or pipelines in Montana; as we work to develop an affordable, just, and clean energy future for Montana that meets the demands and challenges of the 21st century.

-HAVE YOU PLANNED YOUR GIVING FOR 2022?

Have you thought about your giving strategy for 2022? Are taxes on your mind this time of year? One strategy to minimize your tax responsibilities is as simple as directing some of your (minimum required distribution) IRA to Northern Plains – you won’t incur capital gains income on the donated portion of the distribution!

Or, if you anticipate a major life event this year that involves highly appreciated assets (like selling your home, ranch, or business), you may also consider a planned giving strategy. There are several types of planned gifts that qualify for extra deductions - including gifts that return the assets to heirs of your choice. If you are interested in learning more, contact Caleb at caleb@northernplains.org.
In late 2020 and 2021 we continued to create memories and make change that will go down in Northern Plains’ history. As always, our member-leaders are the driving force behind our success. Below are just a few of the big achievements we were able to take part in over the past year.

Clean Energy
- We passed C-PACE (Commercial Property-Assessed Capital Enhancements) in the 2021 legislature after six years of organizing!
- We stopped several bad renewable energy bills in the Montana legislature that attempted to make renewable technologies more expensive and less accessible to Montanans.
- We helped advance rural electric co-op efforts to develop democratic policies and incorporate renewable energy sources.
- Six of our local affiliates organized Solarize efforts to help residents overcome barriers to implementing residential solar and use pooled resources to save costs.

Coal & Oil
- President Biden revoked the Keystone XL pipeline’s Presidential Permit after demands from tribal and conservation coalitions that included Northern Plains.
- We voted to oppose a proposed gas plant that would be built just outside of Billings.
- We participated in the federal methane rulemaking process.
- We began work to address orphaned and abandoned oil and gas wells in Montana.
- After winning a robust cleanup plan for Colstrip from the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Northern Plains worked to ensure this plan remained intact under the new administration.
- We stopped NorthWestern Energy’s efforts at the Montana legislature to remove consumer protections, ensuring they cannot pass along the costs of bad energy investments to Montana energy customers without oversight and public input.
- We battled legislation that would have weakened Montana’s coal reclamation laws and successfully added amendments to strengthen bond retention and safeguard water quality provisions.
- We defended and organized ranchers and community members in the Bull Mountains to stand up for their land and water rights in the face of a potential Signal Peak mine expansion.
- Northern Plains submitted almost 70 pages of comments in concert with key allies during the review of the federal coal leasing program.
- Jeanie Alderson gave testimony to a U.S. congressional committee as part of the Biden administration’s effort to review the federal coal program speaking about connections between the federal coal program and climate change, agricultural impacts, and the increasing problem of coal seam fires.

Good Neighbor Agreement
- We continued to watchdog mine expansion activities, ensuring traffic safety and minimizing the mine’s footprint wherever possible in the Stillwater and Boulder valleys.

Agriculture and Soil
- We convened a major group of stakeholders to develop a soil health policy committee, and have convened the group’s policy committee throughout the year.
- We advanced country-of-origin labeling by working with the Montana Farmers Union and Montana Cattlemen’s Association to draft our Montana country-of-origin labeling bill for the 2021 session.
- We met with Senator Tester’s staff to ask him to introduce a standalone COOL bill into Congress, helping result in his introduction of the American Beef Labeling Act.
- We held the 6th Annual Montana Local Food Challenge to raise support for local food. The event attracted 107 participants across Montana.
- We attended the Montana Farm-to-School Summit.
- We hosted two soil crawl events drawing attendees from across the state to learn about “Saline Seeps, Bale Grazing and Cheatgrass” and to tour the XX Bar Ranch and learn about their soil practices.
Building our Strength

- We completed an organizing assessment in Cascade County with over 100 one-on-one meetings and plan to launch a new affiliate in the region.
- We hosted a virtual “Energy Summit” drawing participants from across Montana to talk about current energy issues and our shared vision for Montana’s future. A total of 102 people registered for the event!
- We recruited 345 new members to Northern Plains.
- We moved the DEI committee to a task force, solidifying our permanent commitment to advance equity in our work.
- We formally established a history task force committed to documenting, recording, and sharing Northern Plains’ history with our membership and the public.
- We conducted an intensive phone canvass during the 2021 legislature that identified many new membership prospects, and inspired action on a number of important bills.

THANK YOU for everything you did to help build this list of accomplishments!

AGRICULTURE

Tell Senator Steve Daines to co-sponsor the American Beef Labeling Act

By Caroline Canarios

At Northern Plains, we believe consumers deserve the right to choose USA beef, and ranchers deserve the right to an honest market. Currently, our country’s meatpackers can label imported beef “Product of USA” without consequence, and beef remains one of the few products without County-of-Origin Labeling (COOL).

