51ST ANNUAL MEETING IS BRINGING DEMOCRACY HOME

THIS YEAR’S IN-PERSON MEETING PROMISES A CELEBRATION OF THE MONTANA CONSTITUTION AND THE WAYS DEMOCRACY ENHANCES OUR EVERYDAY LIVES

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HISTORIC CLIMATE LEGISLATION SIGNED INTO LAW!

Despite imperfections, the Inflation Reduction Act provides opportunity to create a clean energy future for Montana.

NEW LAW LIMITS METHANE POLLUTION

 Agencies are empowered to expand protections for air quality and climate health.

SOIL HEALTH IS KEY STRATEGY FOR CLIMATE RESILIENCE

Montana’s regenerative farmers and ranchers could receive a big boost within nation's plan to mitigate planet’s warming.
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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Steve Paulson, History Project Coordinator
Michael Skinner, Community Organizer and GNA Manager
Melode Snyder, Data Engagement Specialist

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The Plains Truth Fall 2022 Page 2
We've learned that monocultures in agriculture, while they boost short-term efficiency, magnify vulnerabilities like weather extremes, pests, and market unreliability. Diversifying crops can be a potent protection.

Our democracy is a kind of diversification of decision-making and power. Our daily lives show us that many minds working to solve a problem are more creative and imaginative than just one mind. While each of us looks at challenges through the lens of our upbringing, our lifetime of experiences, and our carefully crafted opinions and beliefs, we need other minds, other vantage points. Our democracy is beautifully designed to let us see around the corners of our personal limits. That wider view leads us away from the hoarding of decision-making power, and toward inclusive and generous decisions that benefit all of us.

Members of our newly formed Democracy Committee are focused on protecting the rights granted by our Montana Constitution, held up as a model for grassroots democracy. The committee is a small group of the bigger group of the Northern Plains community who know that every bit of our work rests on a thriving democracy, from small community projects like solar on an elementary school roof, to state-wide legislative campaigns like C-PACE. Without democracy’s tools we can’t shape decisions that determine if the air we breathe will keep our children healthy or send them to the emergency room struggling to breathe, if the utility bill in our mailboxes matches our expectations or registers a shocking increase, or how easy - or difficult – it is for us to cast our ballot.

Three of the new committee members have a lot to say about the ways Northern Plains helps diversify power so that everyday people- and our combined wisdom - are the ruling force.

Tom Tschida, tending a family farm in Bridger, appreciates how we conduct our meetings, with an underlying democratic philosophy encouraging us to learn together. He sees education as a pillar of democracy, maybe THE pillar; without informed citizens, no amount of good ideas or intentions will prevail. He feels Northern Plains is a part of that pillar, educating our members about critical issues, and at the same time supporting them to bring their knowledge into the public arena through LTEs, testifying, running for office, what he calls “direct democracy”.

Kris Glenn, active in YVCC, finds our process of making room for a diversity of viewpoints valuable, and…. uncomfortable! But while there is discomfort if we are out of step with a group that matters to us, something much more important happens. Any campaign needs people to turn it into a win, and if our idea doesn’t attract others, it is doomed to fail, Kris says. “The people are the hands that shape ideas into concrete progress. Without those hands, good ideas have no way to become an active part of our lives.”

Two years ago, after retiring from full time work in the non-profit conservation world, Norane Freistadt found Northern Plains met her longing to work with a group committed to both environmental concerns, and the urgent issues of equity and justice. She sees the Northern Plains vision of “building a world that lives up to our ideals of fairness, inclusion and justice” in all our work. Adhering to democratic principles is “…why this unique organization has been and is so successful in all its endeavors.” For Norane, protecting our environment also means protecting the democratic structures that give us our power.

As voices all across America raise the alarm of a weakening democracy, it’s fortuitous that Northern Plains is ready. During every year of our half century of organizing, we’ve been building, tending, and perfecting democracy's tools. And we know how to use them!

- Joanie Kresich
Chair
Kris Glenn: Finding her voice, finding a system

By Dustin Ogdin

Kris Glenn knew she had a lot to say, but she didn't necessarily know how best to say it. Several years ago, she found herself observing the world around her and becoming more concerned about a lack of social cohesion. People seemed to be increasingly polarized while losing faith in fundamental pillars of our culture. “If we don’t have trust in our institutions, how can we have faith in society?” she wondered. Seeking ways to better communicate her concerns about the social fabric led Kris to Northern Plains, but in a roundabout way.

Kris joined the organization almost on a whim. In 2018, she signed up for a public speaking workshop Northern Plains was hosting in Billings, the town she grew up in and returned to after 20 years living overseas as an engineer. She saw that the workshop offered a discount for members and decided to take a chance on a group she didn’t quite understand. “They seemed harmless” she considered even though she “couldn’t quite figure out what the organization did.”

Not knowing the full details about Northern Plains’ organizing model didn’t deter Kris from engaging with her local affiliate, Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council (YVCC). She stuck her toe in the water by supporting YVCC’s work to expand access to local food. But when the affiliate asked her to help engage members, she was hooked, even if she still didn’t quite “get” the nuances of Northern Plains. What was unmistakable to her, however, was the fact that Northern Plains and YVCC were actively building and strengthening community. “People working together can be unstoppable,” Kris thought.

Eventually Kris attended one of Northern Plains’ essential workshops for member-leaders, Western Organization of Resource Council’s POCO (Principles of Community Organizing). From there, everything clicked. The nuances of community organizing were clear to her after learning more about the nuts and bolts of the work. “Because I’m a systems engineer, it was exciting to see there was a system, a structure to follow.”

