



NORTHERN PLAINS

RESOURCE COUNCIL

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 a benefit of membership.

Membership Dues

\$1200+ Rider of the Big Sky

\$600 - \$1199 Bottom Line Rider

\$51 - \$599 Rider

\$50 General Member

Endowment

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

Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC)

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

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A LOOK BACK AT 2025







A ROAD WELL TRAVELED

Board Chair **NORANE FREISTADT**

As I sit by the gas stove, soaking up the heat on this damp January day, I am contemplating my personal journey to Northern Plains Resource Council. Realizing we all have a story that sparked our interest in dedicating time and effort to this 50+ year organization that has accomplished numerous successes in the conservation realm, I want to share my personal path.

My dedication to all things conservation-related has been at the core of my values since an early age. I remember a conversation with my father, contemplating what path I might choose after high school, expressing to him that I wanted to work for a non-profit conservation/ environmental organization. The very first Earth Day in 1972 had made a big impact on me, and I was well on my way to wanting to be part of that 'environmental movement'. As my father was a geologist, we spent many a summer camped at the Flint Creek Camp near Phillipsburg, Dad prospecting the area, and my mother, brother and I spending our days at the campground playing in Flint Creek. My outdoor-centered family experiences formed a deep reverence for all things in nature.

Those memories sparked my desire to become part of the growing 1970's 'environmental movement', and upon settling in Helena in 1978, my husband and I delved head-long into efforts to stem the proposed development of 250 acres of open space lands on Mount Ascension into a residential neighborhood. Throughout this process, I put my efforts towards the

protection of natural landscapes and livability issues in my community. From that collective effort grew Prickly Pear Land Trust, and I enthusiastically jumped in as their development director. There I embarked on what became a 20-year career as a development director in the non-profit conservation arena. Throughout my time at three organizations (Prickly Pear Land Trust, Montana Wilderness Association, Montana Audubon), I feel lucky for having spent my professional career advocating for the very things I feel are so important in this world.

My entrée to the big world of Northern Plains was through Sleeping Giant Citizens Council. I immediately loved the people, the grassroots nature of the organization, and the passion with which folks were involved. I got to know Svein Newman who was then SGCC's organizer, and he approached me about being chair of the newly formed Northern Plains Democracy Committee, knowing that the upcoming 2023 legislature was going to marshal in major threats to our Montana Constitution and democracy in general. This was a steep learning curve for us all, but what an exhilarating feeling when we became part of a group effort that helped stem the tide of messing with Montanan's Constitution! I will always be thankful for our organization's foresight in expanding our organizing into this realm.

I encourage you all to consider your personal story and what that brings to this organization and its profound history of organizing on behalf of working lands, clean water, land, and air!

What do think about when you hear the word power?

Do you associate it as something bad? Greedy CEO's, corrupt politicians, or something else? Do you feel uncomfortable? Mad? Excited?

At its core, power is neither good or bad – and as Martin Luther King Jr. taught during the civil rights movement:

“Power is simply the ability to achieve purpose.” - MLK

This past summer we shared an update on the deep questions Northern Plains leaders were asking as part of a new strategic plan. A key question we answered early on was that Northern Plains does not currently have the power we need in order to achieve our mission.

OUR PATH TO POWER

BY MAGGIE GORDON

MISSION:

- Organize Montanans to protect our water, land, air, and working landscapes
- Support a healthy, localized, and sustainable economy in farm and ranch country and in our towns,
- Build strong grassroots leaders, always considering the next generation.

Yet the challenges we face in our state and country have only become more dire. The policies that extract resources (and slim savings) from our communities to increase the wealth of billionaires are winning. Coal leasing in Eastern Montana just re-opened, ag markets plummeted as ranchers were hauling cattle to market, not to mention healthcare premiums skyrocketed January 1 for thousands of Montanans.

So, what do we do about it?

Northern Plains' is responding by getting clear about the power our people want to build in Montana. We are doubling down on organizing people, and developing leaders. And in order to do more organizing, we need more leaders in all of our communities who are part of a statewide strategy to build our collective power. In 2026 we're hosting trainings both locally and statewide, to train everyday folks who want to build power with Northern Plains.

Then what?

