A SUMMER OF HOPE FOR OUR SOIL AND CLIMATE

MONTANA YOUTH BRING COURAGE AND HOPE TO THE FIGHT FOR OUR CLIMATE’S FUTURE

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SOIL CRAWLS GATHER SOIL HEALTH ENTHUSIASTS FROM ACROSS THE STATE

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

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

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

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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.

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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 Summer 2023 Page 2
From a sedate wood-paneled courtroom in Helena, the voices of 16 Montana youth rang out with clarity. Those voices are ringing still, here in our country and around the world, tolling a message of time slipping away, of urgency. And just as powerful, a message of love. The Held v. Montana case in June was the first trial in which youth accused their government of shunning its obligation to provide a livable future for them.

Our relationship with youth contains a timeless reciprocity. We shelter them, teach them, and ensure the world will be ready to receive them. In turn they carry our love of life, our deepest values, and our hard-won knowledge into the future, to a time beyond us. Yet in the last few decades, this reciprocity has been shaken. The reckless burning of fossil fuels has not abated, and the frightening effects are now felt everywhere on earth.

In the courtroom, the stories youth told reflected a Montana childhood bestowed on many of our children: hiking favorite trails, family camping, fishing sun-sparkled rivers, skiing all winter. We heard a love for wild places, for a closeness to creatures other children see only in pictures, whether spotted in wilderness or tended to daily on family ranches. Yet this natural exhilaration is now marred by experiences of loss, of grieving a beloved place charred by wildfire, of feeling fear as drought strands dying trout in eddies.

The localized events of climate chaos are crashing into the lives of our youth. Plaintiff Olivia Vesovich’s asthma now isn’t just exercise-induced. As wildfire smoke descends more frequently, she has only 5 minutes outside before the panic-inducing experience of struggling to breathe hits.

No infant or small child will survive without adult care. Dr. Lori Byron of Hardin MT, a Northern Plains member and expert who testified on the effects of climate disruption on children’s bodies, expanded on this vulnerability from a scientific vantage. Children’s bodies are not small adult bodies, she explained; they have unique vulnerabilities that are worsened by climate change. The more rapid respiration of infants and young children leads to the absorption of more toxins from wildfire smoke. Children are more fragile during climate-induced heat extremes and more likely to die. Their still-developing nervous systems make them more vulnerable to neurotoxins in polluted air and water. Dr Byron made clear that climate induced extremes are targeting our children.

As the roots of climate change are revealed, we in Northern Plains have mobilized. Plaintiff Grace Gibson-Synder highlighted the need for concerted collective actions:

“I realized that as much work as I put in on the local level, as much change as we made here, it would always be less efficient than having policy change.”

Our recent history is full of sustained efforts to create policies addressing the new climate challenges. We have supported rural electric co-op members to leverage their power to increase energy efficiency and green energy. We passed C-PACE legislation to boost the transition off fossil fuels. We have been a force in shifting our productive soils to sequester carbon. We mobilized to successfully shield our Montana Constitution from legislative attacks - our right to a “clean and healthful environment” proudly stood intact at the end of the 2023 season, and provided the foundation for the youth case in Helena.

None of us asked to face the daunting challenges that climate change brings, but we accept them willingly. Our children can count on our deep resolve to keep working to ensure the future they will inhabit is worthy of them. They can count on us to shore up the trust between the generations, weakened by climate chaos, but still within our grasp.

- Joanie Kresich
Chair
Melissa Holt was born and raised in Glendive. She lives in the home her maternal grandparents bought after moving to the Montana town generations ago. Her family was later surprised to learn that this property goes all the way back to land once owned by her great-grandparents on her father's side. “My family is very rooted here,” says Melissa, and it’s clear that her love for eastern Montana is just as deeply rooted. Protecting her home is what led her to Northern Plains through her local affiliate, Dawson Resource Council (DRC).

Several years ago, Melissa saw a Facebook post from a former high school classmate, Seth Newton. Seth had posted a Northern Plains petition about a radioactive waste facility in the area that had the potential to pollute the groundwater essential to his ranch. Melissa signed the petition and was soon contacted by a Northern Plains organizer. They set up a meeting to get to know one another, and she joined Dawson Resource Council right there, on the spot. She has been a stalwart leader for DRC ever since, going on to become one of the affiliate’s representatives to the Northern Plains board of directors, a vice-chair of DRC, and now, the affiliate’s chair. But she admits to facing some fears along the way.

“I was so in awe of the leaders of DRC and Northern Plains when I started and would never have seen myself in a position of leadership,” Melissa noted. After hearing her former classmate Seth talk in-depth about the technical issues related to radioactive oil waste, she thought, “There’s no way I’m going to understand this.” But it wasn’t too long before Melissa delivered a powerful, impassioned, and deeply informed testimony about radioactive waste during a Glendive public hearing. She was nervous about speaking in front of the crowd but felt empowered once it was over.

“Every new step in this work has been daunting and scary, but Northern Plains gives you so many tools to do it,” she says. “Through our campaigns I have found a voice and learned that together, even small groups of people can make big change.” This became evident when DRC and Northern Plains were instrumental in getting Montana’s first ever radioactive waste disposal rules passed into law.

Melissa went on to be a leader in other DRC campaigns, including a successful effort to bring recycling back to Glendive after the city’s local facility burned down while she was away at college in North Dakota. That campaign spawned a new nonprofit organization – Glendive Recycles Our Waste (GROW) – where Melissa somehow finds the time to serve as vice-chair.

Most recently, Melissa has been one of the most outspoken leaders fighting a predatory rate increase for customers of Montana Dakota Utilities, the region’s monopoly energy utility. She sees the campaign as a “monumental opportunity for DRC” to show leadership on “an issue that affects everyone in our town and surrounding community.” She’s standing up for the economic prosperity and dignity of the place she loves.

“I care about the people in my community, and this place is worth protecting,” Melissa says. “Eastern Montana has a unique way of life, and I want us to maintain that.”
Montanans welcome strong reforms for federal oil and gas protections

By Gusty Catherin-Sauer

Montanans and the nation can celebrate the release of strong new proposed federal oil and gas rules that update an archaic system. The Biden administration and the Department of Interior have released a plan to increase the amount of bonding money oil companies have to provide before they can drill on public and tribal lands twenty-fold. This is the first adjustment to bonding levels in 63 years.

