

# THE PLAINS TRUTH

VOICE OF THE NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL

VOL. 54, ISSUE 1 | WINTER 2025



## MAKING OUR VOICES HEARD AT THE “PEOPLE’S HOUSE”

Northern Plains members stand up for our air, land, water, climate, and communities during Montana’s 69th Legislative Session.

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## COMMUNITY, CONNECTION, AND COURAGE AT THE 53rd ANNUAL MEETING



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Northern Plains is a grassroots conservation and family agriculture group that organizes Montanans to protect our water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life.

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### THE PLAINS TRUTH

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

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#### Membership Dues

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

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#### Endowment

The Northern Plains Endowment is a permanent fund established to help sustain Northern Plains' work into the future. If you want to make a donation, a memorial gift, or a bequest to this fund, please contact the Northern Plains office.

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#### Western Organization of Resource Councils

Northern Plains is a founding member of the Western Organization of Resource Councils. WORC is a regional network of eight grassroots community organizations that include 15,200 members in seven Western states. WORC helps its member groups succeed by providing training and coordinating regional issue campaigns. Visit [www.worc.org](http://www.worc.org)

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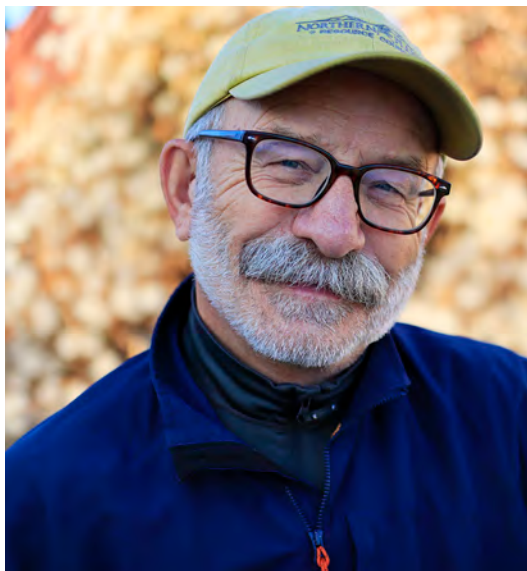
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# TO THE MEMBERS

## New year, new energy, and new challenges

Happy New Year everyone!! I hope you all had a pleasant holiday season, are refreshed, and ready for the challenges that 2025 has to offer. A number of you attended our annual meeting this past November, and I would like to share some reflections on that special event. I would also like to follow up with another example of an active, current campaign that illustrates the point I made in the last Plains Truth about how Northern Plains puts the right people, in the right place, at the right time, with the right message. And finally, I'll make a solicitation for your help in recruiting new members. So much to say...



fuels and the development of clean energy.

First, our annual meeting... Simply put, our 2024 Annual Meeting was a great success. Lots of folks attended, a number of relevant and informative workshops were presented, and people had ample opportunity to network and socialize. Of particular note, our keynote speakers gave attendees an inside look into the hugely important verdict in the Held vs. Montana youth climate trial, which involves our constitutional right to a clean and healthful environment. Olivia Vesovich, one of the plaintiffs in the case, and lead attorney Nate Bellinger, gave an insightful presentation into this case and why it is significant in our fight over climate change. At the time of our annual meeting, a verdict finding that state agencies must consider climate pollution when making decisions had been challenged and was being considered by the Montana Supreme Court. Alert readers know that the court ruled in early January to defend the verdict. Great news, as now greenhouse emissions need to be considered when companies are applying for permits involving fossil fuels. This ruling puts significant “wind in our sails” as Northern Plains continues our many campaigns involving the ongoing struggle between fossil

During my last article for Plains Truth I discussed reasons why I believe Northern Plains is such an effective organization. We speak “truth to power” by strategically placing the right people, in the right place, at the right time, with the right message. I gave an example of this by writing about our supporting the citizens of Laurel in their struggle with Northwestern Energy’s methane-fired power plant. In this newsletter, I would like to provide another example about a relatively new campaign — the Snowy River CO2 Sequestration project in Carter County. Yes, ExxonMobil is planning on injecting 150 million tons of carbon dioxide underneath an incredibly beautiful and pristine landscape, a good portion of which is on public land. Alarmed citizens in Carter County reached out to Northern Plains asking us to help support their resistance to this ill-advised and risky project. We joined them in this effort and within a very short time, we were able to help organize meetings with top Bureau of Land Management (BLM) officials and local decision makers while also helping arrange for Carter County residents to speak to Tracey Stone-Manning, then-Director of BLM, in her D.C. office. A subsequent meeting with Director Manning took place at the Northern Plains office in Billings. While a new administration presents uncertainties for this campaign, we are off to a good start in trying to stop this project, but much work has to be done.

Finally, as you can imagine, a good portion of our power comes from our membership. Simply put, the more members we have, the more power we have. So, I am asking you show your support for what we do by asking “your people” to please consider joining. If we were all successful in recruiting one new member we could double our membership... how sweet is that?!!

- *Edward Barta*  
Chair



# PEOPLE OF THE PLAINS

## Kaite Howes: Building relationships and community through respect

By Casey Kennedy



**Kaite Howes on a recent tour of the Stillwater Mine.**

“I have learned that anyone is capable of influencing change. I consider myself an introvert, not inclined to make waves – but I’ve learned that through respectful interactions, one can affect policy,” says Northern Plains member Kaite Howes.