Attendees of our training series will be asked to go home and put their new skills to the test in preparation for the next training. We have big work ahead of us before the 2027 legislative session – but the stakes are high. We hope you'll join us! Contact Maggie Gordon at maggie@northernplains.org

THIS YEAR WE'LL HOST KEY TRAININGS ON THESE TOPICS:

- Understanding power and self-interest
- How to have a one-on-one conversation
- Choosing an issue
- Public actions with decision makers
- Canvassing, candidate forums, and other electoral activities

CERTAINTY: BUILDING YOUR NORTHERN PLAINS LEGACY



BY MARY FITZPATRICK, NORTHERN PLAINS RIDER CHAIR

This year's theme is certainty. Do you remember the theme from last year? Neither do I, and I'm certain you won't remember the recycled jokes either. We seem to be certain of some things. We say "sure as day follows night". We say "Does the bear poop in the woods?" Then there's the old death and taxes thing. Oh yeah, death. We'll get to that. Really, we'll all get to that. Some things, like the economy and our politics, are always uncertain. Lately more than anything, they resemble a lump of Silly Putty bouncing through a House of Fun Hall of Mirrors.

We do have cosmological certainties, like eclipses. For the next solar eclipse in the lower 48, about 1/2 of MT will experience totality. I have it on my calendar, and I am certainly looking forward to it. The date is August 23, a little before sunset, in 2044. In 2044, sunset might be past my bedtime. Can't be certain. Usually though, certainty about the future is hard to come by. I confess I am not at all good at predicting the future, I am much better at catastrophic fantasizing. Sadly, these days, no matter how hard I catastrophize, I just can't keep up!

So, back to the Death Thing. Having your will and other estate planning in order will certainly, well, (maybe) certainly mean that what could be catastrophic is upgraded to some degree of inconvenient. The distressing event in question is so certain, you should always be reading something that will make you look good if you die in the middle of it.

If you've been here since 2019, this is the seventh time you've listened to me talk about remembering Northern Plains in your planning. I hope you have done so, and you're sitting through this only because you like hearing the same jokes year after year. Over the last six years, we have seen a lot of change.

There was Covid, a time of loss and sadness, loneliness and adaptation. Some of the adaptations, like our ability to use remote meetings and programming, have been a plus and worth keeping. The changes have continued. I'm sure you've heard about our new Strategic Plan that will guide us into the next stage in our development as an organization. It will mean hard work, and hard decisions about what to keep and what to leave behind. It will mean change and sadness, excitement, and hope for what we are building. We live in a time when laws don't seem to have much weight or traction. But Northern Plains has always looked beyond law for guidance, looking to what is good for the land and water and air, what makes for prosperous and cohesive communities, what allows for ordinary people in a democracy to have true power over our lives.

Your gift to Northern Plains Legacy will help assure that Northern Plains grows more powerful and keeps on working for Montana. So, these are the essential facts about our Legacy Program: First, the idea is not to die young, but as late as possible. Nevertheless, we need a Plan B, sooner or later. We all need a will.

Your will isn't the only way you can make a Legacy Gift to Northern Plains. For example, if you have a brokerage account, a retirement account, or an insurance policy, you can add Northern Plains as a beneficiary. You can do this yourself, with no attorney. On our website we have some webinars on planning.

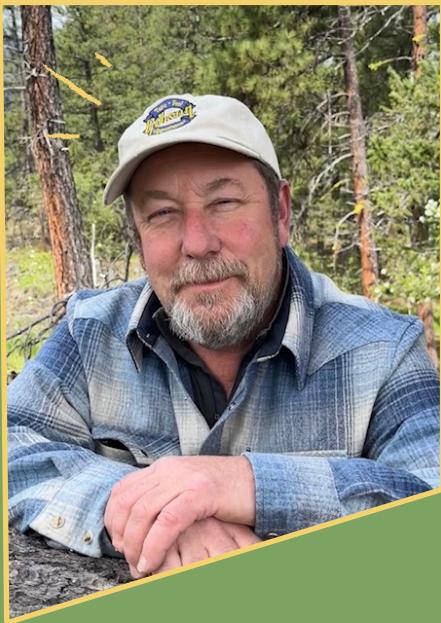
If your situation is so complicated, changing or uncertain as to induce procrastination, never fear! Northern Plains has experts on staff and in our professional network who can help you take it on. So don't wait, call. Whether your priority is generating income through retirement, protecting assets you

want to pass down to your family, or just making sure the assets you've worked hard for continue to work for the causes you hold most dear. Call us and we can help you design a plan that fits like your favorite pair of boots.