The proposed rules will help ensure that federal and tribal wells are plugged and reclaimed in a timely way once drilling is complete so that taxpayers will not foot the cleanup bill. The new standards will require operators to post bonds that will better cover the costs of reclaiming the landscapes impacted by oil and gas development. Through company bankruptcies, oil and gas field sales, and other operational changes, thousands of wells have been left abandoned, posing risks to the health and safety of communities nearby due to leaking chemicals and dilapidated equipment. As a result, oil and gas companies enjoy the profits while landowners and taxpayers are left to deal with the mess. This new rule will provide needed solutions to this problem.

But we need your help! To get these proposed rules over the finish line, we need as many members as possible to submit a comment in support of the rules no later than September 22nd. Email Gusty at gusty@northernplains.org to learn how you can take action today.

A step forward for Treasure State reclamation

By Gusty Catherin-Sauer

A report published in the journal Population and Environment explored the demographics of people living near active oil and gas wells. It found that nearly 18 million individuals live within one mile of these, with communities of color and people living below the poverty line disproportionately impacted. The report also noted a significant number of older individuals and young children reside in many counties with active drilling across the US.

However, there is some good news for Montana. Last year, the state was awarded a grant from the Department of Interior to plug and remediate 274 orphaned (abandoned) wells across the state. The Montana Board of Oil and Gas Conservation oversees the disbursement of these funds, and it did not waste any time. Work has already started, with 52 orphaned wells already plugged at the time of this writing!

The goal is to plug half of the state's orphaned wells by the end of 2023, and we are well on the way. In addition, 14 wells were put back into production. It is important to note that this grant is paid for with taxpayer dollars and policy reforms must be implemented to ensure that oil and gas companies are held responsible for their reclamation duties in the future. Look for opportunities to take action to hold corporations responsible for proper remediation practices to protect our health and environment moving forward.
For years, Northern Plains members have been sounding the alarm about the financial, environmental, and health risks posed by the methane-fired power plant NorthWestern Energy is trying to force onto Montana’s energy customers. As most readers probably know, this plant is under construction alongside the Yellowstone River in Laurel even though NorthWestern has not properly secured legal zoning designation for the plant’s operation and despite a lack of adequate environmental analysis of its anticipated pollution. The monopoly utility corporation continues to barrel forward, ignoring our laws and the concerns of its customers.

In April, a Montana District Court acknowledged the legal shortcomings of the project, revoked the plant’s permit, and ordered NorthWestern to halt construction until the plant’s climate and light pollution could be properly analyzed. In his order, Judge Michael Moses wrote that the plant would emit over 23 million tons of greenhouse gas pollution over its lifetime noting potential conflicts with Montanans’ constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment. With this order, it appeared that NorthWestern and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) were finally being held accountable for failing to properly follow our laws. That is, until, extremist lawmakers came to NorthWestern’s aid during the 2023 legislative session.

Montana’s House of Representatives suspended their own rules to allow Rep. Josh Kassmier (R-Fort Benton) to introduce HB 971 despite the deadline having long passed for new bill introduction. HB 971 bans state agencies from considering climate pollution as part of environmental analyses. The bill, which was signed into law, was clearly designed to undermine this judicial ruling on behalf of NorthWestern Energy. Rep. Kassmier explicitly said as much during the bill’s hearing.

As a result of this corporate-pandering legislation, construction was allowed to resume for the plant, but the state was still required to open a public comment period about the environmental impacts, and Northern Plains members flooded DEQ with hundreds of comments about the plant’s dangerous pollution.

HB 971 is a clear violation of the Montana Constitution, and legal strategies to challenge it are emerging. As we wait for those legal challenges, we are certainly not slowing our work to protect the Laurel community and Montana energy customers from this expensive, polluting power plant.

In July, we spent a week canvassing neighborhoods across Laurel to provide information about the dangers of this plant while learning more about community concerns and attitudes. We discovered that many Laurel residents are worried about the health impacts this plant will impose, especially for those already dealing with health challenges including asthma and other respiratory conditions. We heard from residents on fixed incomes who are concerned about the increases to their power bills this $275 million plant will cause. And we learned that many were angry that the monopoly utility, the state, nor local leaders have given the community an adequate opportunity to have a say in this decision via any meaningful public hearings.

Despite NorthWestern’s relentless push to impose this expensive, polluting plant onto Laurel and its customer base, our members remain fired up and are unwilling to back down. When this Plains Truth goes to print, a judge will hear the case for zoning jurisdiction to determine whether Yellowstone County or the City of Laurel has the authority to enforce zoning laws, and we’ll be rallying at the Yellowstone County Courthouse to show NorthWestern, the media, and decision-makers that we DO NOT WANT this expensive, polluting plant! While we know this battle will remain tough, we also see multiple strategies to stop this reckless plant, and our members will not stop fighting for the clean, just energy future that Montanans want and deserve.
### OIL AND GAS

#### By the numbers: NorthWestern Energy’s polluting power plant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>$275 million</strong></td>
<td>The estimated cost of the plant’s structure alone, without factoring in the future costs of fuel transport and plant maintenance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>28%</strong></td>
<td>The amount by which NorthWestern Energy is currently trying to raise electricity rates before factoring this plant’s enormous price tag into future rate increases.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>49.4 tons</strong></td>
<td>The amount of carcinogenic formaldehyde pollution the plant’s 18 industrial engines will emit every year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>103.8 tons</strong></td>
<td>The amount of particulate matter pollution the plant’s 18 engines will emit each year, causing serious respiratory risks to communities nearby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>165.4 tons</strong></td>
<td>The amount of volatile organic compound (VOCs) pollution the plant’s 18 engines will emit each year, risking damage to the liver, kidney, and central nervous system.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>14.1 tons</strong></td>
<td>The amount of sulfur dioxide (SO2) pollution the plant’s 18 engines will emit each year, causing serious respiratory risks especially for those with pre-existing conditions like asthma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>23 million tons</strong></td>
<td>The total amount of greenhouse gas pollutants this plant would emit over its lifetime according to Montana’s Yellowstone County District Court judge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Zero</strong></td>
<td>The number of meaningful public hearings that Laurel residents and NorthWestern customers have had to voice their concerns about this plant and the disturbing numbers above.</td>
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Summer Soil Crawls in the Last Best Place

By Gusty Catherin-Sauer

Did you know there are about 60 million acres of farms and ranches in the Treasure State? Those millions of acres are made up of soil. We are finding that healthy soils lead to higher yields, better water storage and water quality, and can help farms and ranches tolerate drought better – among many more benefits. Agriculture is one of the biggest industries in our state, and we see soil health as a way to increase the bottom line and make operations more profitable for the long haul. Unfortunately farmers and ranchers continue to report less farm-related income each year, and people are leaving the industry altogether.

