A FLOOD OF PEOPLE POWER IN YELLOWSTONE COUNTY

MEMBERS STAND UP FOR PEOPLE OVER PROFITS IN THE LAUREL METHANE PLANT FIGHT

Nearly 100 people gathered on the Yellowstone County Courthouse lawn in February for a people’s hearing opposing the Laurel methane plant.

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WELCOME GOLDEN TRIANGLE!

Members gather in Great Falls to celebrate the launch of our newest affiliate - Golden Triangle Resource Council!

$1 MILLION CRIMINAL FINE FOR SIGNAL PEAK

Federal judge sentences coal mine to fines and five years probation for illegal schemes that threaten peace and prosperity in the Bull Mountains.
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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The Plains Truth Spring 2022 Page 2
Ready to pivot, ready to stay the course

Last Fall when NorthWestern Energy stunned Montanans by announcing it was hurling forward with plans to construct a methane-burning plant in Laurel, the first of eight such plants, Northern Plains members flew into action. Our experience taught us that this was a dangerous plan that NorthWestern customers would pay for, in dollars and in growing climate chaos. We quickly formed a committee comprised of members from around the state. Actions came swiftly: helping Laurel neighbors attend local meetings, gathering signatures to stop the plant, launching a statewide letter-writing campaign, creating pointed newspaper and television ads, and organizing a rousing People’s Hearing in Billings.

This nimble pivoting is a source of pride for us all! Just as pivoting in our personal lives can mean the difference between getting stuck and moving toward solutions, our organization’s readiness to act means we can respond to big threats as they appear on the horizon, or right under our noses.

Bedrock values underpin this ability. Respect for each other is one of those core values. When the Laurel committee was formed, we had no history of working together, and we hadn’t yet unraveled all the tangled details of NorthWestern’s plan, or what might be the most powerful responses. This initial uncertainty didn’t matter though, because deep respect for each other is at the very core of all we do. If respect simply means “look again,” I think we can add “listen again.” Those first unavoidably messy meetings quickly gave way to a shared understanding of the best ways forward. We listened, and listened again.

Over our 50-year history we’ve stayed the course in long campaigns, too. Members of the Stillwater Protective Association (SPA) and the Cottonwood Resource Council (CRC) know exactly how to protect a win over the long haul; they’ve been doing just that for over twenty years as they keep the Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA) with Stillwater mine owners working for both the local community and the environment. Paul Hawks, a ranching member in Melville, has been active in this effort from the beginning. He points out that there have been four changes of mine ownership over the years, and each time, new management must be educated about the legal commitments made to the local communities through the GNA. Through all of these shifts, members of SPA and CRC have shown up, staying involved and focused.

Paul stresses that only a local group with a deep love and reverence for their place could have endured over the long haul. A group that daily navigates the winding two-lane roads, that knows exactly where the mine’s waste product is stored, that cares deeply about protecting their water. A group that intends to leave their spot on this planet in the best possible condition for the coming generations.

This enduring commitment has yielded big rewards: ongoing communication with the mine on issues such as water quality sampling, participation in decisions, traffic (and accident) reduction on rural roads, and input on dangerous waste material storage, including an emergency plan in case of structural failure.

We are surrounded by a rash of new uncertainties - threats to our democratic systems, a less dependable climate, and future disruptive pandemics while the current one is not yet vanquished. Unsettling as these new challenges are, WE are dependable. WE are predictable. We come together and keep our promises to each other: to act for the well-being of those near and dear to us, for our neighbors and communities, for the voiceless -- including those relegated to the margins of power -- and for the living world on which all life depends.

With daily gratitude for your part in our enduring strength,

- Joanie Kresich
Chair
Ita Killeen: “My job is to have joy in my life, in addition to caring about the climate.”

Ita Killeen believes in the power of people and connection when it comes to fighting climate change. Originally from Maryland, Ita moved west early, and lived in Salt Lake for twenty years before moving to Bozeman with her husband in 2000. “When I go on a trip and fly back over the Gallatin Valley,” she remarks about Montana, “I think, ‘Why would I ever leave this place?’” She found Northern Plains about four years ago by attending our Annual Meeting and said she was drawn in because everyone was “…so friendly. We joined Northern Plains and never looked back after that.”

Ita currently chairs a Northern Plains committee formed late last year by members from across the state who work on differing energy issues. The committee was created so that members with differing backgrounds and areas of expertise could collaborate and strategize to fight the proposed Northwestern Energy Laurel methane plant. She’s also an active leader on clean energy issues and has played a big role in furthering Commercial Property-Assessed Capital Enhancements (C-PACE) work in Bozeman. Ita, along with fellow Bozeman member Mary Maj, organized local Gallatin County members for an in-person gathering to strategize ways to promote the innovative energy efficiency program shortly after Gallatin implemented C-PACE in mid-April.

Ita says that clean energy work is “…accessible and intuitive. Clean energy is something anyone can become active in, because you don’t need a lot of technical knowledge.” But Northern Plains is only one slice of Ita’s work as an activist. She finds that engaging in action on every level is rewarding, and she also works individually with the migrant community in Bozeman, nationally with Citizens Climate Lobby, and has volunteered for local legislative campaigns. The different efforts help to “keep her optimism going.”

Optimism drives Ita’s work in every sphere, and it’s contagious. “There’s so much hardship in the world, and sometimes I ask myself how I can feel good about being happy,” she says. “And then I realize that we need more joy and need more people to be happy.”

Relationships, and spreading joy within them, are key components of activism for Ita. When asked about what she loves most about Montana, she mentions the mountains, the skiing, the biking, and the rivers, but makes sure to include the people. She’d like to see people getting along in Montana’s future. “I’m worried that the national divisiveness is coming to Montana, and I don’t think that’s Montana’s tradition. I’d like to see people respect each other, get along, and keep water clean and our environment intact.”

Ita’s people-centric view on environmentalism also informs her passion for environmental justice. She hopes that Northern Plains will “…continue to increase the pace of incorporating that in everything we do: our outlook, our perspective, our mode of operations. It should just become standard that we use that lens of environmental justice in everything we do.”

She loves Northern Plains because of the emphasis on relationships. “Relationships are what keep us going,” she says. “Doing these hard tasks together with people we enjoy and love and respect.”

Ita Killeen, who is an active leader in Northern Plains’ clean energy work, first found Northern Plains by attending the Annual Meeting in 2018.
In 2021, the Montana Legislature decided that protecting our iconic waterways from sewage, industrial waste, and other nutrient pollution is just too great a burden for Montana's polluters to uphold. Despite overwhelming opposition from everyday Montanans, the legislature passed a bill to dramatically roll back responsible water quality protections the state adopted in 2015.