If you've already included Northern Plains in your planning, THANK YOU, and please let us know! You are supporting NP now with your time, energy and money. Your Legacy Gift means support that materializes when you dematerialize. While none of us can do anything about the certain fate of all mortal flesh, we can assure ourselves a healthy and active afterlife. We can keep raising hell for eternity, or until justice and ecological sanity rule the Earth. Whichever comes first.

WHY INCLUDE NORTHERN PLAINS?

- Ensure that your values live on through Northern Plains' work
- Direct your gift to our Endowment Fund, and sustain your our work everlastingly!
- Making a gift in a will leaves your assets in your control during your lifetime.
- Your will is revocable, and you can change beneficiaries at any time.
- Family first, charity second – you can provide both for your loved ones and carry on the work you believe in.
- Make a gift in honor of or in memory of someone special, or restrict it to a specific purpose.
- You can make your planned gift anonymously if you wish.
- There is no minimum to a bequest, and no gift is too small to make a difference!



JAMIE ISALY: A LIFE FULL OF LEARNING AND LEADING

BY JACK LEUTHOLD

There are values that Northern Plains operates by – integrity, stewardship, and justice, to name just a few. These values make up the foundation of our work and serve as a guide for thinking about what is possible for Montana.

These values don't just live within the structure of our organization, they live within Northern Plains' members as well. Someone who proves this perfectly is Jamie Isaly.

Jamie spent his early years growing up in Pittsburg, PA, and Dubois, WY. When it came time to head off to college, Jamie made his way to Bozeman to attend Montana State University. This choice proved to be the right one as Montana has been home ever since.

Jamie has held many roles in his professional life ranging from ranching to construction to small business operator, but much of his career was spent as an educator. For more than 30 years, Jamie taught middle and high school students in the Livingston School District and also served as an adjunct professor of education at MSU. His life-long learner mentality continues to contribute to who Jamie is –

someone who inspires and sees potential in everyone. It's been said that a good teacher can inspire hope and ignite the imagination and Jamie sure does prove that right.

Jamie's interests also lie in the outdoors and he has been supportive

“For me, retiring from teaching did not mean retiring from educating or engaging. There is so much to do in the aspect of preventing what sometimes appears as a downward spiral of what we see in our world today.

Organizations like Northern Plains really help to organize, educate, motivate, and inspire us to keep doing the hard work. I am sure that I will continue to engage and educate until I physically cannot anymore.”

of sustainable agriculture practices, conservation, and renewable energy for many years. Indeed, this is what brought him to Northern Plains. “I loved their grassroots and members-based approach towards dealing with issues, and how they supported folks and communities in rural Montana, which is often overlooked,” wrote Isaly.

Northern Plains being rooted in people and grassroots organizing

is what makes it such a strong and authentic organization that is able to accomplish and secure benefits for everyday Montanans. For Jamie, an accomplishment that he is most proud of is Northern Plains' role in the passage of C-PACE legislation in the 2021 legislative session.

To Jamie, C-PACE embodies the overall intent of Northern Plains – organizing for “programs that have meaningful impact, benefitting everyday Montanans and Montana's small businesses.”

Jamie's now retired from teaching, but is by no means slowing down on being part of the community that he loves. He's currently serving his first term in the Montana House of Representatives where he brings his values and ideals to the halls of the capital as he represents

the constituents of Livingston and western Park County.

Even though he is not in the classroom anymore, Jamie continues to lean on his past experience to garner the motivation to stay involved in the work.

Oftentimes the future is full of unknowns, new challenges, and a whole ton of work. Luckily for us, Montana has teachers like Jamie who can help us shape it.



ORGANIZING
TRAINING

BY CAITLIN CROMWELL

Trainings, trainings, trainings. We've already jumped full force into the work our ambitious new Strategic Plan laid out for us – the first step being trainings. Northern Plains has always been focused on developing the skills and leadership of regular people to organize their communities. We're doubling down on this approach – and we know that we need more time spent training each other on the learnable skills and concepts of community organizing before we jump off a metaphorical cliff and get serious about building real power for regular Montanans.

This fall, we did just that! Members came together in their own communities to share what's at stake for them, wrestle with what it takes to build real people power, kick our fears to the curb, and commit to organizing

together – across differences and despite the challenge ahead. The trainings also helped folks clarify their commitment, form core leadership teams in specific communities, and launch local organizing plans.

We held six gatherings that trained over fifty leaders with folks in Glendive, Miles City, Sidney, Roundup and the Bull Mountains, and Billings. We also trained a cohort of farmers, ranchers, and land managers who are clear on their own stakes and curious about what it would look like to fight for a better future for folks in agriculture. Check out photos from each of these trainings here!