Kaite moved to the Stillwater valley in the late 90s, drawn to the rural beauty and quiet life the small town of Nye offered her growing family. She first learned about Northern Plains in the early 2000s, when a friend invited her to attend a Stillwater Protective Association (SPA) meeting. SPA is Northern Plains’ Stillwater Valley affiliate organization. Though intrigued, Kaite was immersed in the bustling demands of raising her two young girls and settling into her new community.

As the years went by, Kaite started to hear about the Stillwater mine’s expansion in the area through local news outlets and conversations with friends. Curious to learn more, she decided to attend several public meetings hosted by state agencies to better understand these proposed developments and their potential impacts on her family and neighbors.

Kaite became concerned that the construction and proposed drilling sites from the mine would disrupt the natural vegetation, displace wildlife, dewater the creeks, and potentially contaminate the water around her home. “I didn’t feel like the public was getting the full story,” she reflects.

Kaite decided to get more involved in several volunteer groups and joined the Stillwater Protective Association to share her concerns. Eventually, she became deeply involved in our work to maintain the Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA), a legally-binding, collaborative agreement between Northern Plains, our local affiliate groups, and the Sibanye-Stillwater Mine that ensures strong water and community protections.

“Small rural communities rely on volunteers,” Kaite says about her and others’ work to uphold the GNA. “You have the ability to connect with people, on issues important to a specific area and see real results. The payback for me is meeting people, building relationships, and accomplishing something for the community.”

After years of participation in these groups, Kaite is now chair of the Good Neighbor Agreement Task Force, a group of Northern Plains member leaders who lead our GNA work. She is also an active and trusted member within the Stillwater community. Kaite serves as a critical point of communication between the Stillwater mine, Stillwater Protective Association, and her neighbors in the valley. While this trust is both essential and rewarding, it is not without its challenges. Kaite is never fully off the clock, frequently approached by community members in her everyday life, and often finds herself picking up the phone and calling the mine to relay their concerns.

As chair, Kaite is also tasked with navigating the complex and technical aspects of the agreement, and thinks that the most challenging part of the work is negotiating with the mine’s senior management. “I push myself through the discomfort, because others rely on me to deliver our message,” she says.

Kaite and fellow members volunteering to uphold the Good Neighbor Agreement continue to work hard to protect the watershed around the mines, enforcing water quality protections that are stricter than state and federal regulations, with the determined goal of preserving the Stillwater and East Boulder River’s pristine water quality for generations to come.

“I am proud to be a part of the Good Neighbor Agreement, and I am a big believer in building community,” she says. “This work has offered a look at what is possible when people continue to work toward a goal, with facts and mutual respect, and willingness to compromise to reach the best outcomes for their communities.”

## Reaffirming Our Values

Our Northern Plains community is proud to welcome a new staff union, marking an exciting milestone in our organization's history that builds upon decades of grassroots organizing in Montana. Since our founding in 1972, the members of Northern Plains together with staff have never wavered in our commitment to "protect our water, land, air, and working landscapes...and build strong grassroots leaders, always with a deep dedication to the next generation."

Woven into the success of Northern Plains' mission has been the willingness of those same members and staff to struggle through the process of problem solving and facing conflicts, always assuring the means by which the ends are realized adhere to our core values.

It was our commitment to a healthy and respectful process that shone during negotiations between members of the Northern Plains board and staff. Though not without some tension, everyone had a voice, and every concern was treated with respect.

Throughout our American history, labor organizing and community organizing have been intrinsically linked, each strengthening the other in the pursuit of social justice and democratic participation, though not without struggle. The labor movement has often supported community causes beyond workplace issues, from civil rights to environmental protection. Similarly, community organizers have often stood in solidarity with workers fighting for better conditions and a voice in their workplace.

This interplay between labor and community organizing is clearly visible in Montana's history. From the Butte copper mines to the railroads that cross our state, working people have long understood that their power lies in collective action - whether fighting for workplace safety or protecting their communities from environmental degradation. Even early Northern Plains organizers received training and were inspired by labor leaders and community organizers alike.

The decision by Northern Plains staff to unionize emerged from this same understanding. While our organization has always valued open communication between staff and leadership, employees recognized that formalizing their voice through a union would strengthen the organization's democratic framework.

This union formation represents more than just a change in workplace structure - it's also a reaffirmation of the values that have guided Northern Plains for over five decades. The process has demonstrated that the values we promote in our organizing work; democratic participation, respect for all voices, and the power of collective action are alive and well within our own organization.

Northern Plains has a proud history and clear mandate to protect the interests of working people. In today's climate, where unions, as with all corners of society, face mounting pressure from forces seeking to polarize the working class, Northern Plains stands firm in its commitment to combating these divisive efforts. Our work exemplifies this commitment - whether we're organizing against monopoly utilities' rate hikes or bringing diverse groups together under a big tent to fight for clean water. This dedication to unity and collective action remains at the core of our mission.