The infamous bill, SB 358, demands the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) replace Montana's strong, science-based numeric standards for nutrients in our out water with weak, murky narrative standards. "Numeric standards" means exactly what it sounds like. Specific numbers are designated for specific pollutants, and if our waterways hit a particular metric of a pollutant, corrective action must be taken by polluters in a reasonable and prudent manner.

"Narrative standards" are also a lot like their name implies. In essence, they ask, "What's the story with this waterway?" What pollutants are being dumped in this river section and by whom? What might go wrong? How does this area look? Do we see algae forming from the sewage being dumped upstream? Not yet? Well, no need to take action now…

The nutrients in question are nitrogen and phosphorus, and too much of them can result in the waterways we paddle and fish becoming choked with weeds and algae and our livestock watering holes devolving into lagoons of pond scum. If narrative standards were fully implemented, corrective action would not be required until it was too late, once our water sources had already become obviously degraded. What a backslide this would be.

The strong numeric standards that Montana adopted in 2015 made us a national leader in water quality protections. As a state whose two biggest economic drivers are outdoor recreation and agriculture – both of which fundamentally rely on clean water – it's no surprise Montanans had the foresight to protect this vital resource. Of course, our very identity as the Last Best Place is also defined by our reverence for clean air, unspoiled landscapes, and safe, healthy water.

The numeric standards were adopted because our leaders understood what Northern Plains members have always known: that a responsible conservation ethic is essential to bolstering Montana's strength, durability, and prosperity. Unfortunately, today's proposed water quality rollbacks show a profound lack of leadership.

It is up to us, everyday Montanans who love this place we all call home, to assert the leadership currently lacking in Helena. Northern Plains members will do what we always do – roll up our sleeves to ensure that decisions about our communities are made based on the will of the people, not the will of moneyed special interests.

DEQ just completed the first of a two-part round of rulemaking. The second phase is expected this summer, and we will continue the fight to uphold strong water quality protections. Stay tuned for more information about how you can get involved to make sure that DEQ knows that these irresponsible backslides violate our constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment, conflict with federal laws that protect our clean water, and fly in the face of core Montana values that cherish healthy land, air, and water.
Northern Plains members demand NorthWestern Energy put people over profits!

By Shel Mauchline

In early February, Northern Plains organized a People’s Hearing on the Yellowstone County Courthouse lawn in Billings. The event gave local residents an opportunity to raise their voice against NorthWestern Energy’s proposed methane plant and pipeline, given the recurring theme of NorthWestern Energy and Montana decision-makers skirting public input as they steamroll this reckless project forward.

We turned out nearly 100 people to the Courthouse lawn on that 61º February day (reason enough to be concerned about climate chaos, as one testifier pointed out). Emceed by former Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council Chair Eric Schmidt, we cheered and rallied behind our five impassioned member speakers: Barb Emineth, Lori Byron, Pari Kemmick, Rob Byron, Carol Blades, and song leader Mary Fitzpatrick. After the speakers, many more attendees testified about why this methane plant does not align with our collective vision of a prosperous economic and environmental future for Montana.

Our impact was felt well beyond the many hearing attendees, too. The event received media coverage from the Billings Gazette, Laurel Outlook, the Daily Montanan, Q2 and KULR 8 television stations, and Yellowstone Public Radio. Rumor even has it that a NorthWestern Energy truck was circling the block! Despite NorthWestern evading public decision-making spaces, our members found creative ways to energize this campaign, demonstrating people power, and building community — outcomes that were especially moving after many months of pandemic-fueled isolation.

Shortly after the People’s Hearing, we learned that the Yellowstone County Commission would decide whether to approve NorthWestern Energy’s floodplain permit application. This permit would allow NorthWestern to bore a new pipeline underneath the Yellowstone River to supply methane to the proposed plant on the north bank of the river. And, finally, this decision would include a public hearing.

The permit hearing took place on a rainy Billings morning in late March. The room was packed, with most people sporting stickers of solidarity reading “Protect the Yellowstone.” Many of these folks gathered with us and the Montana

Member Ita Killeen testifies at the People’s Hearing about the health and environmental threats of this polluting plant.
Environmental Information Center (MEIC) the week prior at the Billings Public Library to strategize and assemble their testimonies over an evening of pizza, and it paid off.

30 citizens in total — 23 of those Northern Plains members — took a stand at the podium and spoke passionately and persuasively, demanding that commissioners deny NorthWestern's permit. One by one, they made clear arguments about incomplete project information, design flaws, human safety concerns, environmental threats, insufficient oversight, and hasty decision-making.

Through our organizing at the People’s Hearing, we had already gathered over 80 written comments to submit to commissioners in opposition to the methane pipeline and corresponding plant. Commissioner Donald Jones stated for the record that 93 written comments opposed the permit, while only 10 were in support.

Sadly, the commissioners voted to approve the permit after less than three minutes of deliberation, ignoring hours of constituent testimony in overwhelming opposition to the permit. However, this was just one stop within our larger journey to protect Montana from this expensive and reckless project, and we laid down an overwhelming public record — in the hearing room and in the media — to deploy as we push forward in this campaign.

Speaking of media, have you seen our ads on the Sunday morning news or your daily paper’s website? We are inundating media outlets across the state to hold NorthWestern accountable for continually putting profits over people! We know the monopoly corporation has taken notice, as they have already cranked up a defensive public relations campaign with advertisements and opinion pieces touting a commitment to clean energy — so long as we are willing to wait until 2050 for them to get there.

Well, we refuse to threaten future generations by giving NorthWestern three more decades of inflated profits and destructive pollution. Montanans deserve clean, affordable, reliable energy right now, and Northern Plains members will not be silenced until we stop this reckless methane plant!
In the last issue of the Plains Truth, we detailed a crime-movie level of corruption, and injustice that Signal Peak Energy (SPE) has levied on the local community and their workers. SPE is the operator of Bull Mountain Mine No. 1, an underground coal mine near Roundup. Unfortunately, the plot of the coal company’s recklessness continues to thicken.

On January 31, SPE received a criminal sentence by a federal judge which included a $1 million fine and three years of probation for willful violations of multiple environmental and safety standards. The company’s crimes included the illegal pumping of toxic wastewater into abandoned mine areas and bribing employees to cover up injuries incurred on the job, which included a finger amputation. More recent developments show that Signal Peak’s threats extend even further.

In April, a federal court found that the U.S. Interior Department downplayed the climate disruption that would result from Signal Peak’s last permit expansion in a 2018 environmental analysis. This expansion includes all the coal Signal Peak plans to mine between now and 2030. The project as a whole would cumulatively release an estimated 190 million tons of greenhouse gas (GHG) pollution, which the court noted would “generate more GHG emissions annually than the largest single point source of GHG emissions in the United States.”