There is a bill that can fix this problem and bring back mandatory COOL for beef: The American Beef Labeling Act. This bill, sponsored by Senators Thune (SD), Tester (MT), Rounds (SD), and Booker (NJ), is currently seeking co-sponsors to get more congressional support. An additional six senators have signed on as co-sponsors. Missing from that list is Montana’s Senator Steve Daines. It’s time he takes meaningful action to support family ranchers by signing on to support this bill.

Northern Plains hosted a week of action from January 24th-28th! Members joined in phonebanking, writing letters to Senator Daines’ office, posting on social media, and taking robust action to ask Senator Daines to co-sponsor the American Beef Labeling Act. At the time this issue went to press, we had not heard his response.

To learn if Senator Daines has signed onto the bill or to learn how you can take action, call Caroline at 406-248-1154.
Upcoming USDA rulemaking provides opportunity to reform corrupt cattle market

By Caroline Canarios

Our family ranchers are barely making ends meet while corporate meatpackers celebrate record profits. It’s a story we’ve lived for decades and a tough campaign Northern Plains has had to fight with one arm tied behind our back given the wealth and political power of the packers. But the ground is shifting, and we’re back at it with renewed hope and more momentum than ever!

You might have seen The New York Times article on December 27th where our members Steve Charter, Annika Charter, and Jeanie Alderson spoke to this issue, giving national attention to the crisis facing family ranching. “People shouldn’t be worried about us, because we’re kind of quaint, and it’s nice to have the cowboys out there,” Steve told the Times. “We need a food system that serves everyone, and not just a handful of companies.”

As this issue is finally getting more attention from the public and politicians alike, we are gearing up for the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s upcoming rulemaking on the 1921 Packers and Stockyards Act. This bill was originally passed to break up the beef packers of the early 20th century, but its enforcement has been eroded since the 1980s, resulting in a broken bill that is in need of a decisive, meaningful update.

We will be asking the USDA to include the following two provisions during the rulemaking to restore fairness and transparency to a system the packers are currently abusing:

1. No packer shall procure cattle for slaughter through the use of formula or basis price forward contracts. All forward contracts used by packers for purchase of cattle slaughter supplies shall contain a firm base price that can be equated to a specific dollar amount at the time the contract is entered into and be offered or bid in an open public manner.

2. No packer shall own and feed cattle unless those cattle are sold for slaughter in an open public market.

These two provisions will bring back open markets and competition to the cattle industry, ensuring fair prices for both family ranchers and consumers.

We will make sure all Northern Plains members have the necessary tools, messages, and information to comment on this issue. Keep an eye on your mailboxes and inboxes!

To stay informed on this issue and learn more, contact Caroline at caroline@northernplains.org or (406) 248-1154.

Jeanie Alderson and her father, Irv, were among the members interviewed by The New York Times on reforming corruption in the livestock market. Image from NYTimes.com. Photograph by Erin Schaff.
GOOD NEIGHBOR AGREEMENT

The GNA Water Quality Adaptive Management Plan reaches another milestone

You might remember at the end of 2020 we celebrated the completion of Water Quality Adaptive Management Plans that would strengthen water quality limits in the Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA). It was a huge milestone that took over four years to reach.

The next step for our members was to officially amend the GNA – the legally binding agreement itself – to include the Adaptive Management Plans. As of December, we took a huge leap toward that goal. We officially agreed with Stillwater Mining Company on revision language! Now it will head to the lawyers to make sure it is strong, enforceable language and does not conflict with anything in the rest of the contract. Not only are these strong water quality protection plans in place for watersheds in Stillwater and Sweet Grass counties, but they will soon be legally binding to boot.

The Adaptive Management Plans implement stronger monitoring measures to prevent groundwater contamination near the East Boulder Mine.

SOIL

Montana Soil Outreach Initiative launches, seeks producer input

At the 2021 legislative session, Northern Plains and ally groups introduced SB 180, which would have directed the state to establish a task force charged with identifying how Montana can increase the adoption of healthy soils practices. Although SB 180 ultimately failed to garner enough votes, it spurred productive conversations within the agricultural community.

Fast forward to 2022, as those conversations have turned into action. Northern Plains, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Montana Association of Conservation Districts, the Montana Watershed Coordination Council, and others have launched the Montana Soil Outreach Initiative, which asks producers, “What more might be done to better support farmers and ranchers in managing soils in Montana?” The Initiative aims to identify ways Montana may increase the pace and scale at which land stewards implement voluntary practices and systems.
to maintain and improve soil health, which benefits the long term economic and ecological vitality of agriculture in our state.

Northern Plains invites its members who are producers and/or agriculture professionals to participate in this initiative. Those interested can respond to a short online survey and consider attending one of six focus groups hosted in various cities across the state (virtual options also available). Responses collected via surveys and focus group sessions will inform recommendations for the state to be captured in a written report that will be publicly available in August. This is a great opportunity to shape Montana’s soil health future.