Kris quickly took to this system and has become a passionate leader within the organization. She sits on the Northern Plains Board of Directors as the YVCC representative and has recently become deeply involved in our work to protect and defend democracy. She’s been studying the history of Northern Plains, too.

“I tell everyone to get a copy of Northern Plains’ history anthology, Standing Together” she says, noting how impressed she was to learn about the organization’s outsized accomplishments in its earliest days, helping pass federal coal reclamation laws on top of other major victories. She’s also been studying the history of the U.S. government and learning just how precious and important our democratic rights are. Taken together, this research is lighting a fire under Kris, inspiring her work to protect the Montana Constitution and our right to participate in the decisions that affect our communities.

“I learned how important citizens’ voices are with respect to shaping our communities,” Kris says. “Without democracy and our formal right to speak to our government, Northern Plains can't do our work.”

It’s obvious that Kris discovered more than expected after attending that first Northern Plains workshop. She may have been seeking ways to be a better public speaker, but she gained something much deeper.

“I learned how to get involved and how to make my voice heard,” she says. “Northern Plains gave me a voice.”
It’s that time of year again, the Annual Meeting is almost here! After two years of virtual gathering, we are thrilled to be back in person on November 11-12. After a half century of protecting Montanans’ right to a clean and healthful environment, this year Northern Plains is Bringing Democracy Home.

Join us as we celebrate the Montana Constitution and discover the many ways in which democracy creates stronger communities and enhances our everyday lives.

This year is a wonderful opportunity to re-connect face-to-face with folks from across Montana. We will also be offering a virtual option via Zoom, and we encourage all forms of participation. Whether you attend in person or through Zoom, we are so glad to have you!

Our bylaws define the Annual Meeting as a time to conduct Northern Plains’ official business. It’s your best opportunity to help steer Northern Plains through the coming year and to adopt resolutions on important public policy questions. Read on to learn more about this year’s meeting!

Keynote Speakers

We are pleased to announce two keynote speakers this year: John Boyd and Jim Nelson!

John Boyd is a prominent defender of civil rights and president of the National Black Farmers Association. A fourth generation farmer, John founded the NBFA in 1995 after experiencing the US Department of Agriculture’s discriminatory practices firsthand and learning other Black farmers faced similar discrimination. Now, the NBFA advocates for Black farmers’ rights across America. Boyd is a past nominee for the NAACP’s highest honor, the Springarn Award, and formerly served as an agricultural advisor for the state of Virginia.
Jim Nelson is a long-time civil rights advocate and proponent for an impartial justice system. He served as an associate justice on the Montana Supreme Court from 1993 to 2012. Before being elected to the Montana Supreme Court, Jim represented individuals, small businesses, ranchers, farmers, and worked on oil and gas matters in private practice. He also served as the Glacier County Attorney for 14 years. Since his tenure as a Supreme Court justice, Jim has taught as an adjunct professor at the University of Montana School of Law and currently serves on the legal advisory committee of FreeSpeechForPeople.org.

What you need to know

Important Deadlines

October 27
- Nominations due for Bob Tully and Mary Donohoe awards. Contact Caleb at (406) 248-1154 or caleb@northernplains.org.

November 10
- Election ballots must be received at the Northern Plains’ office by this date, in person or by mail.
- Registration deadline for in-person attendees. Please note: Online registration for in-person attendance will close Thursday, November 10 at 4 pm in order for us to properly prepare for attendance at all sessions. You can still register for in-person attendance after this time at the DoubleTree.

November 12
- Online registration for virtual attendees closes on Saturday, November 12 at noon.

Resolutions
NOTE: The deadline to submit resolutions to the Resolutions Committee has passed. If you wish to introduce a resolution at the Annual Meeting, the members present need to vote to add it to the meeting agenda. You must also provide digital and print copies of your draft resolution so that everyone can have one to reference during debate. Please contact Sydney at sydney@northernplains.org with any questions.

Meeting of the Membership

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

Election Ballot

The slate of candidates put forward by the Nominations Committee will appear on a ballot mailed to each member. If your Northern Plains dues are current, you should receive your ballot soon, enclosed in the Annual Meeting brochure. There is also space for write-ins. The seats you can vote on include Board officers and at-large delegates. If you do not receive your ballot, call (406) 248-1154 to check if your membership is current. Ballots must be received by November 10. Ballots will not be available at the Annual Meeting!
Bring the kids!

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

Silent Auction returns!

This year, we are excited to be hosting our traditional, in-person silent auction, but with a twist! The auction will run over the two days of the Annual Meeting, Nov. 11-12. This year, the auction will also include an online component with a few special items open for bidding in late October. From cabin stays to fine art, you are guaranteed to find something for everyone!

Our auction plays a key role in strengthening Northern Plains work for the year ahead. Whether you’re a donor or a bidder (or both), we appreciate all your help in making it a success!

If you have any questions about the auction, please contact Karen at (406) 248-1154, or email karen@northernplains.org

Bidding will close Saturday night, November 12 at 7:00 PM.
ANNUAL MEETING

ANNUAL MEETING

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Schedule

*Programming available for remote attendees.