While these rulings alone make it clear this company is reckless and causing immense environmental damage, SPE is also pressuring folks in the Bull Mountains to leave. This is an age-old tactic of coal companies seeking to get landowners or leasers out of the way so no one will hold them accountable for their actions.

The Charters, one of the families that founded Northern Plains and Bull Mountain Land Alliance over 50 years ago, are among those facing this underhanded tactic. The mine recently informed the Charters that it plans to take over the entirety of their property for the purpose of “continuing mine development activities,” legally obligating the Charters to sell their land to the mine at a price that would not be enough for them to replace their present ranching operations. Simultaneously, SPE is cancelling their leased land as well.

The Charters are supposed to vacate all of their cattle by September 1. They are doing everything they can to fight this, and stay on the land their family has stewarded for four generations. Meanwhile, members are informing decision-makers and the surrounding community of how SPE is treating their neighbors and how the company can’t get away with these land grabbing tactics.

Boyd Charter, named after his grandfather who stood up to coal companies in the Bull Mountains a half-century ago, expressed his frustration:

“As long as they stay on top of fixing the cracks and water, the mine could be cooperative and try to work with us. There’s so many other ways that they could be neighborly. We’re just trying to ranch, and we’ve only tried to ranch for the 50 years we’ve had to be in this fight.”

In the face of all of this, Bull Mountain Land Alliance members came together to develop a public message about this struggle for justice, which you can read on the next page.

By Bronya Lechtman

Bull Mountain Land Alliance members developing their core campaign message on Signal Peak Energy.
**Bull Mountain Land Alliance’s message:**

*The Bull Mountains are worth protecting. The abundant wildlife, rugged hills, and expansive grasslands have sustained generations of Montanans who live, ranch, and recreate here. Signal Peak Energy, an underground coal-mining corporation funded by callous billionaires, has proven it cannot be a trusted neighbor. The criminally-convicted company has bullied landowners, illegally dumped toxic slurry, and threatened the livelihoods of local residents.*

*We cannot allow Signal Peak’s reckless abuse of our fragile watershed to go by without holding them accountable. Given its culture of criminal misdeeds, this company has also forfeited any right to expand its operations. Montanans do not need another corrupt corporation emptying our communities, exploiting our natural resources, changing the landscape forever, and leaving us the financial burden to repair the damage.*

**Making sure Costrip’s owners don’t skip town before cleaning up their mess**

*Talen Energy, owner/operator of Colstrip Power Plant, is reportedly seeking loans in preparation for a potential bankruptcy. As Talen spirals towards insolvency, the state’s wishy-washy settlement agreement regarding the company’s cleanup of its toxic coal ash ponds becomes all the more precarious.*

The agreement between the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and Talen held that it must excavate the coal ash and place it into a new, lined landfill located above the groundwater currently absorbing millions of gallons of ash pond pollution. This “final” agreement was reached in October of 2021, but it provided a loophole big enough to drive a coal excavator through.

The agreement requires Talen to draft its plan for excavation but allows it to simultaneously draft a plan for an “alternative remedy” for consideration in 2023. The company has repeatedly sought a cheaper alternative that only includes partial excavation of the toxic material, leaving dangerous pollutants underground that continue to threaten local groundwater. This loophole gives them yet another chance to get a cheap, ineffective plan approved.

Talen has quarterly meetings with DEQ to review progress and receive feedback for their full excavation plan. However, we have learned that DEQ is also receiving updates on the weaker alternative at these meetings, and giving the space for Talen to request feedback. Therefore, DEQ appears to be paving the way for this inadequate manner of cleanup.

Given Talen’s volatile financial situation, it is all the more important that DEQ hold the coal company’s feet to the fire, and doesn’t let it walk away with a cheap cleanup plan that threatens to pollute local groundwater indefinitely. Ranchers, Northern Cheyenne Tribal members, workers, the Colstrip community, and all Montana taxpayers should not be left to deal with the toxic mess after Colstrip’s owners have spent decades making billions of dollars from southeast Montana’s resources. Northern Plains members will be ready to keep up the heat to protect clean water and the hundreds of long term, good-paying jobs that responsible cleanup will create.

**By Bronya Lechtman**

*At over 800 surface acres, the Colstrip ash pond complex is one of the largest in the country. Collectively, the four ash ponds leak 300,000 gallons of contaminated water daily.*
MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

Jeanie Alderson inspires action on livestock issues at Montana Farmers Union event

M ember rancher and past board chair, Jeanie Alderson of Birney, gave an impassioned presentation to attendees at Montana Farmers Union's Winter Rendezvous in mid-February. Jeanie told her story of how monopoly meatpacker practices are impacting ranchers and how we must organize to enact policy reforms that allow producers to get fair prices for their cattle.

Gilles Stockton goes to Washington, makes gains with USDA

L ongtime member-leader, Gilles Stockton of Grass Range, traveled to Washington in early April and met with Senator Tester's staff, USDA Senior Advisor Andy Green, and staff members of the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture. Gilles discussed our support for the American Beef Labeling Act (restoring mandatory Country-of-Origin Labeling) and the importance of enacting meaningful competition reform in our rigged livestock markets.

CMRC members meet with Sen. Daines’ office to push for mandatory COOL

C entral Montana Resource Council members Clay Dunlap and Alan Shammel had a conference call with Senator Daines’ Great Falls and Missoula Field Representatives, urging Senator Daines to co-sponsor the American Beef Labeling Act. The legislation would reinstate federal mandatory Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) for beef.

Clay and Alan described the positive impacts COOL has on rural economies noting how their community thrived during the years COOL was the law of the land. They spoke about why COOL matters to each of them respectively - Clay as a consumer and Alan as a rancher. Urging Senator Daines to prioritize Montana’s ranchers, consumers, and rural communities over the interests of meatpackers, these grassroots leaders conveyed a firm message focused on strong values and compelling personal stories.

Paul Pacini wants Lewis and Clark County on board with the passenger train!

H elena resident Paul Pacini has been fighting for the return of the passenger train across Southern Montana for over two years now. Paul helped organize Sleeping Giant Citizens Council’s Passenger Rail Public Forum, wrote multiple position papers advocating for passenger rail, and had individual meetings with all three of the Lewis and Clark County Commissioners and the Deputy County Attorney in March to answer questions and address their concerns about the rail project. Thank you for your work to help Montanans travel sustainability and safely, Paul!
MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

Members build relationship with FWP toward sustainable wildlife management

Northern Plains members Cara McGary, Jeff Reed, and Nathan Varley, as a coalition of business owners, landed a meeting this March with their regional Fish, Wildlife, and Parks commissioner and staff in Bozeman. These members, along with over 100 other business owners who joined their coalition, want decision-makers to understand that their livelihoods and local tourism economy in Park County depend on sustainable wildlife populations. From this meeting, they learned more about the process for public participation, aiding their strategy to restore responsible wolf harvest quotas for the 2022-2023 hunting season.