***Joanie Kresich, Northern Plains Past Chair and Negotiating Representative***  
***Michael Skinner, Northern Plains Community Organizer and Union Steward***



# GRASSROOTS POWER

## Taking our “People Power” to Helena

By Dustin Ogdin

The 69th Montana Legislative Session has officially commenced! Since our founding in 1972, Northern Plains members have had a strong influence on Montana’s laws and policies. We express our grassroots power by making calls and sending emails to legislators, testifying at hearings, and speaking directly to legislators as citizen lobbyists, providing an essential counterbalance to the corporate lobbyists who roam the halls of Helena day and night. We make democracy a verb, and we get results.

Northern Plains members receive weekly bulletins via email to keep track of the zigs and zags of the session. Most importantly, we let you know how you can take action to help pass bills that advance clean energy, protect our rights and ensure a healthy climate. Of course, much of our work involves preventing bad bills that threaten our land, air, water, and democracy from passing.

Because so many of you are speaking up and taking your concerns directly to legislators, several bad bills have already been stopped in their tracks! When we flex our grassroots democracy muscles and remind everyone in the Capitol that *We the People* have the power, it makes an immediate and lasting impact. Thank you to everyone who is making your voice heard!

To stay up to date with the latest legislative action in Helena, visit our online bill tracker. Here you’ll find information about all of the bills important to our issues of advancing family agriculture, preserving democracy, and protecting our irreplaceable resources for the generations ahead. You’ll also find a directory to find your representatives - which may have changed this session due to a new district map for 2025 - and how to sign up to testify online.

**visit: [NorthernPlains.org/Bill-Tracker](https://NorthernPlains.org/Bill-Tracker)**



**Member Kris Glenn speaks at 2023 Capitol rally.**

## The power of being grassroots funded

By Effy McEldowney

Northern Plains is a grassroots organization in more ways than one. Members like you are the heart and soul of our organization: You lead campaigns, raise your voice for what matters most, and stand up to the big and the powerful when necessary. But we are not just grassroots powered, we are also grassroots funded. And that’s important!



Grassroots funding allows us more independence and creativity as we tackle complex issues like addressing climate change and protecting rural prosperity. It keeps us a strong, resilient organization powered by and for real people so we can continue building a better Montana for all. When you give to a grassroots organization like Northern Plains, you amplify not just your own voice and power, but also that of your neighbors and community. Thank you for standing with us as we face the hard stuff head on, together.

*To learn about the many ways you can continue to support our grassroots work, contact Effy at (406) 248-1154 or [effy@northernplains.org](mailto:effy@northernplains.org).*



## City slicker explains the beef checkoff

By Jackson Newman

As a former city slicker who grew up in a suburb of Washington D.C., I'm always working to better understand the history of agricultural policy. In the last Plains Truth, I talked about the Packers and Stockyards Act. For this edition, I'm going to tackle the beef checkoff, a longtime nemesis of family ranchers.



**Illustration by Rosebud County rancher and Northern Plains member Clint McRae, whose family has long battled against the beef checkoff.**

In December 2000, Northern Plains founding member Irv Alderson grabbed a sheet of his Bones Brothers Ranch stationary, typed out a quick letter to the editor, and sent it to the Agri-news. The letter read, "If Mr. Hammond wants to stick his head in the stanchion like a milk cow and let the beef checkoff jerk it out of him, I guess that's his business. As for me, I am about to set up and duck off and throw in with the Charters and McRaes. It's a good man that knows when he's had enough." Mr. Hammond was the chairman of the Cattlemen's Beef Promotion and Research Board, which manages checkoff money while the Charters and McRaes are ranch families who, alongside the Aldersons, helped found Northern Plains. At the time, the Charter family, north of Billings, had refused to pay the beef checkoff in a case that would almost reach the Supreme Court. So what is the beef checkoff and why does it have ranchers so ticked off?

The beef checkoff was created in the 1985 Farm Bill and forces ranchers to pay a \$1 fee every time they sell a head of cattle. When a cow-calf rancher sells their cows to a feedlot, they pay a dollar for each cow. While that might not seem like much, ranchers and feedlots selling thousands of cows end up paying quite a bit. The money collected from the checkoff is subsequently used to promote beef sales and research. Ever heard the slogan, "Beef. It's what's for dinner"? That comes directly from the check off. So, in some senses, the check off is good! It helps sell more beef which theoretically helps ranchers be more profitable.

Since the check off was enacted, it has collected over \$1 billion in fees. This money is managed by the Cattlemen's Beef Board (CBB). The problem is that the CBB turns around and hands that money directly to the National Cattlemen's Beef Association (NCBA). Checkoff funds make up over 70% of the NCBA's budget. Meanwhile the NCBA lobbies on behalf of the corporate meatpacking monopoly (think Cargill and Tyson). To spell it out simply, ranchers across the country pay a tax to fund a group who lobbies in DC directly against their interests. The NCBA is the biggest opponent of the passage of Country-of-Origin Labeling (COOL) laws and Packers and Stockyards Act Reform. Since the checkoff was enacted, we have lost close to 500,000 cattle ranchers despite its supposed "success."

So where does that leave us today? Northern Plains supports the OFF Act, a piece of federal legislation that would require audits, budget transparency, and stop the Cattlemen's Beef Board from contracting with lobbying groups. The OFF Act has bipartisan support and we are hoping it progresses in congress. In addition, we have opposed the introduction of a Montana law that creates a second checkoff dollar through the Montana Cattle Committee. Ranchers should not have to pay a tax that funds their own downfall. As Irv Alderson said, "It's a good man that knows when he's had enough."