Members may directly find the survey and sign up for a focus group at MontanaSoilOutreach.macdnet.org. Alternatively, reach out to our soil organizers, Tai and Gusty, for more information at (406) 248-1154.

Signal Peak Energy: A “den of thieves” who can no longer hide underground

By Bronya Lechtman

While you may have heard rumors about a reckless coal mine operation in Montana’s Bull Mountains, we wanted to make sure everyone knows the facts about them. Sadly, most of the rumors you have heard are true.

Signal Peak Energy, LLC (SPE) is the operator of the Bull Mountain Mine No. 1, Montana’s only underground coal mine. In 2021, they produced 7,246,556 tons of coal, according to the Montana Department of Labor and Industry. For reference, that’s about one million tons more than the Westmoreland Rosebud Mine - the mine that powers the Colstrip power plants - produced this past year. In 2021, 95% of SPE’s coal was exported across the Pacific to countries such as Japan, South Korea, and China according to the Montana Department of Commerce.

SPE is made up of three parent companies, two of which have been convicted of heavy criminal charges. Reuters has reported that one, Gunvor Commodities Trading, was levied a $95 million fine in 2019 due to corruption and bribery in Congo, and another, FirstEnergy Corp, was sentenced to a $230 million settlement for wrongfully charging ratepayers. The Columbus Dispatch has reported that parent company number three, Boich Companies, and FirstEnergy Corp are both under investigation for giving cash to ‘dark money’ groups to
ensure that a bill in the Ohio legislature granting a $1 billion-plus ratepayer-funded bailout of two nuclear power plants was passed.

As for Signal Peak, the apple does not fall far from the tree. In 2019, during the prosecution of a former SPE executive for swindling $2.4 million from the company, a federal prosecutor called SPE “a den of thievery.” In October 2021, SPE admitted to criminal charges on four counts of willful violation of health and safety standards. This included the illegal pumping of wastewater in 2013 and 2015 into abandoned mine sections, and bribing employees to cover up injuries received at work in 2018. One individual had his finger amputated due to a work-related injury and was pressured by the company’s vice president at the time to not report his injury. The injured worker was bribed with $2,000, which is described in a Department of Justice press release. That release continued to say:

“The Signal Peak Energy prosecution is part of a broad corruption investigation into mine management and operations that resulted in not only worker safety and environmental misdemeanor convictions, but also in individual convictions and charges for some former mine officials and associates for embezzlement, tax evasion, bank fraud, money laundering, drugs and firearms violations.”

Fraud. Money laundering. Illegal dumping of toxic waste. Bribery. Drugs. Firearms. These are the actions of the corporate “neighbors” that communities in the Bull Mountains and Roundup have to contend with. For years, Northern Plains members in this region have had to deal with wells being dried up, subsidence, and pressure from SPE to sell their land to them, an age-old tactic of coal companies seeking to get landowners out of the way so no one will hold them accountable for their actions. For too long, our members have dealt with the underhanded tactics of this underground mining company.

This past year, more and more landowners in the Bulls are growing uneasy. SPE’s mining activity is approaching more densely populated areas, putting a whole new group of landowners at risk. Within their current mine plan, SPE is projected to continue mining until 2030. While most U.S. coal companies are looking to wind down operations given the declining coal market, SPE submitted a Notice of Intent to expand their “Facilities Exploration Area”, which is typically the first step associated with seeking a permit expansion.

Northern Plains and Bull Mountain Land Alliance members have been working tirelessly to protect our communities and the viability of agriculture in the Bulls in the face of this massive, corrupt company that has been able to operate above the law for far too long. In February, SPE will be transitioning to a new CEO, and we hope that this leadership will be more just and transparent; however, their long history of misdeeds can no longer be hidden underground. It is time for Montanans to start paying a whole lot more attention to SPE.
Recollections from 50 years ago: The first “Annual Meeting” of Northern Plains

By Pat Sweeney

Editor’s note: After reaching our milestone 50th Annual Meeting last November, we thought members might be curious to learn more about the first meeting in 1972. The following recollection was provided by Pat Sweeney, an original member of the Northern Plains staff who later served as Staff Director. Pat served on Northern Plains staff from 1972 to 1982 and helped found the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC).

The first annual meeting of Northern Plains was held in the fall of 1972 – or at least that’s the meeting we have dubbed the first annual meeting.

The meeting was called because the first Chair of Northern Plains, Dick Colberg, had resigned. Dick, related to the Redding’s of Sarpy Creek, had stepped in as Chair when Northern Plains was started in April of 1972. Now he was running for the legislature on controlling strip mining. He eventually won that 1972 race and was part of Northern Plains’ historic work to pass model reclamation legislation.

But that night a group of Northern Plains members convened a meeting at the home of Kit Muller in Billings, Montana. Kit, along with a handful of recent college graduates including myself and some ranch kids, formed the core of the first staff. We often met at the Muller home off of Virginia Lane.