MEMBER VOICE

Why I care about climate change...

I look at the lives of my parents, grandparents, great-great grandparents and think about the challenges their generations faced. Their experiences were fairly normative and involved some level of toiling away, day after day, in jobs that are unfulfilling, receiving less than they were owed in most aspects of life. They pressed on because they were building something for the future, for their children and grandchildren. They sacrificed themselves in the present for the people who would come after.

In contrast, my generation never knew a world without the truth of climate change, so we cannot lean into this narrative. We can no longer break our backs with our mouths shut and our heads down assuming a piece of our genes will succeed us. We know that our children may not live a life that we would recognize as “normal.” There is no predictable world awaiting the future, and therefore, we must think more critically about the present. We are forced to ask more from our lives, to question where we work, how we feel, who we love, who benefits from the institutions our culture serves, and who is being repeatedly thrust to the bottom.

For some reason, this brings me comfort because it forces an opportunity. We have all seen social progress ebb and flow. We have recognized when our values conflict with our pocketbooks, when doing the right thing prevents us from getting the promotion, when turning a blind eye to suffering and injustice is the option that keeps us safe.

But, in a world where the future is so uncertain, I cannot simply say, “I am trudging on and doing this for my children.” Instead, I am forced to live for the people of today and to make decisions based on the reality in front of me. A future of climate change prevents excuses in the present and demands action. The decisions of today can no longer be made with assumptions about the future. There is no use in playing it safe and small. Today is the only thing we have, and we are called to seize the moment and work together for big, transformational change.

- Kathryn Eklund, Livingston
Montana’s clean energy future is one step closer as counties pass C-PACE resolutions

By Emily Auld

On January 3rd, 2022, a tenacious campaign that spanned more than seven years and three legislative sessions reached a culmination point. The innovative energy efficiency funding program that Northern Plains members spearheaded as a legislative bill, Commercial Property-Assessed Capital Enhancements (C-PACE), officially went live on a state agency website: LastBestPace.com!

The Montana Facility Finance Authority (MFFA), the facilitators of the program, are extremely optimistic about the support that C-PACE has received in its first few months as a live program.

Now that we successfully passed the statewide bill and MFFA has the program ready, each county must vote to create a C-PACE district to allow local businesses, farms, ranches, and other commercial property owners to apply for the funding program. C-PACE allows them to access private funding to make energy efficiency upgrades to their buildings provided their utility savings are greater than the cost of the upgrades. The funds can be repaid slowly over time, generating income for local banks while allowing property owners to make energy saving investments that might otherwise be out of reach. C-PACE supports energy efficiency, creates jobs, saves businesses money on their utilities, and helps bring us closer to a clean energy future.

Park County was first to create a county-wide district in late February, narrowly beating out Missoula County by two days. Cascade County passed their final resolution in late March, and Gallatin County hopped on board on April 12. Other counties, including Butte-Silver Bow and Lewis and Clark, are already on the way to passing resolutions.

The program is still in its “soft launch” phase, meaning that it has not been marketed yet, but the MFFA expects that about 70% of Montana’s population will have access to C-PACE by mid-2022.

Continued congratulations to all members who advocated for the program in the 2017, 2019, and 2021 legislative sessions; we owe this great success to you and your perseverance!

Questions about the program or enabling C-PACE in your county can be sent to emily@northernplains.org.

INTRODUCING OUR RACIAL JUSTICE READING GROUP

We’re proud to share an exciting opportunity to grow with other members of the Northern Plains community!

Thanks to the leadership of board member Edward Barta, Northern Plains started a Racial Justice Reading Group for members. The Reading Group is a space for members to have deeper discussions about race, racial justice, and related topics in a more relaxed and conversational setting. This group has already read a number of books over the course of the past year!

The Racial Justice Reading Group meets over Zoom on the first Monday of each month, from 5:30 to 7:00 PM.

Upcoming books and discussions for the coming months:

Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America by Ibram X - June 6 and July 11
Stamped (For Kids): Racism, Antiracism, and You by Ibram X. Kendi and Jason Reynolds - August 1
The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley on Monday - September 12 and October 3

All Northern Plains members are welcome and invited to participate! This can mean joining the group for every book and discussion, or just hopping in for one book that you’re particularly interested in.

If you’d like to participate, please email Northern Plains member Edward Barta at edward2b@yahoo.com to RSVP and receive the Zoom link.

If you plan on purchasing any of these books to participate, we encourage you to find a local bookstore to buy them from or order them through. Support local!

Note: Some of the dates may be subject to change as they get closer – please confirm with Edward if you plan to attend.
Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from our Northern Plains History Project anthology, Standing Together: Protecting Land, Air, Water, and People. The anthology was written and curated by Teresa Erickson, Northern Plains' esteemed Staff Director from 1986-2019. In this excerpt, Teresa speaks to themes found elsewhere in this edition of the Plains Truth, most notably in Joanie Kresich’s “To the Members” column on page 3. Teresa reminds us that interconnectedness – with respect to both our people and our issues – has always been at the heart of Northern Plains' work and success.

Northern Plains is known for weaving multiple issues together. Connecting issues is a big reason why Northern Plains has been able to connect people from different backgrounds and different parts of Montana.

Fighting climate change, for example, is a broad vision that includes putting a halt to the practice of fossil fuel development externalizing costs onto the public and the environment. It also means encouraging healthy, family-scale farms and ranches that build healthy soil, as well as making energy from the wind and sun more accessible to Montanans.

All throughout Northern Plains' life, certain beliefs have been present in every issue campaign: water, energy, and public participation.

**Water is Worth Fighting For**

Energy development, industrialization of agriculture, reckless waste disposal, and virtually every issue Northern Plains has tackled was motivated by the belief in the preeminence of water. Testimony, factsheets, media statements, presentations, trainings, and a truckload of other techniques and tactics centered on protecting water quality and quantity. Legal counsel for Northern Plains became specialists in water law and were sought after by many other organizations after learning on cases with Northern Plains.

**Energy’s Soft Path**

Very early in the organization’s life, Northern Plains sought information and leadership for energy efficiency and renewable energy. Energy policy expert Amory Lovins coined the term “soft path” energy, which described ways to use less energy from fossil fuels and generate more from the sun and the wind.