## 53rd Annual Meeting: Celebrating community, connection, and courage

By Effy McEldowney

Northern Plains members and staff enjoyed a weekend packed full of fun, community, and collective learning as we held our 53rd Annual Meeting at the Pub Station last November. This year, we focused on facing our challenges with courage and building connections with folks from all walks of life to build a better Montana. We were excited to once again host the meeting at a locally owned and operated venue that reflects our values, and attendees of all ages enjoyed forging new friendships and reconnecting with folks from across Montana and beyond.

Our keynotes, Olivia Vesovich and Nate Bellinger, inspired the room with their stories of the historic Held v. Montana youth climate trial. Speakers and panelists came from near and far (Montana, Wisconsin, California, and West Virginia!) to educate us on the issues most salient to our current work. We heard from two panels on effective efforts to protect eastern Montana's working landscapes and the challenges rural communities face as they try to create a just and sustainable future in the shadow of the coal industry. Attendees also learned about the important role family farms and ranches have in conserving our land and how powerful narratives can win campaigns---especially in our clean energy work. We are so grateful every year for this chance to celebrate our community organizing wins and successes and reflect on lessons learned. Thank you to all our attendees; we hope to see you next year!





# ANNUAL MEETING

## AWARDS

### Bob Tully Spirit Award – John Brown



The Bob Tully Spirit Award recognizes a member who has demonstrated outstanding leadership abilities, creativity in the face of adversity, and unwavering courage. Mary Fitzpatrick presented this award to Sleeping Giant Citizens Council member and Helena resident John Brown.

John is known for his stick-to-itiveness, enthusiasm, long term dedication, and his passion for the land. He is dedicated to approaching our collective work with a holistic approach, offering his experience, knowledge, and relationships whenever possible. He is a talented community builder: John jumps at every opportunity to share information about Northern Plains with other groups and is consistently sharing ideas that he finds exciting or inspiring with his peers at Northern Plains. He focuses on walking the talk by highlighting the importance of rideshares and composting at group events. John chairs the Soil Task Force, is a member of the Agriculture and DEI task forces, served as Board

Secretary, and is an active member of his local affiliate, Sleeping Giant Citizens Council. Thank you for your hard work and deep thinking John!

### Mary Donohoe Tell It Like It Is Award – Tom Baratta



The Mary Donohoe Tell It Like It Is Award is presented to a Northern Plains member who isn't afraid to speak up, raise their voice, and "tell it like it is." This year, Mary Catherine Dunphy presented the award to Bull Mountain Land Alliance member and Roundup resident Tom Baratta.

Tom has been an outspoken advocate for landowners in the Bull Mountains ever since he retired to the area after over 30 years as a special-educator. Whether he was meeting with congressional staffers and committees, testifying before the Montana legislature, or speaking to the director of the federal Office of Surface Mining, Tom never hesitated to "tell it like it is." He never wavered in our collective efforts to hold Signal Peak Energy accountable for the damage its mining has caused to land and

water in the Bulls. Thank you for adding new life, energy, and spirit to BMLA and Northern Plains Tom!

As Eastern Montana Resource Council member Mary Catherine Dunphy says, "Tom Baratta is a man for all seasons, who tells it like it is out of genuine concern for his community, for the earth, and for the Bull Mountain Land Alliance."

### Affiliate Awards

Bull Mountain Land Alliance was presented with the award for "Largest Percentage of New Members." Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council was presented with the "Most New Members Award." Congratulations BMLA and YVCC!

### Elections

Please welcome our newest Board Member, Kyran Kunkel, and our newest Board Officers, Scott Hancock (Treasurer) and Kris Glenn (Assistant Secretary)!

## RESOLUTIONS

Northern Plains members gathered at the Meeting of the Membership to discuss and debate three proposed resolutions. Northern Plains resolutions are an opportunity for the organization to determine our position and direction on issues relevant to our members. Discussion and debate around resolutions always proves lively and inspiring, showcasing our members' depth of knowledge and our commitment to democratic processes.

The three resolutions before the membership in November were:

- A resolution declaring that Northern Plains stands in opposition to carbon capture and storage projects
- A resolution to oppose any initiative in the Montana Legislature calling for a United States Constitutional Convention
- A resolution opposing the idea that corporations possess any innate qualities of personhood or that they have natural rights like a living person



**Members listen intently as strategy for the year ahead is discussed.**

All three resolutions were passed and adopted by the members gathered at the 2024 Annual Meeting. Final text for each resolution follows.

