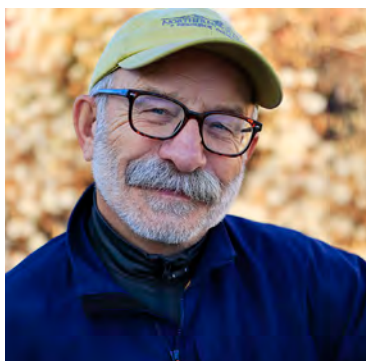


A smaller newsletter with a big thank you!



I hope this finds you all well and enjoying your summer. As you can see, this is not a normal *Plains Truth* publication. We have had a number of staff out on parental or sabbatical leave and producing a full production issue is beyond our current capacity. (Please welcome three newborns to our Northern Plains orbit. These cuties are already taking part in zoom meetings, and, if they could figure this walking thing out, they would surely be joining our rallies and other events). You will see a typical, robust *Plains Truth* in the fall. Please note, however, that all of our many campaigns are going full steam ahead. Updates on them are included in this newsletter. **A hardy thank you to all staff and members who are working on issues important to all of us.**

I would like to follow up on a discussion begun in the last *Plains Truth* about the “Road Show” tour we had this past Spring in which I and a couple of staff members visited a number of affiliates. The remaining stops on this tour were in Bozeman and Missoula. Although Northern Plains does not have affiliates in these towns, there are many members in each location. Both of these stops brought out lots of folks and the ensuing discussions were broad and deep. One of the noteworthy observations I have about all of these affiliate visits was that many Northern Plains members remain active after decades of past involvement. I gave a call to a couple of these folks to ask them why they still believe in our organization.

My first call went to Beth Kaeding. Beth and her husband Lynn moved to Gardiner around 1990. She became active in the local Bear Creek Council affiliate. She remembers one of the primary issues they were working on at the time was mining operations near Jardine. She later was asked to join the Northern Plains board where she soon became active in a number of campaigns, perhaps the coalbed methane campaign being the most significant. Although I do not know all the roles Beth assumed on the board, I know that she is a past board chair, and was the secretary when I first came on the board a number of years ago. Now living in Bozeman, Beth regularly attends annual meetings and remains committed to Northern Plains because we are effectively working on statewide issues of concern to her.

My second call went to Daniel Kemmis in Missoula. He first became involved with Northern Plains in the 70’s when he was in the state legislature. Energy and agriculture issues were his primary focus back then and his alliance with Northern Plains was very helpful. Having been born in Richey, Dan has always been thankful for all that Northern Plains has done in support of eastern Montana ranchers and citizens. We sincerely thank both Daniel and Beth for their past involvement with Northern Plains and are very happy that they still support and believe in our work and still show up at our events!

- *Edward Barta*
Chair

AGRICULTURE

Northern Plains members who lead our agriculture work have been out on the range this summer organizing Montanans to take action for needed federal reforms that support family agriculture and rural communities. Gathering at cultural events like the Old Salt Festival, local fairs, and other community get-togethers, members have secured hundreds of signatures in support of restoring mandatory Country-of-Origin Labeling within the next Farm Bill.

When 85% of the beef market is controlled by only four multinational meatpacking corporations, we clearly do not have fair competition. Meatpackers have used their monopoly influence to block policies like COOL, which is why we're standing up to help level the playing field for local producers.

Montanans realize that family ranching is the backbone of rural economies and ranchers are the natural stewards of their grazing lands. Without COOL, both our economy and our working landscapes are at risk. We appreciate the hard work of members to bring this message to decision-makers in Washington, D.C.



Northern Plains member and Grass Range rancher Gilles Stockton (right) gathers petition signatures in support of COOL at the Old Salt Festival in Helmsville this past June.

CLEAN ENERGY



Whether part of a rural ranching community like member Mark Fix (above) or within a densely populated urban neighborhood, community solar would allow more Montanans access to low cost, clean energy.

Our members are already working diligently to prepare a bill for the 2025 legislative session that would enable a Community Solar program for customers of NorthWestern Energy and Montana Dakota Utilities. Community solar allows multiple households, buildings, or businesses to share a single solar array. Participating customers could individually purchase shares of the larger community solar array, and each month they would receive a credit on their power bill equal to the shares of the energy generated. The program would even be available to renters. This early planning, which also includes organizing opportunities at upcoming public events, will give us a head start in our efforts to bring affordable, clean energy opportunities to more Montanans through commonsense legislation.