We want to encourage more Montanans to consider a future in agriculture. This is one reason Northern Plains hosts “Soil Crawls” each summer. These are public events where we gather to explore the soil health on our members’ ranches and farms to learn what we could do to make improvements and identify where we are finding success.

Our first soil crawl of the year was held at Stone Soup Garden in Laurel. Participants toured a small-scale, regenerative farm led by young farmers Patrick Certain and Claire Overholt, who are striving to cultivate healthy soil, food, and community. Attendees bolstered their knowledge of soil health principles and deepened their relationships to each other and the land. Our speakers and participants represented a diverse range of perspectives. They included Annika Charter Williams, one of the founders of the Yellowstone Valley Food Hub, Elle Ross from the Hardin Food Bank and Farm to School program, and Dr. Tony Hartshorn from the Montana State University Soil Integration lab.

Next we were excited to head north for a soil crawl on the Hi-Line. We joined Patti Armbrister, founder of the Agrarian Food Web, for a gardening and greenhouse tour of Sleeping Buffalo Springs, the Reinhardt Garden, and other Hinsdale regenerative operations. Participants at the second soil crawl even camped out at the hot springs to build relationships and grow their understanding of what’s below our feet!

We hope you’ll attend a soil crawl to experience the full depth they can cover, but here’s a brief overview of what we learned already this summer! Between the two soil crawls, speakers discussed how to start a regenerative farm or garden, how to navigate soil salinity, and how to utilize heavy clay in soils. Speakers referenced the basics of how soil captures carbon and the importance of a strong localized food system. Attendees also learned how to understand soil organic matter, what geological formations and soil horizons are represented in our local regions, and we even dove into the beautifully complex world of soil-microbe-plant interactions.

If you are interested in participating in a soil crawl visit our website to register for our final 2023 event happening on September 9th at the Stick Leg Ranch in Valier, Montana!
SOIL

Northern Plains members soil their undies for soil health!

Have you ever wondered how healthy your soil is? The Soil Your Undies Challenge is a national event that has been brought to Montana. This summer Northern Plains challenged farmers, ranchers, and soil health enthusiasts across Montana to bury a pair of cotton underwear to promote soil health awareness. It’s a quick and dirty way to test the microbial activity in your soil. The more the underwear has deteriorated, the healthier your soil!

Whether you’re on a cropland, open range, forest, or other substrate, microbial action is hard at work. One teaspoon of healthy soil contains more microbes than there are people on the planet. These microbes help soil resist erosion, cycle nutrients, and store water. Just like us, these microbes in your soil need food, shelter, and variety in order to thrive.

If you’d like to participate in the challenge or sign up to learn about other opportunities to bolster Montana’s natural resources please email Gusty at gusty@northernplains.org. You can also see the results from the challenge across the country by googling, “Soil Your Undies Tracker.” Show your neighbors and friends what is going on under their feet!

Northern Plains members dig up the underwear we buried earlier this summer to discover how healthy the soil is at Home on the Range.

COAL

DEQ’s oversight failures in the Bull Mountains creates crisis for ranchers

As many of you know, Signal Peak Energy, the operator of the Bull Mountains Mine near Roundup, has been a reckless company. Signal Peak is currently on federal probation following criminal convictions on multiple counts regarding health, safety, and environmental violations. Despite accountability from federal prosecutors, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) allowed this reckless behavior to transpire mostly unchecked, and that pattern of lax oversight continues today.

One of the ways we see the mine escape accountability is through a process called minor permit revisions. Minor permit revisions are changes to coal mining permits that companies apply for, and these revisions are not supposed to impact things like the ability to reclaim damaged land or water once mining is complete. These minor revisions are supposed to have minimal impacts, and, therefore, do not provide opportunity for public comment and require only limited analysis by DEQ. Unfortunately, many of the over 300 “minor” permit revisions that Signal Peak has been granted do have significant impacts on the land and water of the Bull Mountains, and these revisions should have been subject to public comment and greater scrutiny by DEQ.

On multiple occasions, supposedly “minor” permit revisions have included changes to Signal Peak’s spring mitigation plan, which detail the company’s plans to replace water that it has damaged. For example, without anyone’s input, Signal Peak created an interim mitigation plan for a spring damaged by mining activity that Bull Mountain ranch family, the Charters,
depend on for their operation. The plan and permit revision inserted blatantly inaccurate information about the Charter’s water rights and use of the spring over the years, and the Charters had no opportunity to respond or revise.

Inserting inaccurate narratives about an individual in a permit is inappropriate, unnecessary, and damaging. The revision then goes on to specify that Signal Peak is only required to provide minimal and wildly inadequate amounts of water replacement, and even that is only required if the flow of water stops altogether. Specifically, the revision says Signal Peak will not be required to provide water in excess of 500 gallons per week at or near this spring location despite the fact that this spring can commonly produce up to 50,000 gallons per week. 500 gallons would only water about 2-3 cows. Over the many decades of ranching in this area, the Charters have not seen this spring completely stop running even in a particularly dry year. No one was consulted before making these revisions, and there is no clear explanation as to how the paltry number of 500 gallons came to be.

On top of this, multiple other springs have gone dry on the Charters’ property and Signal Peak and DEQ have consistently blamed this on drought, despite it being a significantly wetter year in the Bull Mountains. DEQ is not requiring replacement of these water sources. Therefore, it is simply not possible for the Charters to bring cows up to the Bull Mountains this summer where they have ranched for generations.

Similar “minor” permit revisions that impact water or directly impact people’s livelihoods have occurred at other Bull Mountain ranches. We believe that these minor permit revisions, which consistently impede adequate water reclamation, are blatant violations of state and federal law. People living near coal mines rely on Montana DEQ to provide the necessary oversight and protections to ensure mining practices are conducted responsibly. DEQ is failing to provide this oversight, and everyday people are suffering the consequences.