Friday, November 11, 2022

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<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12:00 PM</td>
<td>Registration opens</td>
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<tr>
<td>1:00 PM</td>
<td>Meeting of the Membership*</td>
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<td>4:30 PM</td>
<td>Cocktail Hour and Dessert Raffle</td>
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<td>5:30 PM</td>
<td>YVCC Cowboy Supper</td>
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<td>7:30 PM</td>
<td>Theater of the West/Staff Skit</td>
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Saturday, November 12, 2022

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>10:00 AM</td>
<td>Opening Remarks</td>
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<tr>
<td>10:15 AM</td>
<td>Session I: Mining and Renewables*</td>
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<td>11:15 AM</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>12:00 PM</td>
<td>Keynote: John Boyd*/Lunch/Affiliate Awards</td>
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<td>1:30 PM</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:00 PM</td>
<td>Session II: Corporate Monopolies in Agriculture*</td>
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<td>3:00 PM</td>
<td>Break</td>
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<tr>
<td>3:30 PM</td>
<td>Session III: Celebrating Women Leadership at Northern Plains*</td>
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<td>4:30 PM</td>
<td>Mary Fitzpatrick on Planned Giving*</td>
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<tr>
<td>4:40 PM</td>
<td>Announcements, Childrens’ Parade</td>
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<td>5:00 PM</td>
<td>Cocktail Hour</td>
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<tr>
<td>5:30 PM</td>
<td>Keynote: Jim Nelson*/Dinner/Bob Tully and Mary Donohoe Awards/Evening Festivities</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:00 PM</td>
<td>Silent Auction Closes</td>
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<tr>
<td>7:45 PM</td>
<td>Annual Meeting Adjournment</td>
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Registration

Register at NorthernPlains.org/Annual-Meeting or call (406) 248-1154
OIL AND GAS

Methane pollution addressed in historic climate change law

This past August the Inflation Reduction Act was signed into law. This act may help transform Montana's energy future and environmental health outlook. The legislation directs the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to discourage wasteful practices that release methane and other harmful greenhouse gas pollution into the air. The legislation empowers the EPA to limit greenhouse gas pollution from power plants under the Clean Air Act.

In essence, the law establishes the first federal carbon price on greenhouse gas, applying to operations that emit over 25,000 metric tons of carbon pollution per year. This is important for Montana because NorthWestern Energy — the state's largest monopoly power company — unveiled a plan last year to build a new carbon-polluting methane gas plant in Laurel.

Relatedly, the new climate legislation directs the EPA to ensure that accurate emissions data is collected and based on empirical evidence. The law drives investment in technologies that measure and reduce methane pollution. It likely will create incentives for the oil and gas industry to comply with the EPA's clean air protections or at least will bolster the EPA's defense if any challenges to the agency's protections arise later.

Other conservation improvements to our country's oil and gas industry include increased bonding levels and royalty rates, which provide funds to help ensure timely remediation of new wells and a quicker transition to cleaner, safer, renewable energy sources.

WATER QUALITY

Nutrient pollution threatens Montana's waterways as state runs afoul of Clean Water Act

The 2021 Montana Legislature passed Senate Bill 358, a measure that threatens the water quality of the state's rivers, streams, ponds, and creeks by rolling back nutrient pollution protections. Specifically, the bill repealed Montana's science-based numeric nutrient water standards seeking to replace them with imprecise and hard to enforce narrative standards. Nutrient pollution results from industrial waste and municipal sewage among other sources and can lead to algae and weed-choked rivers and streams. It can also pose a threat to human health.

SB 358 directs the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to create rules defining and enforcing these murky narrative water quality standards. As DEQ embarked on this project, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) determined that four key sections of SB 358 violated the federal Clean Water Act.

Despite EPA's disapproval of key sections of SB 358, DEQ has resumed meetings with key stakeholders via a Nutrient Working Group (which includes a Northern Plains representative) and is continuing to move forward with a narrative nutrient standard rulemaking process. The current framework being discussed does not trigger action until after water degradation has occurred. At this point, the damage will have been done. This is a profound backslide from the strong protections Montana had in place before the passage of SB 358.

On top of a narrative framework that doesn't require action until our waterways have suffered the impacts of nutrient pollution, DEQ is operating without a publicly disclosed time frame or date of implementation for the new narrative standards. This means permits are not being reviewed or renewed. In short, Montana's waterways are not receiving proper protection from pollutants like industrial waste and municipal sewage.

As pressure mounts on DEQ to deliver a rule and review permits, Northern Plains continues to work within the stakeholder group seeking proper accountability to the law and the best protections that can be created given the irresponsible legislation passed in 2021. While polluters are advocating for weaker protections, we will continue to demand Montana's waters are kept clean.
This summer, Northern Plains joined several other organizations in seeking greater accountability for reckless, illegal actions by Signal Peak Energy, the operator of the Bull Mountain Mine. Alongside Montana Environmental Information Center, Sierra Club, WildEarth Guardians, Western Environmental Law Center, and Earthjustice, Northern Plains sent a letter to the U.S. Attorney’s Office and filed a citizen complaint with the U.S. Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) and Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). These letters detailed a long history of criminal activity, corruption, and environmental and public health violations inflicted by the mine’s owners. A formal request was made for these agencies to conduct an investigation and halt mine operations until the energy company complies with the law.

In response, OSMRE issued a ten-day-notice to DEQ indicating that they need to work with DEQ to correct two violations in Signal Peak’s permit. The first violation is the lack of full disclosure of ownership of Pinesdale LLC, a subsidiary of Gunvor. Full transparency around Gunvor’s ownership is critical given Gunvor’s documented ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin and ongoing acts of corruption and bribery in other countries including the Congo and Ecuador. The second issue is related to inaccuracies in Signal Peak’s sworn certification statement, which has not been updated since 2013 when the corporation was illegally disposing of waste underground and violating worker safety violations.