### **Resolution No. 2024 - 1**

A RESOLUTION OF THE MEMBERS OF NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL AMENDING RESOLUTION NO. 2010-1 CONCERNING THE CAPTURE AND SEQUESTRATION OF CARBON DIOXIDE FROM THE BURNING OF FOSSIL FUELS OR OTHER INDUSTRIAL PROCESSES

WHEREAS, Carbon Capture and Sequestration (CCS) requires large amounts of energy (approximately 30% of each plant's output) for capturing, processing, and transporting carbon dioxide, and this process will be paid for by ratepayers and tax payers; and

WHEREAS, CCS projects often claim they will reduce CO2 emissions by 90 percent although in reality they capture as little as 7 percent or even less- in many cases CCS projects actually increase CO2 emissions; and

WHEREAS, CCS drains research and investor dollars away from efficiency programs and other forms of energy that are more sustainable, cleaner, and cheaper; and

WHEREAS, the retrofitting of carbon capture and storage facilities to aging coal-fired and gas power plants is uneconomic even with the 45Q subsidy, and the lifecycle cost of renewable energy facilities is much lower than that of a coal plant retrofitted with CCS; and

WHEREAS, the long-term liability of monitoring CCS and paying for damages will likely fall on the landowner where CCS occurs and/or taxpayers because businesses can go bankrupt; and

WHEREAS, the energy requirements of CCS will require that approximately 30% more coal be mined in order to produce the same amount of electricity; and

WHEREAS, this mining has multiple associated problems such as surface damage to natural and cultural resources from either strip mining or mountain top removal, as well as impacts to the air; water pollution and degradation; and other impacts to surface uses such as agriculture, tourism, and homes; and

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# ANNUAL MEETING

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WHEREAS, CCS equipment to capture CO<sub>2</sub> from an industrial source requires energy to operate. To produce this energy, a power plant must burn 10% to 40% more fuel than a similar plant without CCS, depending on the capture equipment employed. Scientists call this the “energy penalty” for using CCS; and

WHEREAS, the questions of how much and where pore space exists as well as who owns the pore space are unanswered; and

WHEREAS, the pipelines and other infrastructure necessary for CCS would negatively harm landowners, agricultural land, and wild lands; and

WHEREAS, sudden, large carbon dioxide leaks into the atmosphere from underground storage locations or from pipelines could be lethal to animals and people and there is a lack of infrastructure for emergency response, especially in rural or hard to reach areas; and

WHEREAS, the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration (PHMSA) rulemaking for carbon dioxide pipeline safety has not yet been published or implemented; and

WHEREAS, CCS is an unproven technology, that is, there is no certainty that large amounts of carbon dioxide can be stored underground permanently without leakage or contamination of groundwater; and

WHEREAS, any leakage of carbon dioxide back into the atmosphere would constitute failure of the entire endeavor and, consequently, be a waste of money.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MEMBERS OF NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL:

That Northern Plains Resource Council stands in opposition to CCS projects by:

- 1) opposing any further government subsidy for research or the development of technology for carbon capture and sequestration;
- 2) demanding that government and utilities increase their support for research, development, and deployment of energy efficiency strategies and technologies as well as the development of sustainable and renewable energy sources; and
- 3) demands that supporting placement of jurisdiction for CCS decisions in Montana be placed within the purview of a regulatory agency that has no mission or incentive to promote CCS (for example, the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Environmental Quality but not in addition to the Board of Oil and Gas Conservation).
- 4) requiring a full environmental impact statement (EIS) be completed for each proposed CCS project.



**Member Bill Walker introducing a resolution opposing the unproven technology of carbon capture and sequestration for fossil fuel and other industrial processes.**



## Resolution No. 2024 - 2

A RESOLUTION BY THE MEMBERS OF NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL OPPOSING THE PASSAGE OF A BILL OR RESOLUTION BY THE MONTANA LEGISLATURE CALLING FOR A UNITED STATES CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION OF STATES IN ORDER TO AMEND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

WHEREAS, there is a coordinated effort by extremist organizations, including the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), to convene a Constitutional Convention, ostensibly to pass an amendment to the United States Constitution entitled a “Compact for America: Balanced Budget Amendment.”; and

WHEREAS, there are Montana Legislators who will propose legislation calling for a constitutional convention in order to enact such a balanced budget amendment; and

WHEREAS, Article Five of the United States Constitution allows two options for amending the Constitution; and

WHEREAS, the one method, which has been employed twenty-seven times, requires a two thirds (2/3) vote of Congress and ratification by three-fourths (3/4) of states; and

WHEREAS, the second method, which has never been utilized, would convene a constitutional convention, after two-thirds (2/3) of the states (34) request a constitutional convention and three-fourths (3/4) of state legislatures (38) concur; and

WHEREAS, the United States Constitution imposes no limitations, guidance, or constraints on delegates to a constitutional convention, once appointed, delegates to the constitutional convention may propose any changes to the U.S. Constitution that the assembly so desires, regardless of guidance from individual state legislatures.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE MEMBERS OF NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL:

Shall oppose any initiative in the Montana Legislature calling for a United States Constitutional Convention.

## Resolution No. 2024 - 3

A RESOLUTION OF THE MEMBERS OF NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL AMENDING RESOLUTION NO. 2012-5 REGARDING POLITICAL SPENDING IN ELECTIONS AND CORPORATE PERSONHOOD.