To Northern Plains, soft path also meant there is a world in which humans can live comfortably and meaningfully without destroying the earth and harming places and people. Since the early 70s, Northern Plains has worked to find ways to reach the soft path. “No problem without a solution” is the mantra.

**Public Participation**

It is the right and responsibility of all citizens to participate in decisions that affect their lives. Northern Plains has learned from experience that the public’s voice can – and often does – make a difference in the outcome of policy decisions by agencies and lawmakers. Northern Plains’ campaign plans all include components for bringing the voices of Montanans to the issues that the organization is advancing.

Northern Plains has taken on issues that its founders never dreamed of. What remains as true today as in 1972 is that issues affecting Montana’s land and water - and issues of the state’s long-term future - are complex and connected.

Copies of Standing Together, a 130-page hardbound book featuring photos, cartoons, artwork, and poetry alongside Teresa’s comprehensive narrative of Northern Plains history, can be purchased online at: [NorthernPlains.org/Anthology-Order](http://NorthernPlains.org/Anthology-Order).
Northern Plains voices concern over meaningful “Product of USA” label consumer survey

By Caroline Canarios

The “Product of USA” label found on your beef and pork products is fraudulent. The label is often applied to meat that is only processed or packaged in the U.S., but can be raised, and slaughtered elsewhere. Not only does this label misrepresent product origin to the customer, it also drives down prices paid to American ranchers as meatpackers can import cheaper cattle from other countries and label the resulting meat “Product of USA”. Additionally, food safety standards in other countries often do not equal those in the United States, putting customers at risk.

In February, the USDA Food Safety and Inspection Service, tasked with reviewing this labeling loophole, instead decided to conduct a consumer survey about the label. Northern Plains, long having worked to repeal this label and reinstate mandatory Country-of-Origin Labeling, does not support the resource-wasting approach of a consumer survey. We maintain that USDA is able to issue a new rule without a consumer survey. Northern Plains submitted comments to the USDA expressing our position on the survey and the “Product of USA” label.

Consumer research supporting truth in labeling is already well-demonstrated. 93% of Americans polled want to know where their food comes from, and 75% say that country-of-origin is a major factor in their purchase.

It is time for the USDA to give ranchers and consumers what they deserve: an honest label for beef and pork.

To learn more about our work to restore Country-of-Origin Labeling, contact Caroline at (406) 248-1154 or caroline@northernplains.org.

Tell Sen. Daines and Rep. Rosendale to co-sponsor the American Beef Labeling Act

By Caroline Canarios

The movement for Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) has reached the U.S. House of Representatives! The American Beef Labeling Act was introduced in the U.S. Senate late last year, and Rep. Lance Gooden (R-TX) and Rep. Ro Khanna (D-CA) have now introduced a house companion bill. It is time for Montana’s congressional delegation to step up and support mandatory COOL!

Now is the time to ask that Montana’s representative, Congressman Matt Rosendale, co-sponsor the American Beef Labeling Act (H.R.7291):

Call his office at (406) 413-6720

Despite urging from hundreds of our members over the phone, in writing, and in person, Senator Daines has yet to co-sponsor the American Beef Labeling Act in the Senate. We’re asking you to keep the pressure on, and give his office another call.

Tell Senator Daines to co-sponsor the American Beef Labeling Act (S.2716):

Call his office at (406) 245-6822
Northern Plains ranchers lead national conversation on cattle market corruption

The cover of the last Plains Truth displayed an image from a front page New York Times story featuring Northern Plains ranching members recounting their work to reform the rigged cattle market system. Getting such prominent coverage from the nation’s paper of record was a game-changer for elevating the issue of monopoly meatpacker manipulation. It also dramatically amplified the power of Northern Plains members and our theory of creating change through grassroots organizing. That article was only the beginning of our continued influence.

A month after the print article was published, The New York Times released an hour-long episode of their most popular podcast, “The Daily,” which provided an expansive overview of cattle market corruption framed within the family history of Northern Plains’ founding ranch family, the Charters. “The Daily” has a podcast audience of at least two million listeners and is also broadcast on 250 public radio stations across the nation.

Within the episode, Steve, Annika, and Ressa Charter outlined over a century of Montana history, illustrating how corrupt cattle markets have remained a constant threat to family ranching. As the Charters recount through compelling personal stories, the crisis has now reached an apex. The Charters’ anti-corruption work was also featured on an expanded television story produced by Billings’ KTVQ news network and distributed throughout the state. Senator Tester was featured in that story, voicing strong support for livestock reforms. Our members are not just influencing the national debate, they are influencing federal office holders. And, still, more national attention is to come.

In mid-February, another rancher from one of Northern Plains’ founding families told her story of fighting meatpacker corruption on the national stage. Jeanie Alderson of Birney was featured on the venerable National Public Radio news program, “On Point,” which reaches almost 300 public radio stations nationwide and also receives millions of monthly podcast downloads. Jeanie described how the wealth extraction by the big four packers has not only threatened family operations like hers, but has also led to a devastating negative ripple effect hollowing out rural America. Jeanie expanded on this theme of organizing against rural wealth extraction in a long-form interview within the excellent “Reframing Rural” podcast.

Not only are Northern Plains member-leaders affecting the national conversation about cattle market reform, they are setting the terms of the debate. Even President Biden criticized the big four meatpacker monopoly in his March State of the Union address. As soon as this summer, we have the greatest opportunity in a generation to reform cattle markets when the USDA takes up revised rulemaking for the Packers and Stockyards Act.

Even with all of this powerful momentum our members have generated nationally, this will be an “all hands on deck” moment to beat back the billions of dollars the meatpackers have at their disposal to maintain the corrupt status quo. Northern Plains has two things on our side that money can’t buy—grassroots people power and justice. Look for opportunities coming soon to turn on that power spigot, and in the meantime, take a moment to add your name to our letter to Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack at NorthernPlains.org/Stop-Cattle-Market-Corruption/.
GAINING GROUND

Introducing the newest Northern Plains affiliate!

By Caitlin Cromwell

It’s not every day that a new – and powerful – affiliate joins the Northern Plains affiliate family. Golden Triangle Resource Council (GTRC), a new local organization that will hold membership meetings, build power, run effective campaigns, and develop leaders, will join our twelve existing Northern Plains affiliates! GTRC will include Northern Plains membership in Cascade, Teton, Chouteau, and Pondera counties.

Golden Triangle Resource Council celebrated their launch on April 28 at the Celtic Cowboy in downtown Great Falls. It was a fantastic event with high turnout – people are eager to gather, after several years of weathering a pandemic! Speaker Sheila Rice spoke about community efforts in Great Falls and the importance of being involved, while speaker Bob Quinn offered a rural, agricultural perspective on the region and its future. We’re grateful to all who attended and became members and to the Celtic Cowboy for hosting such a successful evening.