A ten-day-notice is issued when OSMRE “has reason to believe a violation exists or when, on the basis of a Federal inspection, it determines that a violation exists.” Within 10 days, Montana DEQ must take “appropriate action to cause the possible violations to be corrected, or to show good cause for such a failure”. At the time of this article, DEQ has reached out to Signal Peak about correcting these violations, and is waiting for a response.

Unfortunately, OSMRE failed to issue a ten-day-notice to DEQ on four of the issues we outlined related to water, reclamation, waste disposal, and minor permit revisions. We believe we provided the evidence needed for OSMRE to take action, and we will continue to work hard over the coming months to ensure the agency does their job to uphold the law.

In August, Federal District Court Judge Brian Morris ruled that a previously lifted moratorium on new coal leasing on public lands must be reinstated. Judge Morris found that the Interior Department was not complying with bedrock environmental laws when granting new coal leases because the agency has failed to study the full environmental impacts that result from granting permits for expanded coal mining. This means that no new coal leases can be issued unless the Biden administration issues a new environmental analysis. This moratorium was initially established in 2016 at the end of the Obama administration and was repealed at the beginning of the Trump administration.

This ruling is a big win for Montana, where the vast majority of our coal is federally owned.
Federal court sends massive Montana, Wyoming coal mining plan back to the drawing board

On August 3rd, Northern Plains and a coalition of allies won a major legal battle for the climate, human health, and the responsible use of our public lands and minerals. In a scathing ruling, U.S. District Judge Brian Morris struck down the Bureau of Land Management’s Trump-era Resource Management Plans for Eastern Montana and Northeastern Wyoming. Collectively, these plans governed tens of thousands of acres of land and billions of tons of coal, all of which are owned by taxpayers.

Judge Morris ruled that BLM must take into account the downstream impacts of coal-related non-greenhouse gas emissions – that is to say, the public health impacts of burning coal and releasing sulfur dioxide, mercury, lead, and other pollutants. He also ruled that BLM must consider leasing less taxpayer-owned coal for mining. Previously, BLM had refused to even think about limiting future coal mining in the Powder River Basin.

“As Montana and Wyoming deal with the impacts of more frequent and more severe droughts, flooding, and heat waves due to climate change, this ruling is especially welcome,” said Northern Plains chair Joanie Kresich. “We are pleased that the court has upheld the law. BLM will have to fully consider climate pollution when it makes decisions about our region’s public lands and minerals. We have an obligation to provide a healthy climate to our children and grandchildren, and this ruling helps make that possible.”

Under the ruling, BLM has a year to create new Resource Management Plans. Stay tuned for ways to get involved to ensure that our publicly-owned minerals and lands serve the public good.

Northern Plains was represented in the case by Western Environmental Law Center.

MEMBER VOICE

Climate Matters

I remember first hearing about climate change in a middle school class when our science teacher taught us about global warming. At the time it was a distant threat, and there were all sorts of new and exciting technologies that we expected to solve the problem for us. From carbon capture to fuel cell cars, science was going to figure it out. Now, almost 20 years later, that hasn’t exactly happened. It turns out there is no magic solution to this problem, and it’s going to take hard work by a lot of people to change how we do things.

That’s the greatest reason I support Northern Plains. By banding together, we can kick start those changes in our communities. Together, we have rallied against construction of the methane plant in Laurel and helped over a dozen homes in Billings install solar panels. We’ve worked to fund these projects through C-PACE and advocated for walk and bike ability with our city council and planners. While it can be hard to make an impact as one individual, cooperating with others gives us a chance to make real change.

- Tyler Mortenson

Billings
The American Beef Labeling Act still needs a push to move forward. If you, like most Americans, support COOL, call the Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee office at (202) 224-2035 and ask them to hear the American Beef Labeling Act.

A recently released poll confirms what we’ve known for years: American voters want their beef labeled with country-of-origin. The poll, conducted by Morning Consult and commissioned by Coalition for a Prosperous America, was released as the 117th U.S. Congress nears its conclusion in January 2023. Right now, the American Beef Labeling Act is still waiting to be heard in the Senate Agriculture Committee. As we have yet to see movement on this legislation to restore COOL, we are especially motivated by the poll’s results:

- 89% of American voters are concerned that importers of foreign beef can legally put a U.S. food safety inspection sticker on a package containing beef born, raised, and harvested outside of the U.S.
- 90% of American voters are concerned that importers of foreign beef can legally put a ‘Product of U.S.A.’ sticker on a package of beef born, raised, and harvested outside of the U.S.

As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of both Northern Plains and the Montana Constitution, we are proud of our right to a “clean and healthful environment for present and future generations.” We are equally proud of the rights we use every day to participate in the decisions that affect our communities. We also know these rights are vulnerable without steadfast stewardship and protection.

By including Northern Plains in your estate planning, you can ensure you are supporting work to protect and defend these rights forever more. To learn more about the many ways to structure your bequest, contact Caleb at caleb@northernplains.org.
What the Inflation Reduction Act could mean for soil health

The federal Inflation Reduction Act passed in August amid skyrocketing fuel and fertilizer prices as well as recent climate-fueled weather events including record-setting heat waves, historic flooding, and oppressive drought here in Montana. This legislation provides the most significant action on climate change mitigation in U.S. history, and it relies on agriculture playing a key role in addressing the climate crisis.

The Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) will receive nearly $20 billion to fund work that helps incentivize carbon-sequestering farming and ranching practices. NRCS/USDA programs that received this funding include: the Environmental Quality Incentives Program which works to increase practices like cover crops, prescribed grazing and forest stand improvement; the Regional Conservation Partnership Program which addresses farm, watershed and other natural resource concerns; the Agricultural Conservation Easement program; and the Conservation Stewardship Program.

Conservation plans are usually aimed at addressing water quality, soil erosion, biodiversity, pollinator habitat, carbon sequestration, and energy use. This funding provides an opportunity to incentivize producers to implement soil health practices across the state of Montana!

The Inflation Reduction Act also includes $4 billion in funding for drought relief efforts in the Western United States. Specifically, the funding will go towards projects in the “Reclamation States” including Montana. If these funds are implemented with producers in mind, it will bolster existing programs that encourage the adoption of soil health practices. All in all, this historic legislation provides a major boost to regenerative agriculture, ensuring a big step to mitigate climate change.

MEMBER VOICE

During classes to get my Environmental studies degree with an emphasis in environmental justice at the University of Montana, a professor introduced me to the work Northern Plains has accomplished throughout the years. This sparked a quest within me to work in some capacity for Northern Plains after graduating. I joined Northern Plains’ canvass in 2018 and then again in 2019. During my time working with the organization, I was able to see the admirable dedication every single staff member has to advancing Northern Plains’ mission and empowering community leaders to act in their communities’ best interest. The work Northern Plains does is invaluable to Montana and the country as a whole, and I want to support as best I can.

Monthly Sustainers are vital to Northern Plains, and I am happy to contribute $5 a month at this point in time. I run on a tight budget, so giving monthly helps me incorporate community giving into my spending without placing any strain on my ability to cover the necessities of life. Consistent donations made over time will help ensure Northern Plains can keep protecting our air, water, and natural and working landscapes.

- Alanna Wulf
Billings
The best opportunity at hand to stop construction of NorthWestern Energy’s methane plant on the banks of the Yellowstone River in Laurel is an unglamorous land use tool: zoning. In order for NorthWestern to complete the project, the corporation needs a portion of the land re-zoned from agricultural use to heavy industrial use. Who is in charge of making that re-zoning decision? Well there starts an epic game of hot potato.

The City of Laurel claims to have no jurisdiction and punts the decision to Yellowstone County. Yellowstone County refuses to answer questions about zoning authority. And in this game of hot potato, NorthWestern is plowing ahead with construction of an expensive plant that doubles down on polluting fuel sources without proper zoning in place. It’s the people of Laurel and Yellowstone County, our climate, and future generations that will lose while our elected officials shirk their responsibility and hand NorthWestern what it wants on a silver platter.

Enough is enough. We continue to make residents in Yellowstone County aware of NorthWestern’s egregious actions to ensure that they have a voice in these important decisions that impact the health and safety of their community.

**TAKE ACTION**

Visit NorthernPlains.org/No-Methane-Plant to learn more about how we can protect our wallets, health, and climate from this corporation’s reckless project. We deserve better than methane.
C-PACE program receives national recognition!

Seven months in, Montana’s Last Best Pace program is already receiving national attention.

In late August, the Montana Facility Finance Authority (MFFA) and the Montana Department of Commerce announced that Adam Gill, executive director of MFFA, and Seth Lutter, assistant director, have both won national PACESetter Awards for the Montana C-PACE program.

“The PACENation PACESetter Awards were designed to recognize exceptional achievement, and Montana's C-PACE Program administered by the Montana Facility Finance Authority is just that -- exceptional,” PACENation's Acting Executive Director Mary Luévano commented.

Adam and Seth have been instrumental in providing a clear road map for Montana’s counties, businesses, and banks to participate in the C-PACE program, and have spoken across the state on how to access funding. MFFA has big plans to help as many Montana businesses as possible access C-PACE funding to make energy efficient upgrades and reduce their bottom line. This award also comes after the funding close of the first C-PACE program, a water and sewer treatment facility in Broadwater County whose savings will total up to $10 million.

Seth Lutter points out, “If just 15 percent of businesses in Montana adopt C-PACE, that would mean $1 billion in economic development and $4 billion in savings to businesses.”

Local Northern Plains affiliates such as the Sleeping Giant Citizens Council, the Golden Triangle Resource Council, and the Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council are all actively pursuing C-PACE campaigns to enable the program in their counties. Seven counties have enabled C-PACE, with more counties in the voting process. Thanks to Northern Plains members, Montana is on PACE to be a regional leader of this innovative, energy-saving financing tool!

The fast facts on C-PACE

C-PACE (Commercial Property Assessed Capital Enhancements) is a statewide program passed into law in the 2021 legislative session that allows businesses, farms, ranches, and other commercial property owners to secure funding from private lenders to make energy efficient upgrades at no upfront cost. The upgrades are paid off slowly over time via property taxes through an agreement with a lender, and the program is designed so that the utility savings outweigh the costs of the upgrades. This allows commercial property owners to more easily make major building improvements such as new lighting, insulation, boiler and HVAC systems, solar panels, and more.