Want to host a similar training in your own community? Contact Caitlin at caitlin@northernplains.org, and we'll explore it.



Farmers, ranchers, and land stewards from across Montana gathered in December to talk about what it will take to build the power we need fight for the future of family farms. Folks learned about organizing, wrestled with tensions and fears, and talked through a shared organizing strategy. It was tough but powerful stuff. It's time to contend for our communities!



WHY GIVING MONTHLY MATTERS: MAGGI BEESON

BY EFFY ALGRANATI

Back when Maggi Beeson first moved to Billings, she quickly learned that her new city was rated 3rd worst in the country for sulphur dioxide air pollution. Luckily, she also learned about all the good work Northern Plains and Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council (YVCC) were doing to clean up and improve Billings' air quality. Maggi immediately rolled up her sleeves and got involved! From there, she continued to stay engaged with local issues ranging from bringing cardboard recycling to Billings to fighting NorthWestern Energy's illegal construction of the Laurel Methane Plant. Maggi loves how Northern Plains keeps showing up and

brings folks of all shapes and stripes to the table, and being able to connect with other folk who share her commitments and values.

For Maggi, giving monthly is a more manageable way to ensure that she is supporting work that is important to her. She doesn't have to think about giving at the end of the year, and no matter what, Maggi knows her generosity is "always giving a little bit of energy" to Northern Plains' work. By giving monthly, anyone can be a valued part of this community whether or not they have the time to be involved in other ways. Thank you for being a Northern Plains Monthly Sustainer, Maggi!

DON'T DELAY, BE A MONTHLY SUSTAINER TODAY!

With as little as \$5 a month, monthly sustainers provide Northern Plains with a predictable source of income to sustain our work. You'll never get behind on your membership (say goodbye to renewal letters!), and it is simple to change the donation amount whenever you would like. Joining is simple—click the **Donate Now** button on our website or give us a call at (406) 248-1154. We would love to welcome you into the fold!



SCAN HERE



NORTHERN PLAINS EXPANDS AG OUTREACH, PUSHES FOR MCOOL

BY GUSTY CATHERIN-SAUER

With renewed momentum in the fight for fair markets, Montana producers continue to press for mandatory country-of-origin labeling and Northern Plains has launched a new Ag. organizing effort.

This holiday season, Montana producers stepped up to demand fairness, transparency, and honesty in the beef marketplace. Members of the Montana Country of Origin Labeling Coalition—representing Northern Plains, Montana Farmers Union, U.S. Cattlemen’s Association, the National Farm Organization, and independent ranchers—visited congressional offices across the state during the Senate’s in-district work period to urge our elected officials to support mandatory country of origin labeling (MCOOL). From Great Falls to Bozeman, to Billings, producers carried a unified message:

Montana ranchers deserve fair

markets, consumers deserve honest labels, and Congress must stand up to the monopoly power distorting our food system.

This push arrives at a moment when national scrutiny of JBS—the world’s largest meatpacker—is intensifying across both political parties. For many ranchers, the connection is direct and alarming: JBS makes political contributions to national candidates while simultaneously squeezing independent producers and fighting against MCOOL. In conversations with our coalition, members noted that this bipartisan concern should be compelling enough to bring our delegation fully on board.

Momentum is not just coming from policy pressure—it’s also rising from the grassroots.

Northern Plains’ recent Ag Kickoff Meeting brought together producers from across Central and Eastern

Montana to discuss the crisis facing family agriculture and the need for deep relational organizing. The energy was unmistakable. Participants want real solutions, real accountability, and a real path to power. We explored Montana’s rapidly shifting agricultural landscape, the collapse of fair markets and erosion of producer livelihoods, and explored strategy moving forward into 2026 based on our rich history of agricultural organizing.

Across the state, producers are facing land development pressure, inflation, extreme weather, and market manipulation. While many organizations offer services or advocacy, few avenues exist for real structural power for producers. That is where Northern Plains is stepping in. The numbers tell a stark story:

Between 2017 and 2022, Ravalli County alone lost more than 150 farms and 50,000 acres of farmland, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture USDA census. And since 2015, Montana has lost 25 percent of the state’s family ranches.

Between coordinated congressional outreach, new statewide allies, and energized grassroots leadership, we are entering the new year with momentum. Montana’s agricultural future—its land, its families, its markets—depends on organizing that is strategic, relational, and powerful.