WHEREAS, corporations exist as entities established for human convenience to facilitate commerce; and

WHEREAS, each state has established in its legal code the various powers and limitations of corporations that enable them to conduct business in an orderly manner; and

WHEREAS, court decisions have deemed corporations to enjoy certain legal rights and privileges equivalent to natural human persons and which go beyond the powers granted by those state laws; and

WHEREAS, some corporations, or individuals within them, have persistently exploited the idea of corporate “personhood” in a manner that has caused social, economic, and environmental harm and further exploited the concept of corporate “personhood” to shield themselves and their corporation from the consequences of their actions; and

WHEREAS, free and fair elections are essential to democracy and effective, representative self- governance; and

WHEREAS, the United States Congress and state legislatures should have the authority to set reasonable limits and conditions on campaign contributions to ensure effective self-governance; and

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# ANNUAL MEETING

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WHEREAS, the citizens of Montana are very concerned about the continued, deepening erosion of our democratic processes by the unlimited, massive expenditures by corporations in our election process and do not accept this attack on our democratic processes; and

WHEREAS, out-of-state corporate money used in election campaigns has had a dramatic effect on Montana's elections and on politics across the nation; and

WHEREAS, Montanans in 2012 passed Initiative I-166 by a 74.67% voter margin, with a majority in every county, which asserted that, "the people of Montana establish that there should be a level playing field in campaign spending, in part by prohibiting corporate campaign contributions and expenditures and by limiting political spending in elections, as we did for 100 years, before the 1912 Montana Corrupt Practices Act was overturned by the Citizens United decision; and

WHEREAS, in the United States of America, natural living persons hold, enjoy, and have constitutionally reserved to themselves the right and power to question all actions of government.



**Member Sue Kirchmeyer presents a resolution about corporate spending in elections.**

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

That Northern Plains Resource Council opposes the idea that corporations possess any innate qualities of personhood or that they have natural rights like a living person.

AND, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That Northern Plains Resource Council supports legal challenges to the idea that corporations possess any innate quality of personhood or have any natural rights like a living person.

AND, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That Northern Plains Resource Council supports legislation, up to and including constitutional amendment, clarifying that only living human beings enjoy the innate rights of personhood.

AND, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That Northern Plains Resource Council supports legislation, up to and including constitutional amendment, that will make it clear that corporations legally hold only the powers granted to them by law and are fully subject to limitations imposed on them by law.

AND, BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That Northern Plains Resource Council supports any effort to amend the Constitution of the United States to confirm the authority of government by the people through state and federal law to regulate money in politics, particularly to prohibit corporate campaign contributions regarding a candidate or ballot issue, ensures all citizens have access to the political process by confirming that the rights enumerated in the Constitution of the United States are retained by the people as natural persons, and confirms that money is not equal to free speech and that the United States Congress should send the amendment to the states for ratification.

AND, BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED:

That Northern Plains Resource Council supports legislation, up to and including constitutional amendment, clarifying that any corporation can be involuntarily dissolved by legal process for sufficiently serious violations of the law.





**Members and staff tour the Stillwater Mine as part of our work to uphold the Good Neighbor Agreement with the Sibanye Stillwater Mine, Northern Plains, and our local affiliates, Cottonwood Resource Council and the Stillwater Protective Association.**



**Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council members celebrate the first tree planting in Billings resulting from their successful efforts to land a \$1 million urban forestry grant for the city.**



**Bull Mountain Land Alliance members share a meal while discussing strategy to ensure that proper environmental analysis of the Signal Peak coal mine is conducted to protect local landowners and water sources.**



**Members Steve Charter and Mike Turley pose for a photo after presenting a groundwater study proposal to the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology.**



**Northern Plains member Frank Kromkowski (left) speaks with visitors to the Capitol during Climate Lobby Day at the legislature.**





# SMALL TOWN PICKS

Northern Plains field organizers spend a lot of time on the road, exploring every nook and cranny of this beautiful state while meeting members and working to protect the people and places we love. Finding the best spots along the way to catch a coffee, grab a meal, or simply unwind between one-on-one meetings or strategy sessions is essential to staying rejuvenated. As a result, folks come to learn the best spots, typically off the beaten path but well worth a visit. We thought readers might enjoy hearing more about these local treasures, too, so we're introducing Small Town Picks. This edition's selection focuses on the Stillwater Valley.



The Fishtail General Store is a true Montana treasure.

## **FISHTAIL GENERAL STORE: 35 W. Main, Fishtail**

Step back in time and enjoy a piece of Montana history while visiting this cornerstone of the Fishtail community. Built in 1900, the Fishtail General Store once served as the community's post office and, some say a stagecoach stop before then. Today it's a spot to grab groceries, hardware, delicious deli sandwiches made in-house, and (pro tip) homemade pies - only two per day are made, so get there early! It's also a great spot to find all kinds of Montana-made goods and gifts while you sip a latte or hot chocolate from the Fishtail Grind, a quaint coffee shop located within.

## **CARTER'S CAMP: 2027 Nye Rd., Nye**

The only thing better than a Carter's burger and a cold beer is the stunning scenery of the Stillwater River winding through the Beartooth Mountains behind this rustic outpost. Huge portions, friendly staff, and a great old-school Montana atmosphere make this spot a worthy destination in and of itself, but you can enjoy some of the best hiking, fishing, and rafting in the state while you're in the neighborhood, too.



Carter's Camp embodies a unique Montana-centric rustic charm. (Photo from *Tripadvisor.com*)

## **LIKE YOUR FAVORITE WINTER PAJAMAS: BECOMING A MONTHLY SUSTAINER**

**Comfy and familiar:** Giving monthly is the rare kind of habit where you only have to do something one time. Once set up, Northern Plains will receive a little bit of love from you each month, keeping this organization secure and cozy like that old sweater you reach for on a lazy day.

**Always there when you need them:** Just like your trusty pair of sweatpants, your monthly donation is always there to help when the need arises, whether it's supporting a long-term campaign or an immediate need like getting folks to Helena for a last minute legislative hearing.