Northern Plains members were the primary drivers in getting C-PACE passed by the legislature, a hard won campaign that took seven years of tenacious organizing. From here, C-PACE must be enabled on a county-by-county basis, and our members continue to be the driving force in that effort across Montana!
Defending our values at the upcoming Montana Legislative Session

By Caroline Canarios

We’re fast approaching the 2023 Montana legislative session, and it’s time to get ready! We are already preparing to defend our values around energy democracy, the Montana constitution, support for family farmers and ranchers, bolstering soil health, protecting democracy, preventing corporations from taking advantage of Montanans, and more. We know we’re in for a tough session ahead, so we need you to show up, take action, and make your voice heard!

What does this look like? Check out some of our members from past legislative sessions!

Making our voice heard at our clean energy rally in 2019.

Lobbying our legislators at our citizen lobby days.

Member testimony at bill hearings.

SIGN UP FOR A LEGISLATIVE PHONE TREE

The legislative phone tree helps us get hundreds of calls into the legislature during times when critical votes are cast and urgent action is needed. You can sign up to be a leaf (call your legislators), a limb (call a few members and your legislators), or a branch (call several members and your legislators).

These phone trees allow our legislative work to reach new heights, so please consider turning over a new leaf or branching out if you’ve never been part of this meaningful work in the past! If you’re already firmly rooted in this work, we look forward to having you sign up again!

To sign up for the phone tree, email Caroline at caroline@northernplains.org.
GAINING GROUND

Bull Mountain Land Alliance wins the September Affiliate Membership Recruitment Competition!

By Bronya Lechtman

The first annual affiliate membership recruitment competition has come to a wrap! Throughout the month of September, Northern Plains affiliates were invited to participate in a friendly competition to help us grow our membership, and expand our grassroots power. Nine affiliates ended up participating, with six affiliates recruiting members through one-on-one conversations, pint nights at local breweries, booths at local festivals and fairs, or canvassing their neighbors.

The winner is Bull Mountain Land Alliance (BMLA), recruiting a whopping 21% of their membership! Five new household memberships is a big deal in building BMLA’s power, and bolstering the strength of neighbors in the Bull Mountains as they stand up to Signal Peak Energy, the corrupt “Bully of the Bull Mountains” (see page 10 for more information on Signal Peak). BMLA’s success came from canvassing in their community as part of developing a water monitoring program that they invited neighbors to participate in. Congratulations BMLA! As their prize, they will get to choose between having a dinner in the Bull Mountains hosted by Northern Plains staff, or a tree planted in their affiliate’s name.

While BMLA might have won the competition, the broader Northern Plains family got a big win thanks to the hard work of everyone who participated. It was inspiring to see how many members attended the recruitment training held by staff, initiated conversations with their friends and neighbors, and tried new ideas to get more folks involved in their affiliates. Shout out to Central Montana Resource Council, Dawson Resource Council, Yellowstone Bend Citizen’s Council, Bear Creek Council, and Yellowstone Valley Citizen’s Council, who also recruited members this month. We especially want to highlight Dawson Resource Council, who was the runner up in percentage.

Below is the final tally:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affiliate</th>
<th>Membership Recruitment %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BMLA</td>
<td>21%</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BCC</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>YBCC</td>
<td>3%</td>
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<tr>
<td>YVCC</td>
<td>0.5%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Bull Mountain Land Alliance members developing their neighborhood canvass strategy.

THROW THIS DOCUMENT IN THE DIRT, PLEASE

After you read up on all the dirt about happenings in Montana, you can turn the Plains Truth into dirt for your flower beds and gardens. We have moved to a printing process that uses vegetable-based inks on 100% recycled paper. As a result, this newsletter is safe for residential or commercial composting, helping us build a more sustainable future for Montana and beyond!

(Remember to remove the staples before throwing it in your compost!)
**GAINING GROUND**

**Inflation Reduction Act will strengthen our rural communities, bring us closer to a healthier climate**

*By Anna Kerr-Schneider*

On August 16, 2022 President Biden signed into law the most significant climate change legislation in U.S. history. While the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) is far from perfect, the law will have significant implications for our climate, the clean energy future we’re fighting for, and the future of family agriculture.

The IRA is an investment in our rural communities. Among its many economic priorities, the law advances $22 billion in part for agricultural conservation and another $13 billion in rural development (see page 13 for details). With family farms and ranches supported, the backbone of our local economy is strengthened, and we can better foster a strong local food system. The law also provides nearly $10 billion in grant and loan funding for electric cooperatives to invest in affordable renewable energy. Our rural electric co-ops will be able to get a fair slice of the renewable energy market and allow energy customers all across the state to take back control over the energy decisions that impact their lives.

In addition, the IRA will provide a stronger path forward in our just transition to clean energy. The law promises $40 billion for the U.S. manufacture of solar panels, wind turbines, batteries and critical minerals. We know that the transition to a clean energy future has implications for workers. The IRA will strengthen and provide more American manufacturing jobs, ensuring a prosperous future for hard-working families. In addition, the law provides extensive tax credits for clean energy upgrades, making clean energy more accessible. The law also promises a 40% cut in greenhouse gas pollution by 2030 bringing us much closer to a healthier climate for all.

We are glad to see our rural communities and hard-working families put front and center in climate legislation. We know that with these many great strides come many compromises, including continued investment in fossil fuels like methane. Nevertheless, we move forward celebrating all of the grassroots work that got us here and continuing our commitment to ensure a stable and healthy climate for future generations.