**TAKE ACTION**

By the time this article hits the printer, members of Northern Plains affiliate, Bull Mountain Land Alliance, will have traveled to Helena to meet with members of the DEQ coal section. We hope this meeting will lead to some agreement, and DEQ will change its course of action. For now though, here are some ways you can take action:

1. **Write a letter to the editor** of your local newspaper so more people in Montana understand what is happening in the Bull Mountains.
2. **Write letters to Montana Senators Tester and Daines, and Representatives Rosendale and Zinke** letting them know that DEQ’s recent behavior is unacceptable in Montana.

We need to stand up and defend our friends and neighbors in coal country. If you need support with these actions please contact Bronya at bronya@northernplains.org.
For over 50 years, Northern Plains members have tried to co-exist with fossil fuel development. We worked to pass the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act (SMCRA), which provided common sense laws to ensure that coal companies would mine responsibly with minimal disruption to the community or the agricultural operations that are often nearby. These laws also required companies to reclaim land and water after mining was complete. Often, fossil fuel companies extract minerals owed by the public or mine on public lands, and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) oversees the federal leases involved with these public resources.

Despite the laws we fought hard to enact, thousands of acres of land in Montana have been mined and not yet reclaimed. Our surface waters and our aquifers have been damaged and, in some cases, destroyed. We’ve seen mining companies behave as if they own the land and can do as they please – and the vast majority of the time, no one in authority stops them. But the coal companies that mine the public’s coal do not own it. Those corporations have fiscal, environmental, and social responsibilities to us – the owners of that public mineral resource. And, the government has the ultimate responsibility to ensure that those responsibilities are met.

A new development has emerged in a long battle to get the Miles City Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Field Office to develop a responsible Resource Management Plan (RMP) for coal leasing. Previous plans typically said little more than “lease all the coal.”

Resulting from a lawsuit that Northern Plains was party to, BLM had to look at alternatives where its leasing decisions would result in less coal being mined. For the first time ever, alternatives were required to look at the downstream health effects of non-greenhouse gas pollution. In other words, the dangerous chemicals that end up in our air, water, and land that threaten our health must be considered. The result is a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) that was released by the Miles City office, which has jurisdiction over most of eastern Montana.

BLM has selected two co-preferred alternatives - one of which is Alternative D whereby NO more additional coal leases are issued. Companies will still be allowed to mine what they’ve already leased from BLM, but no new leases.

Because of the continued damage to land, water, and property done by coal mining without proper accountability, Northern Plains has decided that we can no longer support any new coal leasing in the Miles City RMP. Instead, Northern Plains supports Alternative D, which would prevent any new federal coal leases and would not allow any federal lease applications that are pending to be authorized.

This alternative would have no impacts, unless they were to seek an expansion, on the operations of the Westmoreland Rosebud Mine, which are anticipated to support operations until 2060. For Spring Creek Mine, however, this alternative would exhaust federal coal reserves 53 years earlier, in 2035. In related news, BLM is preparing for an EIS to determine whether it should maintain a pause on federal coal leasing that was adopted by the Obama administration in 2016, ended by the Trump Administration in 2017, and reinstated by a federal court in May 2022.

A coal leasing moratorium would mean no new federal coal could be leased in the United States. The BLM is responsible for overseeing potential coal leases on approximately 570 million acres. A large portion of those public lands are in the western U.S., particularly in the Powder River Basin, a portion of which is in Montana.

As with the Miles City RMP, Northern Plains submitted comments in support of a coal leasing moratorium because laws requiring cleanup of land and water by mining simply isn’t happening. When oversight and accountability are not happening with respect to our public resources, the public is required to take strong action in response.
Restoring competition to the livestock industry remains a top priority for Northern Plains members, and is the only viable path forward for saving our family ranches. We knew that if we pressed forward that ranchers could become the “David vs. Goliath” against the giant meatpacking conglomerates that control the livestock industry. But, we’re no stranger to the fight.

After decades of fighting for these reforms, we gained incredible momentum over the last two years. President Biden’s announcement of an executive order on competition was a significant milestone. The order specifically directed the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to address livestock market competition through the 1921 Packers and Stockyards Act. Following the announcement, USDA announced a package of several rules, the last of which will address cattle markets specifically. We expect USDA to release the rule later this year.

While the rule package is a directive of the executive branch and is executed through an agency, Congress has discretion over agency budgets. In order to enact rule-makings, agencies need adequate funding for that work. Meatpacker lobbyists saw congressional action as an avenue to dismantle this transformative rule package by using willing members of congress to defund it.

In U.S. House Appropriations Committee, meatpacker lobbyists successfully got a rider attached to the 2024 USDA budget which would prohibit USDA from moving forward with its Packers and Stockyards Act Rules, including those already announced.

**TAKE ACTION**

The Senate still needs to agree to the bill, and this is an opportunity for you to take action. Please call Montana’s Senate offices and tell them to stand up for Montana ranchers by opposing any rider that prohibits USDA from doing its job.

Sen. Daines’ D.C. office: (202) 224-2651
Sen. Tester’s D.C. office: (202) 224-2644

**HOW DID YOUR LEGISLATOR STACK UP THIS SESSION?**

Now that the dust has fully settled from a long and arduous 2023 Legislative Session, we have taken stock of how every legislator voted with respect to the key bills and issue priorities of Northern Plains members. The scorecard in the 2023 Voting Record gives every senator and representative a score from 0-100 based on how closely their votes aligned with the preferred votes of Northern Plains on bills related to energy, conservation, democracy, and independent agriculture in Montana.

If you were already a member of Northern Plains in June, you probably received a print Voting Record in your mailbox that also provided articles and analysis about the broad themes and narratives of the session.

Our Voting Records from the last six sessions also live online where you can view all of the above by visiting: NorthernPlains.org/Voting-Records.

You can use this year’s scorecard to reach out to your legislator, either thanking them for supporting the issues that matter to you or letting them know they did not represent your interests in this previous session. To find your legislator, visit: Leg.MT.gov/Legislator-Information.
AGRICULTURE

Northern Plains ranchers lobby for COOL, livestock policy reform in D.C.

Member-ranchers Steve Charter (Shepherd) and Gilles Stockton (Grass Range) joined ranchers from other Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) groups in Wyoming and North Dakota for a “livestock fly-in” earlier this month. Our members had a jam-packed agenda to meet with decision-makers about needed policy reforms that prevent multinational agriculture corporations from abusing U.S. laws and manipulating markets to squeeze independent farmers and ranchers out of business.