A crowd of 20 or more ranchers and supporters met that night to plot the next moves for stopping the vision developed in the North Central Power Study, one where eastern Montana was part of a “National Sacrifice Zone” devoted to coal strip mining and energy development. This included work to further develop the fledgling Northern Plains.

When the question of a new Chair to succeed Dick came up, I remember Bob Tully, a Bull Mountain rancher and one of the founders of Northern Plains, standing up next to the big fireplace in the home and nominating Ellen Pfister. Ellen had recently returned to Montana and her family’s ranch in the Bull Mountains having graduated from law school and private practice.

Bob said here is a person who has been researching the mining laws, has a law degree, and knows ranching and our concerns. Ellen, I remember, was a bit taken aback by the nomination. There were no other nominations that night. Ellen was elected unanimously, and she stepped up to leadership that first annual meeting.

We also created a by-laws committee chaired by Republican state senator George Darrow, a Billings geologist and an early Northern Plains supporter. I was asked to serve on the committee. And, oh my god, I can’t believe that that night started my 50-year career of dealing with by-laws! And organizational development, and capacity, to say nothing of partnering with Ellen and the Northern Plains rancher members on strip mine reclamation.

Sound like a typical annual meeting? Well that was “officially” Northern Plains’ first annual meeting.

As I reflect on that night 50 years later, I realize how Ellen’s election set the stage for the future. A talented, often reluctant member who is asked to step up, again often out of their comfort zone, to provide leadership.

Thank you, Ellen.

And thank you, Jeanne Alderson, and now, Joan Kresich, for stepping up to chair Northern Plains some 50 years later.
A harrowing alternative history: Montana without Northern Plains

We have come a long way since the earliest days of gathering in a Billings family living room in 1972, but the courage, tenacity, and grassroots determination of our earliest members and first staff set the template for fifty years of successful work to come. But what if those brave ranchers and passionate young staffers had not stood up, had never collaborated, and never took those first steps to build one of the most powerful community organizing groups in the nation? What might Montana look like today without Northern Plains members doing the hard work of protecting our air, land, water, climate, and communities? Well, retired Staff Director Teresa Erickson led us through a satirical (but poignant) presentation at the 50th Annual Meeting, presenting that alternative history, and we thought Plains Truth readers might enjoy seeing some of the images from this dark, absurd vision! You can watch Teresa’s full presentation (followed by some inspiring member stories about the real history of Northern Plains) at: NorthernPlains.org/History-Stories.

Without Northern Plains...

Out-of-state garbage would have become Montana’s new way of “gaining ground.” Politicians and planners would begin piling up the garbage in heaps with the goal of building a whole new mountain range for outdoor recreation in Eastern Montana.

Family farms and ranches would have completely vanished from rural Montana, leaving us only with corporate operations and billionaire playground-ranches.

Billings would have the worst air pollution in the nation with a haze of grey, toxic smog hovering throughout the Yellowstone Valley.

We wouldn’t have a Good Neighbor Agreement, and as a result, the Boulder and Stillwater Rivers would be polluted, full of algae, and devoid of fish.

Enjoy a smoother float on the algae-enhanced Stillwater River!
Thanks to the hard work and tenacity of Northern Plains members, Montanans can now make affordable, important clean energy upgrades to their property with C-PACE!

Passed by Northern Plains during the 2021 legislative session, Commercial Property-Assessed Capital Enhancements (C-PACE) allows Montanans to access up to 100% upfront financing from a participating lender to make energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades to their property. Property owners (including farmers and ranchers) then pay the cost of those upgrades back as an assessment on their property’s annual tax bill over time.

The C-PACE program is now up and running thanks to the hard work of our friends at the Montana Facility Finance Authority who run the Montana C-PACE program. Programs like this can take several years in rule making and program development before they are available for use, but MFFA built the C-PACE program in nine months! Check it out at LastBestPACE.com.

But we still have work to do to ensure C-PACE can be used by Montanans in every corner of the state. We need counties to “opt in” to the statewide C-PACE program created by MFFA. Do you want to see C-PACE enabled in your county? Great! Northern Plains has developed a toolkit to help members and affiliates run a local campaign to enable C-PACE. You can find it here: NorthernPlains.org/C-PACE-Implementation-Toolkit.

Questions about C-PACE? Contact Emily Auld at (406) 248-1154 or emily@northernplains.org.
For some time now we have talked about the possibility of getting solar panels or even if it would be feasible. Feasible in a couple of different ways. First, would going solar in eastern Montana even pay for itself? Second, who would be able to install such a system?

This past winter, we participated in a webinar held by Dawson Resource Council, our local Northern Plains affiliate, where Montanans shared their personal experiences with going solar. This, along with the tax breaks, convinced us solar was the way to go. Thanks to the efforts of Dawson Resource Council’s Solarize Glendive campaign, a solar installer, Thirsty Lake Solar, came to Glendive and did a site assessment at no cost to us. The assessment showed us how many panels we'd need, how the panels would be arranged, and how this would affect our energy bill.