The launch event was the culmination of a year of work. Northern Plains’ leaders began a conversation about our statewide power and the geography of our work last April. That conversation led to a deep organizing assessment in Great Falls and the surrounding area that ran from July through December 2021. We had conversations with over 100 individuals in the community and heard from local people about issues ranging from potholes to climate change to the state of the cattle industry.

After concluding our assessment, a team of dedicated local Northern Plains members picked up the effort from there. This team formed an organizing committee, and was tasked with the challenge of actually building a local group, including developing the group’s mission and vision. We’re so grateful to these folks, and they deserve recognition! The GTRC Organizing Committee was:

Lori Benjamin, Fort Benton
Jill Day, Great Falls
Jim Humphrey, Great Falls
Gerry Jennings, Great Falls
Jasmine Krotkov, Neihart
David Oien, Conrad
Amy Rapp, Great Falls
Jessica Stiles, Great Falls
Ted Stimac, Great Falls
Ken Toole, Cascade
Jennisse Waters, Highwood
Millie Whalen, Great Falls

The Organizing Committee also played a big role in choosing the organization’s first few issues. They considered everything under the sun – from soil health to affordable housing – but ultimately landed on pursuing two campaigns to start. One is a campaign to enable the innovative energy efficiency financing tool, Commercial Property-Assessed Capital Enhancements (C-PACE), in each of the counties the affiliate includes (and help implement C-PACE in counties where it’s already enabled, like Cascade), and the other is to initiate a Solarize campaign in the region.

If you live in Golden Triangle Resource Council’s area and would like to get involved, we’d love your participation! GTRC’s organizer will be Emily Auld, and you can reach her at (406) 248-1154 or emily@northernplains.org. GTRC’s first official membership meeting will be on Monday, May 16 in Great Falls; contact Emily for a location and other details.

Golden Triangle Resource Council’s mission:
Golden Triangle Resource Council brings farmers, ranchers, Native people and other concerned citizens together from Cascade, Chouteau, Teton, and Pondera Counties to build diverse coalitions in service of the land and the people who live here. We fight for the quality of our land, water, air, and food, and we work as an example and an active force for free, transparent, decentralized and democratic governing institutions that treat all Montanans equally.

Golden Triangle Resource Council’s vision:
Golden Triangle Resource Council is rooted in a heritage of cooperation among neighbors, family agriculture, respect for indigenous culture and knowledge, and strong community bonds. We honor and seek to build healthy, resilient natural ecosystems, and to create the conditions for strong, sustainable, self-sufficient and harmonious communities for generations to come.
GAINING GROUND

Congress stalls progress on Savanna’s Act
We must push them to address systemic violence to Native communities

By Caitlin Cromwell

In October 2020, Congress passed – and President Trump signed – Savanna’s Act into law. Named for Savanna LaFontaine-Greywind, a member of the Spirit Lake Nation who was found murdered at age 22 while eight months pregnant, the law requires the United States Department of Justice to strengthen training, coordination, data collection, and other guidelines related to cases of missing and murdered Native Americans.

Savanna’s Act begins to address what amounts to an epidemic: Native American women experience some of the highest rates of homicide, according to CDC data, and the Department of Justice found in 2008 that Native American women are killed at more than ten times the national average.

However, nearly 18 months later, the federal agencies tasked with implementation of Savanna’s Act have missed many of the deadlines outlined for them in statute and failed to advance any implementation. One instance of a missed deadline: appointments to a Joint Commission on Reducing Violence Against Indians were required by February 2021, but have not yet happened. Another instance: The Department of Justice has not released plans to begin the requisite tribal consultations, nor to begin training programs for law enforcement.

The phenomenon of Missing and Murdered Indigenous People (MMIP) is not just an endless string of unconnected individuals and crime scenes. It is a pattern that comes from our government, culture, and economics. We need to treat it as a systemic problem, and dig into the legal and social infrastructure that has put Native people in harm’s way for the last 500 years.

At the request and urging of its member groups, the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) has begun looking into the missed deadlines and stalled implementation of Savanna’s Act. WORC is also organizing a conversation about how our network – Native-led and non-Native led organizations alike – might play a role in getting this policy taken seriously. Our sister organizations North Dakota Native Vote, Western Native Voice, and Dakota Rural Action have played leadership roles in fighting the MMIW and MMIP crisis already.

How does this relate to Northern Plains and our issues? Having a presence around this issue is part of being a good ally to our Indigenous brothers and sisters, and building real relationships that are based on trust and mutual commitment.

When we were fighting the Keystone XL pipeline, our allies on Fort Peck were concerned not just about the threat to their water, but also about the pipeline’s potential to bring violence and trafficking to their community. There is a growing body of research to suggest that pipelines can fuel violence against Native people.

For our allies, fights against dangerous fossil fuel infrastructure and the way these projects extract from our rural communities are interwoven with the MMIP crisis. Our relationship as allies needs to include our acknowledgement of that crisis and support of that fight.

The Northern Plains board has discussed exactly that. In February 2021, our leaders took an organizational position to support the movement addressing Missing and Murdered Indigenous People when that support is requested by or useful to our indigenous allies, and when we have capacity to do so.

Stay tuned for opportunities to take action on this, and get Savanna’s Act up and running and protecting our communities – we’ll need you!
On March 8th (just a week before the candidate filing deadline), a panel of federal judges drew new boundaries for Montana’s Public Service Commission (PSC) districts. The districts were redrawn as part of a ruling in response to a lawsuit that argued the old districts violated the “one person, one vote” principle of the U.S. Constitution due to population shifts that have occurred in our state since the districts were drawn in 2003.

After reviewing a handful of proposed maps, the court ultimately selected the map offered by MT Secretary of State Christi Jacobsen (with one tweak to avoid splitting the Blackfeet Indian Reservation). The new districts are largely similar to the old districts, but swap a handful of counties between districts, namely Musselshell, Deer Lodge, Glacier, and Pondera.

The new boundaries may be changed by the 2023 Montana State Legislature, as Public Service Commission districts are the only districts that the legislature is legally allowed to draw. Some Republican legislators had pushed for a special legislative session to draw a new map before the court took action, but were unable to get enough support to do so.

This year, PSC Districts 1 and 5 are up for election. District 1 includes north-central and northeastern Montana. District 5 extends from Lewis & Clark County up through the Flathead.

While these positions don’t always get as much attention as other elected offices in the state, the decisions made by the PSC have a profound impact on the type of energy sources that power Montana homes and businesses, and on the costs that energy customers pay. Ensuring that elections for these offices are fair and constitutional is vital to the work of Northern Plains members.