Specific strategies included getting additional co-sponsors to support the American Beef Labeling Act (a strong country-of-origin labeling bill) and to communicate with congressional staffers and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) on the importance of transformative rule-makings to modernize the 1921 Packers and Stockyards Act.

Our members met with all of the offices for the Montana congressional delegation, talked with our Senators (Sens. Tester and Daines) and Congressmen (Reps. Rosendale and Zinke), met with U.S. House Agriculture Committee minority staff, sat down with White House public outreach staff, and met with USDA personnel.

Steve and Gilles related personal stories about how meatpackers have significantly impacted their livelihoods and communities, made hard asks at each of their meetings, and pushed the envelope on the urgent need for livestock policy reforms.

TAKE ACTION

The most important next step is follow up. It is critical our congressional offices hear from their constituents on the issues that matter.

Call U.S. Senator Steve Daines and tell him to co-sponsor the American Beef Labeling Act: (202) 224-2651.

MEMBER VOICE

Monthly Sustainer

In the early 70s, Mom became a monthly member of Northern Plains, along with families of the Big Horn Mountain drainages - back when the new state constitution was written. It was a special time in Montana. We were attracting young, wise pastors, doctors, and farmers from exotic places like Minnesota, meaning “sky-tinted water” in the Dakota language. Cowboys care about the water in the West, and the land and air. My earliest memory of Northern Plains was mom’s enthusiasm for how they were protecting ranchers along the Tongue River from a railroad cutting through to take coal to the coast.

One of these Powder River pastors, Jack Kelly, helped Mom and Dad adopt me. And one of those Powder River doctors, Ed Stickney, played a prominent role in Montanans’ health and politics after moving to the Yellowstone River — he was a lifetime friend and advocate for healthy people of body and soul. Currently an attorney, Andy Patton, took his first job with Northern Plains and is still protecting Montana ranchers and citizens.

With its origins among the original people of Montana, down Birney way on the Tongue or over on the Rosebud, Northern Plains continues its legacy as a grassroots protector of the land.

After Mom passed, I found notes she’d taken during Northern Plains meetings. “Do something every day for the planet.” And her granddaughter Rikki IS — with Held v. Montana — where the young and the wise meet in the drainages of the Big Horns. (See page 16 for more information.)

With monthly membership, we carry on the legacy.

- Steve Held,
  Broadus
HISTORY PROJECT

Challenging a rate case built on falsehoods (Part I)

By Steve Paulson

Montana Power Company – Northwestern Energy’s predecessor as the primary electric utility in Montana – owned 30% of Colstrip Units 3 and 4.

In 1974, a statewide survey showed that Montanans, by a 2-to-1 margin, opposed building Units 3 and 4 because of their likely effect on electrical rates and the fact the it was doubtful the power would even be needed to serve Montana customers for years to come.

Falsehood #1: Ever-increasing electrical demand

In 1976 hearings on Units 3 and 4, we challenged the accuracy of MPC’s forecast for steadily increasing electrical demand. Time proved us right.

William Johnson, a former PSC staffer, testified on behalf of Northern Plains at the 1976 Board of Natural Resources hearing, predicting that, if Units 3 and 4 were built, Montana Power would thereafter be seeking a very large rate increase.

MPC lawyers desperately (and unsuccessfully) attempted to have Johnson’s testimony stricken from the record, calling it “irrelevant, incompetent, immaterial, conjectural, of no probative value, speculative, hypothetical, ambiguous, confusing, and misleading.”

Johnson’s 1976 forecast turned out to be correct. In 1983, as soon as Unit 3 was built, MPC came to the Public Service Commission for $96.4 million rate increase to help pay the cost of running the plant. This request amounted to an increase of 55% on electrical rates for MPC’s residential and rural customers.

Northern Plains and many other groups intervened to oppose the rate increase before the Public Service Commission. (It was probably the only time Northern Plains has been an ally of Exxon.)

Northern Plains Chair Toni Kelley said when we intervened that, “…power from Colstrip 3 and 4 is not needed. Montana’s ratepayers should not be forced to pay for it.”

At the time, the Public Service Commission followed a “used and useful” doctrine, the question being whether Montana ratepayers are likely to use the power generated in useful ways. The new Colstrip 3 plant was having trouble meeting that test.

The PSC scheduled a series of hearings during the spring of 1984. Northern Plains and other organizations held many town meetings across the state before the hearings began. Our canvassers collected thousands of petition signatures against the rate increase. Montanans turned out in a big way to oppose MPC’s request.

Falsehood #2: Montana will suffer if Units 3 and 4 are not built

Montana Power’s response to being challenged was to repeatedly threaten that there would be blackouts if the two plants weren’t built on their schedule.

This 1984 cartoon, originally published in the Billings Gazette and reprinted here with permission, illustrates how Montana’s energy corporations have long sought to gamble with customers’ money while shielding shareholders from risk.

Continued on next page.
The manager of one rural electric cooperative went to bat for MPC, saying “If Colstrip 3 had not been on line during the extremely cold weather last December [1983], we may well have had blackouts or brownouts throughout the state.”

However, Northern Plains member-leader Bill Gillin pointed out in an open letter that MPC’s own figures showed that the company was selling power out-of-state during that same cold snap.

In fact, Montana Power’s president admitted during questioning by Northern Plains’ attorney that MPC had made an offer to sell 150 megawatts – about half of Montana Power’s share of the plants’ capacity – to the Bonneville Power Administration to be sold in California. This revelation undercut MPC’s claim that the power from Units 3 and 4 was needed to prevent power blackouts in Montana.

The 1980s in Montana showed that Montana Power would say anything to get what it wanted, and that the company expected ratepayers to pay for the company’s bad management and lousy decision-making.

Northern Plains’ Wally McRae observed at the time, “The ratepayers should not have to bear the financial burden for the company’s mistakes.”

Look for Part II of this story in the next edition of the Plains Truth to discover how this case turned out and what we might learn from it regarding our current rate case battles.

HISTORY PROJECT

The 8th Annual Montana Local Food Challenge commenced on August 1, and we are challenging you to eat local food each day this August! There’s plenty of time left to celebrate Montana’s local farmers, ranchers, and food businesses. Each week, we will send a new weekly challenge by email, to up the ante and push you to think about Montana’s local food in new, exciting ways!