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**HISTORY PROJECT**

**The Montana Constitution and Northern Plains: Protecting our state since 1972**

*By Dustin Ogdin*

In the early 1970s, something revolutionary happened. Everyday Montanans rose up, demanding a new constitution with expanded rights and freedoms that center power in the hands of the people. Burgeoning national movements seeking equal rights along race, gender, and cultural lines inspired action. Our society was evolving, and people expected more from their governments and from one another.

Montana’s constitution was seen as archaic, unable to meet the challenges the times required. This surge of democratic action was also a response to corrupt industrialists and compromised politicians who had misused their power, striking self-serving deals in private, smoke-filled rooms far from public view.

Continued on page 19.
The legacy of the copper kings and the environmental disasters that resulted from irresponsible mining were impossible to ignore. The first Earth Day had recently been celebrated. Montanans were tired of big business coming in to the state to extract wealth while buying political influence to evade their responsibilities to clean up their messes or follow the law. At the same time, Montana stood on the precipice of further environmental destruction with the North Central Power Study looming.

This study was a plan concocted by a coalition of government agencies and energy companies that sought to bulldoze and carve up massive swaths of eastern Montana for fossil fuel extraction, designating the entire region a “sacrifice area” for the energy demands of the nation. Of course, the North Central Power Study also served as a primary motivating factor for the founding of Northern Plains as farm and ranch families banded together to protect their land and livelihoods from this encroaching threat. The connections between Northern Plains and Montana’s grassroots movement for foundational reform do not stop here.

In November of 1971, 100 Montanans from all walks of life – farmers, ranchers, teachers, attorneys, Democrats, Republicans, and independents – were elected to the Constitutional Convention. The body met in Helena over two months holding open meetings to develop the new document. They completed the drafting in March of 1972, only one month before what we now consider to be the first meeting of our organization, when the name “Northern Plains Resource Council” was first proposed. It’s uncertain how many of the 100 members of “ConCon” went on to become Northern Plains members, but we know many did. Two members with strong connections to Northern Plains are worth noting.

Louise Cross of Glendive served as the chair of ConCon’s Natural Resources Committee. Cross’s leadership was essential in ensuring that our “right to a clean and healthful environment” was enshrined into our Bill of Rights. Louise went on to become a Northern Plains member and leader within our eastern Montana affiliate Dawson Resource Council, where she helped protect Makoshika State Park from destructive oil and gas extraction.

Attorney Leo Graybill served as the President of ConCon. Graybill guided the entire process, including the challenging work of ratifying the groundbreaking document in June of 1972. Graybill later became an important ally of Northern Plains, conducting our legal work to protect Rosebud County residents and Northern Plains members as Colstrip sought to expand their power plants, threatening local agriculture.

The connections between the Montana Constitution and Northern Plains are both personal and profound. 34 rights were granted by this revolutionary new document - rights that are more clearly articulated than in almost any other constitution in the nation. Because of the work of people like Louise and Leo, we have a right to know what our government does (no more smoke-filled, closed-door rooms) and a right to participate. As noted, we have a right to a clean and healthful environment.

Without these rights, Northern Plains could not do our work. Shortly after the Constitution’s ratification, we used these rights to pass major legislative reforms involving reclamation and water use. Few, if any, of the other campaign victories we’ve won during our 50-year history could have succeeded without our right to be in the room, aware of what our decision-makers are doing, participating in the process.

We are fiercely proud of our constitution, written by Montanans for Montanans. We know that many of the rights and freedoms we hold dear could be under threat during the 2023 legislative session if politicians and special interests try to dismantle this sacred document. We also know that Northern Plains members will fight to keep the Montana Constitution wholly intact, protecting our freedoms for this and future generations.
DRC keeps up the PACE

Sydney Ausen

Dawson Resource Council members are working to enable C-PACE in Dawson County! This fall, DRC member Bruce Peterson presented C-PACE to the Dawson County Commission and received an encouraging reception! This presentation comes after DRC members were featured in a local Glendive newspaper article on C-PACE, a piece that has helped the program to generate name recognition and expanded interest in the community.

DRC members also continue to push McCon Electric Coop to update their solar policies. Members are working to make leadership at McCon Electric aware that their solar policies are among the most restrictive in the state. They are inviting leadership to partner with them to update these policies so going solar can be more affordable and accessible!

YBCC celebrates another year of making grassroots change!

Gusty Catherin-Sauer

Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council continues to work diligently on an equitable and clean energy future and healthful environment. October was a big month for YBCC. The affiliate completed their “Less is More” sustainability workshop series and completed the installation of a solar array on Winans Elementary School, resulting in an assembly and educational “solar traveling trunk”. Lastly, YBCC held their annual meeting giving members an opportunity to celebrate another year of building power and making grassroots change!

Celebrations and new beginnings at SPA this summer

Andrew Amrein

This August, Stillwater Protective Association members celebrated their organization and each other with a picnic at Fishtail Basin Ranch in Dean; the event featured great food and great conversations!

At the August Membership Meeting a new slate of officers was elected, leading to an almost entirely new Executive Committee: Tom Heyneman as President; Burt Williams as Vice-President; Deb Griffin and Lee Wilder as Co-Secretaries; and Cindy Merriam as Treasurer. A number of new committees were also formed to pursue new projects, including a newsletter, which just released this past September; scholarships for local students; and coordinating with other non-profit organizations in Stillwater County.
Bull Mountain Land Alliance has been hard at work to ensure local residents have the tools they need to protect their water sources. Members are working with a hydrologist to develop a standard operating procedure (SOP) for folks in the Bull Mountains to monitor their wells and springs, so that they can have adequate baseline data in the event of damage from underground coal mining activity by Signal Peak Energy.