Within a couple of months, our solar panels were installed after securing a loan through the Montana Department of Environmental Quality for the project. We were then given a tutorial by the installer on how to operate the system which took about ten minutes. We also installed an app that works with the system that shows us how much energy is being produced and how well everything is working.

Once the install was completed, Montana-Dakota Utilities tested our solar system for a week to make sure it was operating within their specifications. Finally, in late October, our system was up and producing energy from the sun.

Since we were one of the first installations in the area, there has been a learning curve about the whole process, and we hope others can benefit from our experience in order to make the transition to solar as seamless as possible. As far as how well our system works, we’ll have to let it soak up the sun over the winter and into the summer before we will be able to reach any solid conclusions.

Just a couple of other points. After our system was installed, we got a call from Thirsty Lake Solar wondering if we had any questions or concerns. They are very committed to making sure we have a professionally-installed quality product. Jeff Wongstrom - the owner, installer, and electrician - even changed a corroded 100 amp main breaker for us. One of the things we learned as the process went along is that our energy provider demands that a solarized home have liability coverage of one million dollars. That added about $10/month onto our home insurance. It’s planned that our system will pay for itself in about 15 years, and the system has a 20 year warranty.

During this whole process, we have had a lot of people driving by and looking. A few skeptics have given us their opinion of the “solar thing,” but for the most part people are looking to see if this can actually work. Our system produced enough electricity in November that our electric bill was cut in half. Not bad for short days of late fall.

Bruce and Sue Peterson in front of their new solar installation at their home in Glendive. Thanks to their new panels, their electric bill was cut in half in November.

Our experience going solar with Solarize Glendive

By Bruce and Sue Peterson, Dawson Resource Council members
Northern Plains has twelve local affiliates across Montana, and we believe deeply in our affiliate structure. Why? Affiliates keep us grounded in our communities, and engage people where they live by tapping into immediate concerns and issues.

Affiliates are also the building blocks of our power. They’re a key avenue for new members of Northern Plains to join, get involved in improving their communities, and build power. They’re where leaders emerge, develop, and practice leadership and organizing skills.

Every so often, we take a chance to step back, look at the big picture, and determine if there is both a need and an opportunity to develop a new affiliate. In 2021, Northern Plains board and leaders did just that! Our leaders asked:

- How do we build the power we need to reassert the values of justice, environmental stewardship, and democracy at the state and local levels?
- Are there places in Montana where, if Northern Plains were to organize, we would build the grassroots leadership and power needed to win on our issues and further our movements?

The answer? Yes -- there are plenty of places that could further our movement and deepen our power! In this instance, our leadership identified Great Falls and the surrounding area as the particular place demanding our focus and evaluation.

Northern Plains spent this past summer and fall doing a deep organizing assessment in the Great Falls area, talking to people about their community and what they care about. The assessment had rich results – and we’re officially forming an affiliate in the area!

A group of leaders local to the area has been leading the next stage of actually building an affiliate there. They’ve chosen to include Cascade, Teton, Chouteau, and Pondera counties. The rest – affiliate name, local campaigns, and more – remains to be seen! We’re proud of the work this group is doing, and eager to help them launch their new organization and welcome them into the Northern Plains affiliate network in the spring of this year.

Stay tuned for more! If you have questions or live in one of the counties included and would like to be in the loop, contact Caitlin at caitlin@northernplains.org or (406) 248-1154.

Why I am a Monthly Sustainer...

Why Northern Plains? I’ve been a member for a long time and the work of Northern Plains is still needed. Huge challenges like climate change can feel pretty overwhelming, so groups of people that have a history of effectively working at the local level are pretty significant to me. When I support Northern Plains’ work, it enables my neighbors to become experts in areas that they want to, it means cooperation and leadership involvement, and it supports the volunteer aspect of the organization.

I’m especially appreciative of the community-building aspect of what Northern Plains does, including in cooperation with the Western Organization of Resource Councils. That partnership provides trainings and resources for communities to be able to address their local problems and – with the challenges facing communities now – there’s so much we can learn by working together.

Why give monthly? I remember seeing a friend in a Plains Truth profile and thinking, “Oh that’s a good idea”. I know it’s easier for me to just have that monthly donation come out automatically – to be honest sometimes I haven’t been a current member just because I get busy with other things.

And I know, personally, how wonderful it is to have a stable source of income. I don’t think the amount is so important, it’s the idea of helping Northern Plains and the people that work there make it easier to feel like you’ve got a stable source of income for certain things. Anything involving grants or volunteer work especially takes energy and it makes the organization more effective by having that regular giving.

- Peg Hart, Billings
NorthWestern Energy attempts to sidestep public to build Laurel methane plant

Because of widespread public opposition, NorthWestern Energy is once again attempting to sidestep public input to construct a dangerous, polluting methane plant in Laurel. Following a Laurel City Council meeting where 40 community members showed up to urge the Council to vote “no” on a zone change, NorthWestern Energy saw the writing on the wall and withdrew their application from the city. Now, the zoning change is in limbo.