If you haven’t already, you can still sign up at NorthernPlains.org/LocalFoodChallenge.

Mock Chile Relleno

Submitted by Donna Rogers, Boulder, MT

Ingredients:
- Trevino’s flour tortillas (made in Billings)
- Fresh Anaheim chiles
- Flathead Lake cheese - Hot Shot Gouda

Instructions:
1. Roast chiles and remove skin, clean out seeds, and stuff with cheese.
2. Roll stuffed chiles in tortillas, then roll tortilla up within foil.
3. Grill for 20 minutes.
4. Let cool and enjoy a delicious made-in-Montana meal!
On June 12th, 2023, the sixteen plaintiffs of Held V Montana were greeted with cheers, signs, and posters as they walked into the Helena District Courtroom. This marked a historic moment: the first day of the first youth led climate trial in history.

Montana’s state constitution provides all Montanans the “right to a clean and healthful environment.” The plaintiffs argued over five days of testimony that the state of Montana has failed to uphold this right and chart a safe and healthy future for the next generation. The law firm Our Children’s Trust represented these young plaintiffs, aged 5 to 22.

During the first week of the trial, Montana District Court judge Kathy Seeley heard from experts on psychology, human health, climate science, and more, who spoke to the measurable harm that climate change inflicts on Montana’s residents and environment. Children, whose brains are still developing and forming, are more vulnerable to both psychological and physical effects of climate change. Twelve of the sixteen plaintiffs also took the stand to eloquently speak to their experiences growing up in a world with floods, fires, and drought, which threaten the things they love most about Montana and their quality of life here.

Sleeping Giant Citizens Council (SGCC) sprang into action in March, soon after finding out about the trial, to support the plaintiffs. Members organized meetings with the City of Helena Parking Commission to secure more parking for increased visitor traffic, volunteered to distribute yard signs in support of the youth plaintiffs, and helped direct folks to the courtroom. SGCC leaders also planned what became the closing event of the trial on the evening of June 20th, where over 150 supporters came out in drizzling rain to hear from youth climate activists, the mayor of Helena, and some of the Held plaintiffs and their families on how to keep the momentum going.

Afterward, Sleeping Giant members reflected on the importance of the trial, which gave Montana youth a voice to stand up for their future and challenge systems that harm them. The trial proved to be an intergenerational event, bringing together long-time climate activists and organizations as well as young people looking to join the movement. Held V Montana highlights the uniqueness of Montana’s Constitution and the need to protect it, especially following attacks on the document in our state legislature this past session.

The verdict of the trial rests on Judge Seeley, who will review the evidence and issue a ruling sometime in the next few months. Northern Plains members know that education and awareness are key, both before and following the verdict; the more people who understand the precedent this trial has set for the future of climate policy – simply by being heard – the better.
GAINING GROUND

Eastern Montana sounds warning to corporate vultures

By Jackson Newman

O ur tireless and fearless eastern Montana members have organized municipalities, county commissions, and citizens to send a clear warning to Montana Dakota Utilities and the Public Service Commission (PSC): “keep your greedy fingers out of our wallets!”

This summer, a wave of scathing letters to the editor and PSC have communicated the message loud and clear. The Mayors of Glendive, Miles City, Forsyth, and Terry among others have all sent letters decrying the predatory rate increase. Local institutions such as rural healthcare providers and senior care centers have been particularly vocal. Burt Keitner, the CEO of Prairie Community Hospital in Terry wrote that his hospital has seen a 185% increase in energy costs since 2019. Keitner followed up “Please deny the proposed rate increase, and ask MDU to do what the rest of us in eastern Montana have done – tighten the belt and work through the current economic climate with what they have on hand.”

These letters underline the grave threat that greedy corporations pose to rural communities. Miles City member Mary Catherine Dunphy was quoted in a Daily Montanan article saying, “I consider this the fight of our lives in eastern Montana.” The bipartisan and wide-ranging response to the rate increase is indicative of growing grassroots frustration with a system that puts profits over people.

MDU took the unusual step of diminishing the proposed rate hike from its initial ask of 19.2% to quell the gathering storm to a 9% rate increase. Shortly before this Plains Truth went to print, the Public Service Commission voted in favor of the new ask.

While 9% is still too much for hardworking business owners and Montanans living below the poverty line, thanks to our organizing efforts, MDU, the media, and decision-makers know that we are paying attention. This outcome isn’t ideal, but we’re extremely proud that we were able to reduce the rate increase. Thank you to everyone who spoke up, wrote comments and letters to the editor, and made this happen! Together, we’ve built progress to continue to hold MDU accountable for their corporate greed.

Northern Plains makes national news fighting for clean energy

By Dustin Ogdin

S hortly after Montana’s 2023 legislative session ended, months of investigative journalism culminated in an hour-long national radio story titled, “The Battle for Clean Energy in Coal Country.” The piece was distributed to over 350 radio stations nationwide, primarily through National Public Radio.

Award-winning journalists at Reveal from the Center for Investigative Reporting, in collaboration with the Montana Free Press exposed how politicians are colluding with NorthWestern Energy and others to guarantee big corporate profits while everyday Montanans pay the price. Northern Plains members Jeanie Alderson, Steve Krum, and Wally McRae described their experiences on the front lines as they’ve fought to protect their communities from toxic pollution and industry greed.

Our members continue to be part of the national conversation as we work to create the clean, affordable, and just energy future Montanans want and deserve. You can find this groundbreaking investigative reporting by searching “Reveal coal country” wherever you listen to podcasts or by visiting: NorthernPlains.org/Reveal-Coal-Country.
NorthWestern’s newest energy roadmap leads to a dead end

NorthWestern Energy’s Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) is released every few years to serve as a roadmap for future power production and a preview of where the company is headed for the next 20 years. The 2023 NorthWestern IRP focuses on two main sources of power to serve Montanans: increased Colstrip ownership and the methane-fired power plant in Laurel. In other words, this roadmap would lead us to a dead end of higher bills and more pollution if implemented.

NorthWestern claims that there is not enough in-state power production to support its customers through the harsh winters. It plans to acquire a 15% share of Colstrip Units 3 and 4, and complete the Laurel methane-fired plant in 2024 to provide increased energy production for Montana. The plan includes limited mentions of renewable energy sources such as wind and solar and continues to claim these are unreliable sources of power that are still more costly and use more land than “natural” gas (methane) and coal. Of course, NorthWestern prefers fossil fuel plants because they are more expensive to build, own, and operate, and the monopoly utility receives guaranteed profits of up to 11% for every dollar it spends.