More redistricting news...

The Montana Constitution provides for a five-member Districting and Apportionment Commission to draw the boundaries of our congressional and legislative districts every ten years (following the United States census). The commission, which consists of two appointees from each major political party and a chair appointed by the MT Supreme Court, drew Montana’s congressional districts last year after Montana gained a new seat in the U.S. House of Representatives.

This autumn, the commission will redraw all 100 state House and 50 state Senate districts. While the commission directs its own proceedings, it has indicated that it will take public comment across seven August and September meetings. Four of these meetings will be in-person in cities/towns across the state, and at least one will take place in a Tribal Nation.

The Legislature can make recommendations to the commission, but it has no power to change the commission’s final map.
Help shape Montana’s soil health future and get ready for summer soil crawls!

By Gusty Catherin-Sauer

Help shape the future of soil health in Montana! Northern Plains, along with many partners, is in the middle of the Montana Soil Outreach Initiative. The initiative is asking producers and agriculture professionals across the state to help identify ways Montana may increase the pace and scale at which land stewards implement voluntary practices to maintain and improve soil health. The long term goal is to ensure the economic and ecological success of agriculture in our state. Ag professionals may provide their input through surveys and focus groups.

So far we have over two hundred survey responses and have held focus group meetings in five different cities, but we also want to hear from you! We invite producers and/or agriculture professionals to participate in this initiative by responding to a short online survey and/or attending a virtual focus group happening on May 26. Members may directly find the survey and sign-up for a focus group at MontanaSoilOutreach.macdnet.org. Alternatively, reach out to Gusty at gusty@northernplains.org, for more information.

Additionally, Northern Plains members have hosted “soil crawls” for the last five years, and we are thrilled to be back in the planning process for this summer’s crawls! We know that building soil health is one way to build a drought resistant operation, but it is different everywhere depending on a property’s existing soils, history, and microclimate. That is why past events have covered a diverse range of topics including bale grazing, dung beetles, weeds, calving, composting, victory gardens, hogs, cover crops, various soil tests and monitoring, and much more!

The first 2022 soil crawl will take place in Sweet Grass County with a focus on youth involvement. Mark your calendars for June 18, and come join us! We are so excited to be able to gather in person to learn more regenerative practices and share what is happening on the ground at local farms and ranches.

Tim Dusenberry of XXBar Ranch speaks to a group during a 2021 soil crawl in Helena.

NORTHERN PLAINS MERCHANDISE NOW AVAILABLE ONLINE!

Show your support for Northern Plains with one-of-a-kind merchandise: hats, travel mugs, stainless steel pint glasses, and more are now for sale online. Much of our merchandise uses recycled or organic materials or is sourced through B Corp companies, and we always work with local print and embroidery shops to bring our designs to life. So you can feel good about supporting local businesses while also supporting our work! Grab your gear today and take Northern Plains with you wherever you go!

Order today at: NorthernPlains.org/Merch

You can pick up your merchandise at the Northern Plains Billings office, or have your items shipped to you for a flat rate of $8.
ONLINE AUCTION

Summer Online Auction returns this July!

By Claire Overholt

Mark your calendars: our annual summer online auction returns this July with impressive items from across Montana!

The online auction is a great way to support Northern Plains’ work while also finding unique items for yourself, family, and friends. You can expect a selection of goods, services, and experiences up for bid from July 1 to August 1.

Because the auction is online, you don’t have to be in Montana to get in on the goods. You can participate from anywhere! All proceeds go to furthering our shared mission of protecting Montana’s water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life.

Call for items: We are looking for generous donations from members and businesses throughout the Northern Plains community.

Maybe you have a vacation home that could welcome a guest for a week? Or maybe you’ve found some collector’s items in a bout of spring cleaning? Do you have an item that would be a good fit for the auction? If so, please consider donating!

Your donation can help make a big difference for Montana. Possible items include:

- vacation stays and cabin getaways
- original art (paintings, pottery, quilts, and more)
- hand-crafted or heirloom jewelry
- food items, like Montana-raised meats
- services, experiences, workshops, and special tours
- the sky’s the limit!

If you have any questions or would like to donate an item of value, please contact Caleb at caleb@northernplains.org or call our office during business hours at (406) 248-1154.

LEAVING NORTHERN PLAINS IN YOUR WILL COULD BE ONE OF YOUR LAST BEST GIFTS

As a Northern Plains member, you’ve shown a commitment to protecting clean water, clean air, unspoiled landscapes, and the rights of people to have a say in the decisions that affect their communities and impact future generations. You can continue to protect those values for your children and grandchildren by including Northern Plains in your estate planning. To learn more, contact Caleb at caleb@northernplains.org.
COUNCIL ROUNDUP

CRC members discuss C-PACE implementation in Sweet Grass County

Cottonwood Resource Council members met in person, for the first time since the pandemic, for their March meeting. Members gathered to hear a presentation on Commercial Property-Assessed Capital Enhancements (C-PACE) implementation from Northern Plains board chair Joanie Kresich, and discussed possible implications and pathways for Sweet Grass County to adopt the innovative energy efficiency funding program. CRC has also begun planning their upcoming presentation on wildfire preparedness with Department of Natural Resources and Conservation Forester Jeff Hermanns.

Cleanups and clean energy in Stillwater County

As reported in the last Plains Truth, Stillwater Protective Association members have been working to expand access to clean energy in their county. In Nye, members coordinated with Beartooth Electric and the local school board to pursue a solar project that will cover all of the schools’ energy needs. Members plan to have further conversations with other county schools about energy efficiency projects besides solarization. Other upcoming activities include a highway cleanup event later this spring and a “fun-raising” membership dinner/social. SPA also became an official sponsor of the county’s Fishing Day Access Clean-Up Day event and will be actively involved throughout this year in cleaning up their local water systems.

BCC organizes to avoid atrocity for Yellowstone wolves in 2022 hunting season

Bear Creek Council, in tandem with the newly-formed Wild Livelihoods Business Coalition, continues to build momentum towards restoring responsible wolf harvest quotas just north of Yellowstone.

BCC applied for a Park County Community Foundation grant to sponsor the work of Isaac Rowland, founder of Arthouse Billy Studios, to produce a short documentary film providing a concise, professional presentation of our local fight to reestablish reasonable wolf management.

BCC and regional allies are also finalizing an educational flyer to distribute to Yellowstone National Park visitors this season, working to create a useful tool that prioritizes facts, displays local values, and gives visitors an avenue to act to protect Yellowstone wolves.

Carbon County Resource Council - busier than ever!