Northern Plains is preparing for NorthWestern Energy’s next move. We anticipate the monopoly utility corporation will instead attempt to get the zoning approved through the Yellowstone County Commission, traditionally a much friendlier body of government for oil and gas development. NorthWestern has failed to clearly and promptly notify the public of these changes, a clear sign to us that it is trying its best to quiet the voices of the Montanans who will be on the hook to pay for all the construction, maintenance, operation, and supply costs of this expensive plant.

But our voices will not be silenced. We’re busy planning our next actions to make sure our members and the community are heard loud and clear, including a People’s Hearing on February 10.

To learn more about the methane plant and the People’s Hearing, contact Shel at shelby@northernplains.org or (406) 248-1154.

Pushing EPA to muzzle methane pollution and protect our climate

Want some good news for a change? The Biden administration’s Environmental Protection Agency prioritized climate action this fall by introducing new, stronger protections around methane from the oil and gas sector.

The EPA first tackled oil and gas methane pollution in 2016 during the Obama administration. Those rules were rescinded by the Trump administration, but then revived in 2021 by Congress. Now, the Biden administration is proposing both strengthening the original rules and expanding the rules’ coverage to existing oil and gas wells (instead of just new wells).

Why does this matter? Because pollution from methane causes 25% of today’s global warming. Cutting methane pollution from the oil and gas industry is one of the fastest ways we can slow climate change.

Issued in November 2021, the EPA’s latest proposal includes:

- Prohibiting regular venting and requiring operators to route gas to a sales line where available
- Strengthening methane pollution monitoring
- Covering existing sources of oil and gas operations, in addition to new sources (did you know there are nearly 1 million older, pre-existing oil and gas wells under federal oversight?!) We believe – and demand – that they can do all this and more. During a comment period that ended January 31, Northern Plains members pushed the EPA to make sure that regular monitoring at all small wells, an end to routine flaring, and standards that would address leaks from abandoned wells all make it into the final rules.

As Northern Plains member Sue Beug puts it, “The health and wealth of our country depends on stopping the release of methane into our communities and our atmosphere.”

With questions or for more information, contact Caitlin at caitlin@northernplains.org.
Jeanie Alderson testifies before U.S. Congress

Jeanie Alderson, Birney rancher and past chair of Northern Plains, testified virtually in front of the U.S. Congress about the need to reform the federal coal program. The hearing came as the Department of Interior explores updates to the federal coal leasing program. Jeanie described the impacts that coal production has on our land, water, climate, and agricultural communities. She urged the Bureau of Land Management to craft coal policies that address climate change in the midst of changing energy markets while creating a just transition for workers and coal-dependent communities.

Jeanie testifying in DC all the way from her ranch in Birney!

Members show up to oppose the Laurel methane plant

Our members in Billings and Laurel are showing up in force, organizing and testifying to stop the Laurel methane plant. In November, Larry Bean and Kasey and Aaron Felder led a door-to-door canvass in Laurel to collect over 30 signatures opposing the plant.

Later that month, over 35 people, more than five of whom were Northern Plains members, showed up to testify in opposition to the plant at a critical Laurel City Council hearing.

Members and community members packed the Laurel City Council meeting in November to testify against the Laurel methane plant.

Sue Beug testifies before the EPA

Red Lodge member Sue Beug testified during a recent Environmental Protection Agency hearing as the agency drafts new rules to limit the amount of methane polluted during oil and gas development. Sue shared her family’s story, detailing the harmful health impacts they experienced living near gas production.

“On our farm in Colorado, the oil well was less than one thousand feet from another gas well,” Sue said in her testimony. “My parents’ home was in the middle. They both suffered from respiratory diseases and died with that being a major contributing factor.

“Did these wells contribute to their breathing problems and death? I will never know but I would like others to be protected in the future.”
MEMBERS ON THE MOVE
Northern Plains ranchers elevate broken cattle market system in New York Times

Northern Plains ranching members made a big splash on the front page of the New York Times on December 27. Steve Charter, Annika Charter, Ressa Charter, Jeanie Alderson, Terry Punt, and Gilles Stockton all spent time with Times reporters (including a photographer and podcast producer), who spent a week in Montana reporting about the crisis in family ranching due to corruption and illegal market manipulations by the “Big Four” meatpackers. The stories, insights, and expertise our members shared resulted in a major story in the nation’s newspaper of record, and the results were immediate. Politicians issued press statements in support of reform. The Biden Administration publicly announced a $1 billion fund to help fund smaller meat processing plants only days later. Northern Plains members made are speaking up at a time when meaningful cattle market reform actually has a chance (see page 12 for more about those reform opportunities.) Shepherd rancher Steve Charter closed the article with a simple vision for what we hope to create: “We need a food system that serves everyone, and not just a handful of companies.”