**Stay cozy by never leaving the couch:** No need to break out the check book or open your laptop every year. Being a monthly sustainer is as easy as a Netflix binge --- But it's guilt-free and protects Montana's natural resources!

Become a monthly sustainer today! It's the gift that keeps giving without ever having to leave your couch.

To transition your membership to a monthly sustainer, contact Effy at [effy@northernplains.org](mailto:effy@northernplains.org) or (406) 248-1154.

## Finding solace in the work, despite the uncertainty

By Jack Leuthold

Looking back, November 5th was a blur for me. After months and months of not being able to escape the media frenzy that is election cycle advertising, anxiously refreshing polls on The New York Times website to see if any big shifts have occurred in the couple hours since I last checked, and listening to too many podcasts with various campaign staff who supposedly had “the inside scoop,” I found myself on a Zoom call in Northern Plains’ conference room talking clean energy with members across the state.

I remember finding it difficult to focus on the strategy and plan being discussed at that meeting. My phone was open on my lap showing the results from the east coast that just began to trickle in as our meeting came to close. A sense of nervousness among the group was evident - a feeling that stemmed from the uncertainty of what tomorrow might look like. However, despite this nervousness, I also had a sense of hope that no matter what the next couple hours will bring Montana, this group will continue to hop on Zoom and fight the good fight.

The morning of November 6th was even blurrier than the previous day. It is often said during elections that “this one is the most important one in our lifetime.” I’ve always felt skeptical of that assertion, but there is no doubt that this one had a different tone. We had all just been through an exhausting ten months of ugly campaign fights often centered on lies and insults. All of the money, time, and effort spent on campaigns over the last year had finally come down to a few hours in early November. As I walked into the office on the morning of the 6th, Montana’s new direction was clear.

When I get to work, the first thing I usually do is check my calendar to see what’s going on for the day and that Wednesday was no different. As I woke up my laptop, I was secretly hoping for a no-meeting kind of day, but that wish quickly vanished as I remembered I planned to travel to Livingston that afternoon and had a staff meeting in the morning. I tried to focus myself on what I needed to do to prepare for that trip, but thoughts about yesterday’s events kept interfering. I walked into our staff meeting feeling anxious for the future, uncertain about what is ahead for our state, and without a clue on how to articulate that to others.

Sitting in the same conference room as the night before, most of Northern Plains’ staff took some time to see what everyone was thinking and how they were feeling. Right away, I discovered that the thoughts and feelings I was experiencing in that moment were not unique, and I came to the realization that if I could be anywhere after Tuesday night, this was as good a spot as any.

I found myself surrounded by people who dedicate their time and efforts every day to the betterment of Montana. They are people who know the power grassroots organizing can wield to push powerful change forward, and they display the values of Northern Plains in their personal lives every day. I quickly came to understand that no matter who is in office and making decisions, this Northern Plains family would never stop working to protect our communities and resources that we hold so dear. They’ll continue to find common ground and common purpose to progress our issues forward while never sacrificing the values that make our organization what it is.

The benefits of being a part of Northern Plains during this point in history is in many ways indescribable. Working every day with members and staff who share the love I have for this state and the way of life it provides to so many tells me that I’m exactly where I’m supposed to be. I hope this feeling is mutual and thank you to everyone who makes Northern Plains a place where power is made and hope is created.

# COUNCIL ROUNDUP

## SPA supports community during challenging times

By Jordan Buser

This winter, Stillwater Protective Association continues to address community concerns and support local businesses as part of its commitment to the Good Neighbor Agreement, the legally-binding agreement with the Sibanye Stillwater Mine that helps protect local water quality and resources. Sibanye-Stillwater placed operations at the Stillwater West Mine into Care and Maintenance, which essentially pauses mining activity, resulting in workforce layoffs. SPA donated to the local food bank to aid community members impacted by layoffs and facilitated concerns from business owners to Sibanye-Stillwater leadership.

Beyond their work as partners in the Good Neighbor Agreement, SPA has advanced their scholarship program for local high school seniors, completed another clean-up along Hwy 419, and is now planning for their speaker series that will start back up in the spring.

## Golden Triangle makes waves on clean water protection

By Emily Auld

Golden Triangle members have been researching and developing a strategy to protect clean water in Pondera County and hold Calumet Refinery and Montana Renewables accountable since late 2023. Calumet has proposed injecting wastewater from biofuel processing underground in Pondera County, posing risks to the Madison Aquifer, clean drinking water, irrigation, water, wildlife, and the livelihoods of local ag producers.

In November, Golden Triangle members participated in a meeting with Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) officials to discuss their concerns about the biofuel injection wells and ask the EPA for due diligence in their permitting process. In late January, members also had a successful meeting with executives of Calumet Refinery to open a dialogue about the effects of Montana Renewables wastewater on the groundwater, and reiterate the need for protecting rural water sources.

## YBCC crosses the finish line on years' long solar project

By Jack Leuthold

Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council has tied the final knot with the local Sherwood Inn solar project – a campaign that YBCC has had an instrumental role in for many years. This affordable housing apartment complex in downtown Livingston now has a fully up and running 25kW solar system. Not only will this system save the residents money on their monthly utility bills, but the system's environmental impact is equivalent to keeping 148,000 pounds of coal from being burned or planting over 3,500 trees! This project wouldn't have been possible without the steadfast commitment of YBCC members who have worked for years to bring the benefits solar can provide to more of the community.