According to its predictions, NorthWestern plans on using almost three times as much methane gas power as wind and solar over the next two decades. In fact, the plan highlights that carbon pollution will rise significantly between now and 2026 with increased ownership of coal and gas resources in the state. After 2026, there’s only a slight drop in climate pollution until 2030.

NorthWestern promises not to acquire more fossil fuel energy after 2035, leaving us with ten more years of dirty energy development in our state, and only fifteen years after that for them to meet their supposed “net zero by 2050” goal. If you’re wondering how NorthWestern plans to build new fossil fuel power sources until 2035, but achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050, we are too.

This plan comes during the fight over the construction of the methane-fired plant in Laurel, which NorthWestern is building without legal zoning in place on the banks of the Yellowstone River. Claiming the plant is needed to ensure that Montanans do not lose power, NorthWestern refuses to include scenarios without the plant or consider safer, more affordable options for meeting power needs. This plan is yet another example of NorthWestern doubling down on expensive fossil fuels that make more money for its shareholders while ignoring national trends towards renewables with false claims of cost and reliability issues.

IRP listening sessions were held in mid-August, with Northern Plains members turning up around the state to comment on the plan and voice their concerns. If you would like to comment on the plan, you can do so by going to NorthernPlains.org/Campaign/NWE-2023-IRP. Submit your comment by August 28th!

You can tell them that their current road map for Montana’s energy future is a dead end because Montanans want and deserve affordable, reliable, clean energy that protects the people and places we love.

CLEAN ENERGY

FAILING TO PLAN YOUR ESTATE COULD BE A GRAVE MISTAKE

Continue protecting the people and places you love for generations to come. We have numerous ways to assist you in planning a legacy that will live forever within our shared work to preserve Montana’s water, land, air, and working landscapes. For a bequest brochure and more information contact Caleb at (406) 248-1154 or caleb@northernplains.org.

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MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

Farmer/rancher Tom Tschida facilitates food justice conversation at Small Town Summit

Northern Plains joined over 250 other rural organizers and grassroots groups at the first ever Small Town Summit, hosted by United Today, Stronger Tomorrow, in Missoula in early June. Convened “by and for small town organizers,” the Summit created a space for rural organizers and leaders who frequently feel isolated from each other to share tools, tactics, and best practices.

As part of the Summit, Northern Plains led an Ag, Farmer, and Food Justice Caucus for farmer and rancher attendees, and organizations doing work around ag and food issues. Member-leader Tom Tschida, a rancher in Bridger, facilitated the group, identifying some shared challenges and shared opportunities. It was a powerful reminder that we’re not alone – while our communities and the issues they face may each be unique, we’ve got a lot in common.

Eastern MT ranchers push BLM to strengthen oil and gas protections

In May, eastern Montana ranchers and Northern Plains members Kirk Panasuk and Terry Punt participated in a stakeholder meeting with the Bureau of Land Management. The ranchers pushed for stronger financial bonds from oil and gas companies to ensure that funds are available to reclaim oil and gas wells once drilling is complete.

“It is estimated that nearly three million acres of federal land in Montana is under an oil and gas lease. The rule passing through the Office of Management and Budget right now will directly impact this land, my home,” said Kirk, referencing proposed new federal rules for oil and gas drilling that were recently released. (See page 5 for more information about these rules.)

Central Montana ranching member convenes Farm Bill listening session

Melstone rancher and Northern Plains member Bill Milton helped organize and facilitate a federal Farm Bill listening session that was attended by staffers from the offices of Senators Daines and Tester and from Representative Rosendale. Among other topics, attendees discussed how the limited staff in USDA offices hampers the ability to get projects funded at the local level. “We might have to re-imagine how we get the dollars out on the ground,” said Bill.

Colstrip ranchers meet with EPA officials about leaking coal ash ponds

In July, Colstrip area ranching members Mark DeCock and Clint and Tammy McRae met with officials from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 8, as well as the Colstrip Project Officer of the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) at the McRae’s home. The meeting came as EPA prioritizes efforts to enforce protections against environmental damage from leaking toxic coal ash ponds across the nation. The officials wanted to better understand the on-the-ground implications.

Members described how the leaking ponds have impacted the community and local livelihoods, and recounted the decades’ long fight to get these ponds cleaned up.

We hope that this meeting will lead to the protection of a current DEQ plan to fully excavate the toxic material within the ash ponds associated with Colstrip Units 1&2, and lead to a more robust cleanup plan for the ponds associated with Colstrip Units 3&4.
MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

Bull Mountain members meet with state and federal officials

Bull Mountain Land Alliance members have had a whirlwind of decision-maker meetings this summer to get better protections for agriculture, water, and the Bull Mountains community. In total, Bull Mountain landowners Kit Nilson, Steve Charter, Pat Thiele, Boyd Charter, and Mike Turley have met with the following officials this summer:

- Chris Dorrington, Director of Montana Department of Environmental Quality
- Bureau of Land Management, Billings office
- Staffers from the Billings offices of Senator Tester, Senator Daines, and Senator Rosendale
- Steve Feldgus, Department of Interior
- Congressman Jared Huffman (CA) and Matt Cartwright (PA)

These conversations have led to steady progress to ensure the Department of Environmental Quality is doing its job to require Signal Peak Energy’s compliance with the law.

COUNCIL ROUNDUP

CCRC staying active as the summer heats up

Carbon County Resource Council members are hard at work on various projects to protect and improve their communities, including: continuing their second year of water quality sampling along Rock Creek and the broader Clarks Fork Yellowstone watershed in collaboration with another local group and the DEQ; finding and building support to enact the innovative energy-saving financing tool, C-PACE, in their county this year; and staying involved in the stakeholder process for a proposed timber reduction project in the national forest outside Red Lodge.

Members are also exploring opportunities to engage with their local elected officials and to participate in their local Red Lodge area Fun Run fundraising event.

It’s fundraising season in Stillwater County

Stillwater Protective Association members have been spending their summer months organizing new ways and refining previous methods to continue to give back to their communities. Earlier this summer they decided to start up a scholarship program for local graduating seniors, specifically looking for students interested in pursuing STEM and conservation-based degrees but encouraging students of all interests, including in trade schools, to apply.