Following an August training with the hydrologist, BMLA members created postcards, as well as an online community resource webpage, providing information about the importance of water monitoring and how to participate in the group’s SOP program. Members have been knocking on doors and talking to neighbors about participating in the program, and interest has been tremendous so far! By the time this hits the printers, BMLA should have received the machine needed to test well water quantity, and then the monitoring program will officially commence!

Check out the resource page at NorthernPlains.org/Bull-Mountains-Community-Page. Shout out to member Boyd Charter who was the mastermind behind the informational videos!

SGCC prepares for a campaign-filled autumn

Sleeping Giant Citizens Council members are getting down to business this fall with two major campaigns. On the heels of the Passenger Rail Summit held in Billings last August, members are reinvigorated to continue their conversation with the Lewis and Clark County Commissioners about joining the Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority.

Members have reached out to interested businesses in Lewis and Clark and Jefferson counties to help make progress on C-PACE authorization. In Lewis and Clark County, members are working with local decision-makers to enable C-PACE in the county. They are also asking businesses for their support in advocating that county commissioners adopt the innovative energy and cost saving program.

Members also attended a presentation on the Slow Money Beetcoin movement. They discussed the possibility of a Slow Money chapter in Montana, which helps new farmers obtain 0% loans to help start production. They are continuing to research the program as they prepare a presentation for the affiliate to consider.
BCC celebrates a win for wildlife!

Bear Creek Council is celebrating their success in helping protect wildlife near Yellowstone National Park. Due largely to the work of BCC members and their allies, the Montana Fish and Wildlife Commission made a recent decision to reinstate wolf hunting quotas in the two hunting units immediately bordering Yellowstone. Last year the Commission eliminated quotas in these units, and Montana experienced a detrimental decline in the Yellowstone wolf population, threatening the livelihoods of BCC members and the vitality of gateway communities that run on wildlife tourism. BCC’s organizing paid off, and we’re celebrating this big victory for more thoughtful, humane, and economically wise wildlife policy in this unique area!

Want to show your support for wildlife? Check out BCC’s license plate the next time you license your vehicle! See our plate at DOJMT.gov/Media-Item/Bear-Creek-Council.

GTRC forges ahead with an autumn of clean energy!

Golden Triangle Resource Council members have been busily incorporating new technology and feedback from members. The goal is to create more accessible, hybrid meeting spaces for all. Meeting attendance continues to soar at around twenty members per gathering, so it’s all the more important we adopt these improvements!

Members have also been working on actions supporting C-PACE in the four county range, as well as promoting the program in Cascade County, which has already been enabled. This autumn, they are embarking on a Solarize campaign to help Great Falls residents go solar and are gearing up for the outreach process with a logo, brochure, and Facebook page in the works.

If you live in Cascade County and are interested in a solar assessment as part of the Solarize campaign, please contact organizer Emily: emily@northernplains.org.

YVCC prepares for commission vote on C-PACE

After a disappointing “no” in July from the Yellowstone County Commission when they discussed enabling C-PACE, Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council was turning their attention toward asking the Billings City Council to adopt C-PACE within city limits. In an exciting turn of events, the Commission reconsidered at the urging of many local business and community groups as well as Senator Mary McNally, who sponsored the successful C-PACE legislation in 2021. With this renewed interest at the county level, YVCC members are busy turning out businesses to testify in support of this innovative energy efficiency financing tool. We’re looking forward to passing C-PACE to enable this awesome program for businesses and organizations in Yellowstone County!
COUNCIL ROUNDUP

CCRC: 25 years and still going strong

Andrew Amrein

After several months of preparation, Carbon County Resource Council’s efforts led to big successes with a wonderful 25th Anniversary Celebration and the local Fun Run, both in Red Lodge. At the Celebration, many members attended to enjoy good food and share inspiring stories of campaigns and issues, past and present.

Besides those events, CCRC members have stayed involved in their local projects, including collecting water quality data in Rock Creek, maintaining a seat in a timber project workgroup, and planning and executing new ways to get the word out about the organization and bring in new members!

CMRC’s Green Share Garden Project feeding Lewistown

Bronya Lechtman

Central Montana Resource Council’s Green Share Garden Project volunteers are wrapping up one successful summer! It was their third year of hosting Tuesday night garden giveaways. As many as 80 people turned out to enjoy the locally grown food each week. The garden also had their first Dinner in the Garden fundraiser since before the pandemic. It was a great time to celebrate all that the garden has accomplished over the year.

CMRC members also had another excellent booth at the Lewistown Chokecherry Festival. Booth activities included selling tickets to our Central Montana Gift Card Bonanza Raffle fundraiser and working with folks to send postcards to Senator Steve Daines asking him to co-sponsor the American Beef Labeling Act.
220 S. 27th St., Suite A
Billings, MT 59101

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!

2022 Annual Meeting

November 11-12, 2022
DoubleTree Hotel
27 N 27th St, Billings

Hotel Reservations
The DoubleTree Hotel has set aside a limited number of rooms at a substantially discounted price. The deadline to reserve under the Northern Plains room block is October 27.
Call (406) 252-7400.

Parking
The DoubleTree offers complimentary parking for guests at the garage connected to the hotel. Use adjacent Park II City Garage and sky bridge; validate parking at the front desk or registration table.