## CCRC organizes water event

By Jackson Newman

Carbon County Resource Council hosted an event this February to explore the health of Rock Creek. The event featured speakers from the Montana Fish, Wildlife, and Parks; Monitoring Montana Water; and Trout Unlimited. Attendees enjoyed free pizza and free beer courtesy of the affiliate! We are excited to build more power as we educate and work with the community to protect our precious water.



## Cottonwood Resource Council Celebrates 37 years!

By Gusty Catherin-Sauer

Cottonwood Resource Council's annual potluck was great fun! Members braved the wintery conditions to gather over a local food feast and celebrate our inaugural solar program! Our goal is to educate and encourage members and local residents to consider solar power at their homes, ranches, and businesses. Close to a dozen installment assessments resulted from this effort so far. We look forward to being a resource to the community by providing information and education on solar energy into the future.

Please join us on February 27th at the Sweet Grass Theatre for an evening with Montana Poet Laureate Chris La Tray! More information can be found by emailing [caitlin@northernplains.org](mailto:caitlin@northernplains.org) or calling the office at 406-248-1154.

## Sleeping Giant wraps Community Change grant, gears up for legislature

By Emily Auld

In mid-November, Sleeping Giant Citizens Council members, in coalition with the Helena Public Schools, submitted an 89-page grant to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to retrofit three Helena schools with energy efficient upgrades. Coalition members are optimistic about the quality of the grant, although the EPA has not yet released all funding awards.

In the New Year, Sleeping Giant hopes to engage with the legislature and leverage their position in Helena to help boost in-person testimony on bills important to Northern Plains and SGCC members. SGCC also tabled at the Climate Advocacy Day on January 24th with other conservation organizations across the state to help draw attention to environmental issues in the 2025 session.

## YVCC organizes to stop NorthWestern rate hike

By Michael Skinner

Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council is organizing to oppose NorthWestern Energy's proposed rate hike, which threatens to unfairly burden families and small businesses in Yellowstone County. By building public support and mobilizing opposition, our members are fighting for transparency and fairness in energy costs.

We are engaging the community by distributing factsheets, going door to door, and meeting one-on-one with neighbors and elected officials to amplify voices against blatant corporate greed. YVCC believes energy should be affordable, reliable, and equitable - not a profit-driven burden. Together, we can stop this rate hike and demand a fair energy future.

# COUNCIL ROUNDUP

## BMLA celebrates defeat of harmful federal coal bills

By Brady McGinley

Bull Mountain Land Alliance is celebrating the culmination of a months-long campaign to stop a series of bills introduced by US Senator Steve Daines aimed at sidestepping a critical environmental review of the Signal Peak coal mine. After a rally in the Bulls last July and numerous meetings with the offices of Senators Daines and Tester, all three of the proposed bills died in the final days of the 118th Congress. As we head into 2025, BMLA is working to thwart any more efforts by Congress to undermine protections for water and public lands in the Bull Mountains.

## CMRC celebrates first year of water monitoring

By Jordan Buser

Central Montana Resource Council members are preparing to celebrate their first year of community-led water monitoring on Ross Fork Creek. After collecting samples this summer, volunteers began analyzing and interpreting the data. These results will inform what areas of the creek are problematic and establish a baseline water quality to assess the overall health of the watershed. CMRC members are adding an additional sampling site for next year to better assess impacts on the watershed. This program would not have been possible without the support of landowners along Ross Fork Creek, dedicated volunteers, and their partnership with Monitoring Montana Waters.

## Beartooth Alliance officers introduce themselves to the membership

By Jack Leuthold

Cooke City is full of snow, but the outreach goals of the affiliate continue. Beartooth Alliance's new officers have been using the start of this New Year to both introduce themselves to the membership and also hear what they are concerned about in terms of local issues. The information they collect will help direct Beartooth Alliance's work as we move through 2025. All of these outreach efforts will lead to a year of building community power in the Cooke City area!

## EMRC monitors wind, plans landowner seminar

By Jackson Newman

Eastern Montana Resource Council members have been monitoring the controversial wind development proposed for Dawson, Prairie, and McCone counties. Discussions at the respective county commissions have led to a lively debate. EMRC is planning a seminar for this winter with a property rights lawyer to educate farmers and ranchers on how to negotiate with energy companies.

*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!*

## Get ready for Montana Soil Health Week, April 1-7!

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Every year during the first week of April we celebrate Montana Soil Health Week and every Wednesday of that week we celebrate Montana Soil Health Day. These events help raise awareness about the importance of soil stewardship while honoring Montana's agricultural producers and celebrating the importance of agriculture in Montana's culture, history, and economy.

The vitality of Montana's food, water, economy and environment is rooted in the health of Montana's soils. These soils and the people who steward them allow us to grow nutritious food, retain our limited water resources, and keep our communities resilient, thriving and prosperous.

Check out our website over the coming weeks to learn about future events, celebrations, and ways to get involved to preserve this precious resource right under our feet.

To learn more about Soil Health Week and ways to advance soil health, visit **[NorthernPlains.org/Soil](https://NorthernPlains.org/Soil)**



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