Carbon County Resource Council members have been busy over the past few months, and their pace isn’t going to slow down anytime soon! Recently, members have been supporting Northern Plains’ campaign to stop NorthWestern Energy’s proposed Laurel methane plant, establishing a committee to monitor water quality in Rock Creek and solarizing the public school in Roberts. Members are also actively working to get Commercial Property-Assessed Capital Enhancements (C-PACE) implemented in Carbon County, taking part in Red Lodge’s Earth Day celebrations, fundraising via the Red Lodge Area Community Foundation’s Fun Run, and planning for the organization’s 25th Anniversary Celebration, amongst other projects!
DRC celebrates solar and picks up the PACE for energy efficiency

Caitlin Cromwell

Dawson Resource Council members are making progress on their efforts to get C-PACE (Commercial Property-Assessed Capital Enhancements) enabled in Dawson County!

Members are out there “pounding the pavement” this spring, talking to businesses and economic development organizations about the benefits of this innovative energy efficiency program. So far, they’ve brought several key businesses on board in support – like Cross Country Brewing!

DRC will celebrate their Annual Meeting on Tuesday, May 10 in conjunction with a “Solar-bration,” a celebration of their successful Solarize Glendive campaign last year. If you’re in the area, join us from 5:00 to 7:00 PM at the Kiwanis Shelter in Makoshika State Park!

YVCC pushes towards a clean, safe, and sustainable future for Yellowstone County

Shel Mauchline

Firstly to note, Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council elected Jana Richter as interim Chair! Jana (they/he/she) is a passionate young person in Billings who is excited to engage with community members.

Diving into Commercial Property-Assessed Capital Enhancements (C-PACE), YVCC is planning to harness the support of local businesses as part of a campaign to encourage county commissioners to enable this innovative energy efficiency financing program.

As for the proposed Laurel methane plant, 23 YVCC members showed up and gave moving opposition testimonies at NorthWestern’s floodplain permit hearing.

Finally, after two years in the making, YVCC’s Sustainability Committee and allies welcomed world-renowned city planner Jeff Speck to present on how to make Billings a more walkable city!

Member Aaron Felder references photos, maps, and even a school activity book (currently in use) to persuade County Commissioners of the force of the Yellowstone River and the irreversible consequences of ignoring it.

SGCC moves into a busy spring!

Emily Auld

Sleeping Giant Citizens Council continues to work toward returning a passenger train route through southern Montana. In March, members met with all three county commissioners to discuss commissioners’ reservations about entry into the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority, and the committee is currently planning action around a public county commission meeting in late May.

The local food committee has restarted with an interest in promoting greenhouses and will soon pick a project to pursue. SGCC is also tracking Commercial Property-Assessed Capital Enhancements (C-PACE) with the hopes of getting businesses on board for enabling the energy efficiency program in Lewis and Clark and Jefferson Counties. The program has already been enabled in Broadwater County!
COUNCIL ROUNDUP

Bull Mountain Land Alliance members put the heat on Signal Peak Energy

On January 31, Bull Mountain Land Alliance members went to the federal courthouse in Billings to watch Signal Peak Energy's (SPE) criminal sentencing hearing (more details on page 8). Members talked to the press after the hearing, expressing their concerns about the coal company's reckless activities in their community. By showing up at the hearing and making sure SPE's illegal activities made headlines, BMLA members put the heat on a coal company that's long operated in secrecy.

BMLA members also had their second quarterly meeting with Montana DEQ coal section supervisor and hydrologists regarding the negative impacts Signal Peak's mining has had on their land and water. Members had the chance to ask questions and get DEQ to agree to some key next steps that would help protect their community such as randomly testing water hauled to local ranchers by Signal Peak to replace well water harmed by its mining activities.

Park County is now a C-PACE district!

Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council members were instrumental in making Park the state's first county to enable a C-PACE program! Implementation will allow YBCC to strengthen connections with many in the Livingston community. We have already met with the Business Improvement District for example.

Our Park Electric Co-op committee has initiated a “letter to the editor” campaign leading up to the next co-op board of trustees election. If you are a co-op member, we invite you to sign on or write your own “LTE.”

Lastly, we are excited to welcome our Rail Watch committee out of standby! The Rail Watch Committee works to stay abreast of what is being transported, the local effects of rail traffic, and also seeks to mitigate the environmental impacts of potential hazardous material spills in our communities. The committee is looking for new members right now! For more information on C-PACE, our LTE campaign, or joining the Rail Watch Committee, email gusty@northernplains.org.

CMRC’s Solarize campaign is rocking and rolling

Central Montana Resource Council’s Solarize campaign is so far a smashing success! At this point, 108 individuals in Fergus, Judith Basin, and Petroleum Counties have signed up for free solar assessments, and eleven have already signed contracts with our selected installer Bozeman Green Build! You can sign up for a free assessment until the Solstice (June 21) at NorthernPlains.org/Solarize-Central-MT.

CMRC’s Green Share Garden Project volunteers also hosted the first in a series of workshops on soil health and gardening, with Northern Plains members Josh Wright, Steve Charter, and Patti Armbrister as speakers. 74 people showed up for this event!

On Thursday, May 19th, from 6-8pm at St. James Episcopal Church in Lewistown, CMRC will have their first in-person annual dinner and meeting in two years!

Northern Plains member and Hinsdale Ag-Ed teacher Patti Armbrister, presenting on building soil health and microorganisms for healthier plants and vegetables.
Check the date at the upper right of your address label to see when your membership is due for renewal. Your membership pays for all the work you read about here!

YOU'RE INVITED: NORTHERN PLAINS 50TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

This year marks 50 years since Northern Plains’ founding as an organization, and we’re excited to invite you to a 50th Anniversary party on June 4th to celebrate!

Join us at DanWalt Gardens in Billings for an evening of music, refreshments, and good company as we reunite in person and commemorate five decades of grassroots organizing across Montana. We are excited to announce that the night will feature music by Billings band Ellen and the Old School, so make sure to bring your dancing shoes!

The Yellowstone Valley Food Hub and Project Lunch will cater local food in the form of appetizers and a casual summer cookout. The event is free with donations appreciated. For more details and to RSVP: NorthernPlains.org/Event/50th-Anniversary-Celebration

You are also invited to join us at Home on the Range at 2:30 pm, before the celebration, for the opening of our History Project photo display.

For guests traveling from out-of-town, a limited block of rooms is available June 3-4 at the DoubleTree Hotel downtown. Call (406) 252-7400 for more information and to reserve yours today.

We hope to see you there!

50th Anniversary Celebration
Saturday, June 4
4:00 - 9:00 pm
DanWalt Gardens
720 Washington St, Billings, MT 59101