Northern Plains also joined a lawsuit demanding that the Montana Public Service Commission (PSC) respond to a formal rulemaking petition that we signed onto in the spring. The petition asked the PSC to adopt a new rule requiring it to consider the impacts of its decisions on climate change, the environment, and human health. The PSC failed to respond to the petition within 60 days, a violation of Montana law. This lawsuit simply asks our courts to enforce compliance from the PSC.

COAL

Much of our recent coal work has focused on defending the Bull Mountains from efforts that undermine local protections against damage to land and water from Signal Peak Energy's underground coal mine. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) recently approved a mine expansion application from Signal Peak that members found to be incomplete and inaccurate. We have submitted formal comments documenting these concerns and will continue to monitor and research potential damage to limited local water resources.

Members have also been leading efforts to protect the Bull Mountains from proposed legislation by Sen. Steve Daines that would remove or undermine a necessary environmental analysis of the mine's impact on land and water. One proposed bill would even trade away public lands and publicly-owned coal to a wealthy private family in order to sidestep federal oversight. *(continued on the following page)*



COAL *(continued)*

Members of the Bull Mountain Land Alliance (BMLA), our affiliate in the area, held a rally recently that harkened back to tools used by farm and ranch families in the earliest days of Northern Plains. BMLA members crafted a cowhide “billboard” to let Senator Daines know that the Bull Mountains will NOT be sacrificed to serve his backroom deals between corporations and wealthy families.

BMLA member Nicole Borner speaks at a Bull Mountain rally in July next to a cowhide “billboard” inspired by Northern Plains’ history of refusing to allow members’ communities to be sacrificed.

OIL & GAS

We continue to hold our decision-makers and utilities accountable for ignoring the economic, health, and environmental costs of polluting fuels. In July, members dominated a Yellowstone County Commission public hearing regarding zoning disputes for NorthWestern Energy’s methane-fired plant in Laurel. Numerous news outlets quoted our members at length, spotlighting commissioner bias and coziness with NorthWestern while detailing the health risks the plant’s pollution would levy on Yellowstone County residents. We continue to face challenges persuading local politicians to make decisions in the public interest, but we are winning the narrative battle around this plant and building a stronger movement along the way.

In other public accountability news, Northern Plains took out half-page newspaper ads for a full week in the Billings Gazette and Helena Independent Record calling out Senator Daines for his efforts to block new federal oil and gas protections. The new Bureau of Land Management rule finally modernizes financial bonding levels for oil and gas companies so that funds are available to plug oil and gas wells if companies choose to skip town after drilling on public lands. Before this update – the first in over 60 years – bonding levels were so low that companies would simply forfeit them, leaving dangerous orphan wells behind that were only cleaned up if taxpayers footed the bill.

Sen. Daines’ efforts to kill the rule is in stark contrast to Montanans’ overwhelming support of the rule according to a recent poll conducted by the Montana Wildlife Federation. We expect our high-profile newspaper ads will bring heightened scrutiny to Sen. Daines’ irresponsible efforts to appease oil and gas lobbyists while ignoring the interests of everyday Montanans.



Member Priscilla Bell speaks at a recent hearing about NorthWestern Energy’s methane-fired plant in Laurel.

SOIL



Attendees enjoy a tour of River City Harvest Park Place Community Gardens in Great Falls as part of GTRC’s soil

Northern Plains members continue to be statewide leaders for education, information-sharing, and building community connections around soil health. Our Great Falls-area affiliate, Golden Triangle Resource Council, hosted two well-attended soil crawls this summer; one in a farm setting and the other in a community garden.

Northern Plains is also hosting a “Badlands Soil Crawl” in the Glendive area on September 19 and 20. The first day will involve a classroom component at Dawson Community College, and the second day will be a traditional soil crawl, outside at the Aus Ranch. The event will focus on what producers can do to keep

their operations sustainable and profitable over the long haul, and those same stewardship principles can also be applied to create healthy gardens and pastures at any scale. Come learn about range management, plant nutrition, and the principles of soil health in beautiful eastern Montana!

To learn more and register for this special event, visit NorthernPlains.org/badlands-soil-crawl.

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!

SAVE THE DATE!

NORTHERN PLAINS 53RD ANNUAL MEETING



**LOOKING BEYOND OUR FENCES:
COURAGE AND CONNECTION AMIDST CRISIS**

**NOVEMBER 15 - 16
THE PUB STATION, BILLINGS**

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:

OLIVIA VESOVICH
HELD V. MONTANA
YOUTH CLIMATE TRIAL PLAINTIFF

NATE BELLINGER
OUR CHILDREN'S TRUST
LEAD ATTORNEY, HELD V. MONTANA