WATER
DEQ tries to roll back water quality standards

In 2021, our legislature passed Senate Bill 358, ignoring our opposition and essentially guaranteeing more pollution in Montana waterways. This bill requires that the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) undergo rulemaking to roll back Montana’s nutrient water quality standards. These standards limit the amount of nitrogen and phosphorus dischargers can emit into our rivers.

In 2015, Montana was a leader in protecting our water quality by passing a bill requiring DEQ to implement numeric nutrient standards. Numeric standards are science-based and are designed to prevent water quality degradation. Now, we have become the first state with numeric standards to roll them back and follow the much weaker “narrative” approach. This is a huge backslide that only benefits polluters.

There are a slew of reasons we do not support this change:

- Narrative standards take a reactive approach to water quality, rather than a proactive one. Dischargers are not required to change their actions until there is noticeable degradation in a river, lake, or stream.
- Narrative standards require each watershed to have an adaptive management plan. In theory, adaptive management plans look at an entire watershed to take a holistic approach. However, the only way to

Continued on page 24.
Come up with good adaptive management plans is to base them on years of data (like we did with the GNA). That data does not exist.

- Narrative standards allow **dischargers to regulate themselves**. The plan is to have all of the dischargers in a watershed get together and hammer out an adaptive management plan that they then submit to DEQ. Beyond the problem of allowing the fox to guard the henhouse, it is also laughable to think that multiple dischargers will be able to agree on the plans.
- These standards are **centered around phosphorus**, however nitrogen is the main pollutant for most dischargers. Focusing on phosphorus misses the mark.

On December 23, DEQ opened a public comment period on this new rule that will run until February 8. Please send comments to DEQ telling them that here in Montana we care about our beautiful rivers and don’t want to see them choked with green algae and pollution that will harm our fishing, recreation, irrigation, and public health. Urge them to maintain the responsible numeric nutrient standards. Contact Mikindra at mikindra@northernplains.org with any questions.

**WATER**

Continued from page 23.

A after a competitive selection process, Central Montana Resource Council members have selected Bozeman Green Build as the installer for our Solarize Central Montana Campaign! CMRC is now gearing up for our kickoff event on February 9th over Zoom, with speakers including our selected installer and representatives from Montana Renewable Energy Association, Fergus Electric, and NorthWestern Energy. CMRC members also presented on our Solarize campaign at the Montana Winter Fair in Lewistown!

CMRC members have also been hard at work to push for federal Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) for beef (see page 13 for more on COOL). Through phone calls, letters to the editor, and a public letter asking for co-sponsorship of the federal COOL bill, CMRC members put the heat on Senator Daines to support this important legislation.
COUNCIL ROUNDUP

**BMLA members organize in the face of troubles old and new**

After learning of Signal Peak Energy’s illegal dumping of coal slurry in 2013 and 2015 (see page 15 for more information), Bull Mountain Land Alliance members are watchdogging the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. Members want to ensure that DEQ 1) holds the mining company accountable and 2) informs community members about where the toxic slurry was dumped and where it may have leaked or settled now.

Signal Peak is not the only company wreaking havoc for BMLA members. Pacific Steele & Recycling is in the early stages of preparing to construct a dump for auto fluff - a byproduct of automobile shredding - on Shepherd Acton road. These facilities pose risks to air, water, soil, and the surrounding community. BMLA members met with company representatives to express their concerns, and they are knocking on neighbors’ doors to raise awareness about Pacific Steele's plans.

**BMLA members developing a strategy on how to protect their community from the impacts of mining activity over the next year.**

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**Roberts School Board approves CCRC’s solar proposal**

Carbon County Resource Council’s solarize project for the Roberts School is moving ahead! The Roberts School Board embraced installing a 10 kilowatt array on the school’s bus barn and is now moving forward with securing grants to cover their share of the project. CCRC and Beartooth Electric Cooperative are covering 75% of the project costs. To CCRC’s surprise, the Roberts School Board is interested in expanding this project in future years to cover the entirety of the school building! CCRC members are anticipating an install sometime in the late spring or early summer.

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**CRC elects officers and plans for the year ahead**

Cottonwood Resource Council held their Annual Meeting on January 13. Unfortunately, we had to miss out on our delicious potluck again this year in exchange for a Zoom meeting. At the meeting CRC elected their officers (Chair: Teri Schlabach, Vice Chair: Betsy Baxter, Secretary: Lisa Wagner, Treasurer: Michael Drye) and planned for the year ahead. They are looking forward to hosting Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Forester Jeff Hermanns later this year to talk about wildfire preparedness and exploring the possibility of enabling Commercial Property-Assessed Capital Enhancements (C-PACE) in Sweet Grass County in the coming year (see page 18 for more about C-PACE).
COUNCIL ROUNDUP

BCC launches Wild Livelihoods Business Coalition

Shel Mauchline

With a mission to protect Yellowstone wolves temporarily traveling north out of the park, Bear Creek Council has brought together a coalition of businesses whose livelihoods are dependent on keeping the Greater Yellowstone region wild. With 67 businesses and 89 individuals already signed on, Wild Livelihoods hopes to communicate beyond environmental motives for preserving wildlife and instead showcase the economic incentives of maintaining the region’s wild places. BCC has set a localized goal of pressuring Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks to reinstate wolf take quotas to two in Wolf Management Units 313 and 316 just north of Yellowstone’s border. Beyond wolves, Wild Livelihoods serves to provide resources for and an opportunity to connect and give voice to ethically- and sustainably-minded businesses that rely on intact wild places. For more information and to sign up your business, visit the website at WildLivelihoods.com.