The scholarship fund was one of the targets of a barbecue and art auction fundraiser that members organized last July, as well as additional support for the River Assessment Triage Team (RATT), a local group whose post-flood efforts SPA has previously supported.
SGCC rallies around climate youth in Held V Montana!

The city of Helena has had a busy summer. In early June, the Held v. Montana case went to trial at the Helena District Court, with sixteen youth plaintiffs from around the state of Montana asserting the state has violated their right to a clean and healthful environment, as outlined in the Montana Constitution, by failing to support or adopt policies to address climate change. SGCC sprang into action, volunteering to help welcome the plaintiffs each morning, direct folks from out of town to the courthouse to watch the trial, and planning a huge send-off event for the plaintiffs on the last day of trial.

Right: Sleeping Giant Citizens Council members cheer for the youth plaintiffs of Held v Montana as they enter the courthouse.

YBCC’s community resilience in action

Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council members kicked off the summer season with our 2nd Annual Community Resilience Award and Celebration. Kristen Galbraith received the award for her leadership and service on five boards and her tireless grant writing efforts for Park County. At the Community Resilience Celebration we heard from City of Livingston staff as well as local youth Eva Lighthiser, a plaintiff in the groundbreaking Held v. Montana climate trial.

Our members believe in fostering community through resilient and equitable policies, and they are taking action every day to further these beliefs. If you’d like, you can take action today by sharing our fundraising information to help install a solar array at Sherwood, a local affordable housing property. Email Gusty (gusty@northernplains.org) to learn more about this and other YBCC efforts in Livingston.

YBCC Members gather to celebrate & learn about community resilience in Livingston and Park County.

BA gathers to celebrate this year’s victories

Beartooth Alliance members gathered in July for our annual Summer Meeting at the Range Rider Lodge to celebrate another year of working to protect the vitality of our beautiful part of the state. Members also had the opportunity to celebrate our recent victory to protect the water quality in the Cooke City/Silver Gate area from an ill-conceived waste system proposal. Over the winter, members organized to elect better decision-makers to the sewer board and saw to it that a safer alternative was put forward.
COUNCIL ROUNDUP

DRC to host local foods celebration

Jackson Newman

In late August, Dawson Resource Council plans to host a local foods celebration to show appreciation for area producers, consumers, gardeners, and more. The event, hosted at the local brewery, encourages folks to bring a food made using local ingredients. DRC remains committed to supporting local food and family agriculture in eastern Montana.

BCC keeps Gardiner “bear aware”

Sydney Ausen

Summer is tourist season in Gardiner, and it’s also bear season. Because of Bear Creek Council’s efforts through our Bear Awareness Gardiner program, the community is well equipped to keep bears and people safe! This year, BCC hit an all-time high in our Bear Awareness Gardiner efforts and has distributed approximately 60 bear-resistant trash cans to residents in the community and about a dozen more to local businesses. The program also secured funding for kits to keep bears out of fruiting trees, launched an apple picking program to ensure rotting fruit doesn’t attract bears into town, provided materials at many community events, and so much more!

YVCC advances opportunities for urban forests; sets sites on Billings’ walk and bike-ability

Caitlin Cromwell

Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council successfully got the City of Billings to apply for federal funding for urban forestry through the Inflation Reduction Act! YVCC members are ready for more trees in Billings, and believe that trees are a necessity, not an amenity. Among other benefits, trees help combat heat and lower temperatures, provide shade for those experiencing homelessness, improve air quality, and combat climate change. Plus, they make for a nicer neighborhood experience! Now, we'll wait to hear if the City receives the funding they applied for.

YVCC members have chosen two new campaigns to advance in the meantime: an effort to make Billings more walkable and bike-able, and a campaign to help get a new city-run recycling program off the ground successfully.

CMRC hosts solar event for local producers

Jackson Newman

Central Montana Resource Council’s commitment to keep farmers and ranchers on the land and increase the use of renewable energy has inspired them to host a Solarize Grass Range event. Hosted by a local rancher with solar, the event will bring speakers including installer Bozeman Green Build, ranchers with solar, and energy experts to educate the community about renewable energy opportunities.
**COUNCIL ROUNDUP**

**CRC holds farm tour and work day**

Sydney Ausen

In June, members of Cottonwood Resource Council gathered at Living Soil Farms, owned and operated by CRC member Cameron Skinner. Members received a tour of the farm and learned about the regenerative practices Cameron has been implementing to increase soil health and produce high-quality local vegetables and eggs. Later in the day, members helped Cameron move plants from the green house and into the soil!

**BMLA members prepare for proposed coal mine expansions**

Bronya Lechtman

Bull Mountain Land Alliance members have had no rest this summer between meetings with decision-makers, and responding to the frustrating actions by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (see pages 9-10). On top of all of this, Signal Peak Energy has applied for two permit expansions for its Bull Mountains mine. Both proposals would lead to more mining closer to our members’ property. BMLA members have been studying these permit expansions and are preparing strategies to fight them, given Signal Peak’s reckless history destroying land and water in the Bulls without oversight or correction.

**GTRC celebrates one year anniversary!**

Emily Auld

On June 15th, Golden Triangle Resource Council (GTRC) members gathered in West Bank Park in Great Falls to celebrate their first year as a Northern Plains affiliate. The group reflected on their successful solarize campaign, during which 79 folks in the Golden Triangle area signed up for a solar assessment of their home or property! GTRC is excited for the year ahead, building their affiliate, and exploring new campaigns, avenues, and partnerships for the group. GTRC will also continue their Solarize work through the summer as they move into the installation and follow-up phase of their campaign.
SAVE THE DATE FOR THE 52ND ANNUAL MEETING!

Mark your calendars! The fall Annual Meeting is just around the corner and you won’t want to miss out on all the fun. We’ll be in a brand new location this year at the Pub Station in Billings. We’re excited to come together in a locally owned and operated space that builds community and cultivates creativity.

This two-day event allows us to reconnect with old friends, meet new, like-minded individuals, and learn about all the great work that’s happening across the state. We’ll learn more about transforming our energy systems, oil and gas bonding and reclamation, the history of Montana Indian Education for All, and keeping our farmers and ranchers on the land through agricultural succession. We hope to see you there!

More information coming soon!

Northern Plains’ 52nd Annual Meeting
November 10 - 11th, 2023
The Pub Station
2502 1st Ave North, Billings