SGCC invites Lewis and Clark County to get “on board” with passenger rail

Emily Auld

This winter, SGCC members campaigned to revive passenger rail service through southern Montana along the North Coast Hiawatha route. The route has been out of use for forty years, and renewed service will bring economic benefits, reduced carbon pollution, and safe, alternative transportation.

A public, virtual forum was held on January 25th to help encourage the Lewis and Clark County Commissioners to join the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority, a statewide organization formed in November 2020. This organization gives member counties the opportunity to collaborate on funding and planning for the train line. A petition is available on the Northern Plains website to sign through mid-February supporting passenger rail through the county. You can find it here: NorthernPlains.org/Helena-Passenger-Rail.

DRC gearing up for C-PACE

Caitlin Cromwell

New solar arrays are providing clean energy across the region thanks to Dawson Resource Council’s successful Solarize Glendive campaign! Thirsty Lake Solar completed five installations in total, and those solar arrays add up to 64.4 kilowatts of installed solar in Glendive!

DRC is gearing up to introduce Commercial Property Assessed Capital Enhancements (or C-PACE), the innovative clean energy bill that Northern Plains passed in the 2021 Montana legislature, to Dawson County decision-makers. Members are eager to compare notes with other affiliates about successful strategies to get C-PACE enabled locally!

Lastly, DRC is grateful to everyone who contributed to our affiliate’s fundraising campaign this year. We appreciate you!
SPA focuses on community traffic issues

Stillwater Protective Association’s Good Neighbor Agreement representatives worked with business owners in Nye and Fishtail to sort out concerns regarding the Stillwater Mine’s new traffic plans. This fall, the Mine made changes to their employee transportation policy when parking lot space was overtaken by newly constructed facilities. The Mine eliminated its “punch pass” system, which allowed employees to drive to site in single-occupancy vehicles four times per quarter (rather than requiring multiple occupant carpooling.) Businesses that provide essential services to the community were concerned that the loss of mine traffic would result in substantial revenue loss given workers frequent their businesses during commutes. GNA representatives negotiated with the Mine to work out a system that balances carpools and contractors such that these essential businesses would not see a significant loss of patronage.

YBCC helps community see how “Less is More” & C-PACE’s imminent arrival in Park County

YBCC’s recently formed “Less is More” committee has been exploring ways to reduce food waste while creating more efficient recycling pathways and resource use. Most recently, members wrote an article published in the *Livingston Enterprise* reporting findings to the community from a fact finding trip to Recycle Montana’s 4 Corners Recycling.

Additionally, the arrival of C-PACE signals an exciting path towards a renewable energy future in Park County! County commissioners have supported the Commercial Property Assessed Capital Enhancements program over three legislative sessions (thanks in large part to the advocacy of YBCC members), and they are set to decide on implementing C-PACE to Park County in early 2022. Businesses will soon have the opportunity to access C-PACE financing to make energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades!

YVCC strategizes effective protest in a pandemic

How do we make noise to stop the Laurel methane plant while keeping our community safe during a public health crisis? Back in November, YVCC members and staff went door-to-door (at a safe distance) alongside our Laurel neighbors to get more than 30 signatures on a petition to City Council opposing plant construction. Unfortunately, NorthWestern Energy formally withdrew their application to the city last month, leaving us to track where permitting and approval for the plant will lie… which is likely with the Yellowstone County Commission.

YVCC has been hard at work devising creative, yet safe, ways to amplify the anger, fear, and frustration of those Laurel community members most directly affected by the dangerous and unsightly construction of this plant. Being the first of 8 plants proposed by NorthWestern Energy across Montana, YVCC plans to show this monopoly utility what happens when they put profits over people and stop this plan dead in its tracks.
STANDING TOGETHER: PROTECTING LAND, AIR, WATER, AND PEOPLE

Learn more about the rich history of Northern Plains in a 130-page hardcover anthology written and curated by Teresa Erickson, Northern Plains Staff Director for 33 years prior to her 2019 retirement. The anthology features a written narrative of our origins and historic campaigns, as well as iconic photos, cartoons, artwork, news clippings, and poetry from a half-century of tenacious grassroots organizing.

We have a limited-edition first printing edition available for purchase (signed by Teresa!)

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