The movement for mandatory country-of-origin labeling and fair markets is growing. Montana producers are leading the way. And Northern Plains is stepping forward to help build the structural power we need to win.

Fill out the Governor’s 10-year Ag Stakeholder Survey:

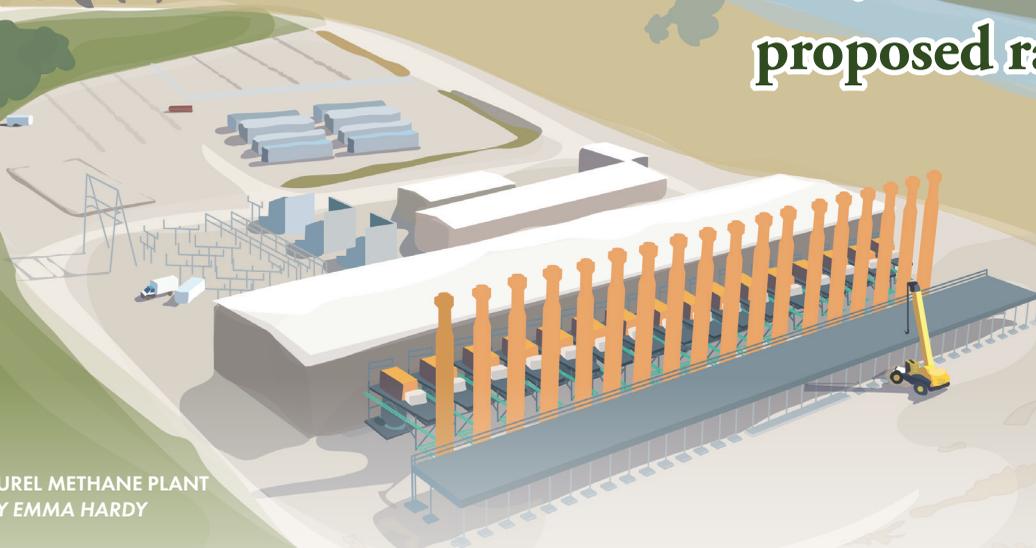
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PSC Disallows more than \$40M in NWE's proposed rate increase

BY JACK LEUTHOLD

THE NWE LAUREL METHANE PLANT
ARTWORK BY EMMA HARDY



In late 2025, Montana's Public Service Commission (PSC) took their final votes on NorthWestern Energy's (NWE) latest request to raise the price they charge customers for electricity and gas. These votes mark the end of a regulatory process that lasted over a year, but the impacts of the commissioners' decisions will last far beyond that.

A huge component of this rate case was the Laurel Methane Plant - a natural gas power plant that NWE built on the banks of the Yellowstone river outside of Laurel, Montana. NWE was asking the PSC to make ratepayers pay for this project. At the end of the day, the PSC obliged and placed the burden of over \$240 million on the ratepayers - a move that puts the financial burden not on the wealthy executives or shareholders, but rather everyday Montanans.

However, grassroots organizing made this decision differ from the usual rubber-stamp of approval that NorthWestern is accustomed to. Montanans from all across the state rallied in Helena during a public hearing to put the bad actions of NWE on full display and voiced to the commissioners the impacts an increase would have on them. Montana's largest city also spoke out against NWE's request as Billings' City Council decided to formally oppose the rate increase. City leaders pointed to the effect the price hike would have on Billings' residents and the city's budget.

While the big public actions may have caught the most attention and headlines, it's important to remem-

ber all the other organizing that was occurring everyday as the rate case went on. Whether it was a resident of Dillon calling their commissioner and urging them not to forget who they represent, a local of Livingston who gave testimony over Zoom explaining the impacts that higher bills will have on them, or a Billings native who wrote in the local Gazette about the impact cost increases will have on families and small businesses. These are by no means isolated actions. Ratepayers across the state contributed to a grassroots campaign that highlighted NWE's greed.

The commissioners ended up disallowing a little over \$40 million dollars from NWE's original request of \$287 million. The basis of this reduction, as explained by the PSC's own staff, was the fact that NWE did not act in a fair, transparent, or cost-effective way throughout the process of building the gas plant - points that Northern Plains members have been highlighting and organizing around for the past several years.

It's important to not ignore the fact that when all is said and done, we are still paying for a reckless NorthWestern Energy investment through higher monthly bills. However, there are huge organizing wins coming out of this. We have built power in ways we haven't before and in ways we can build off of in the future.

Which is good, because if we know anything about NorthWestern Energy, they are going to come back for more and it'll be up to us to push back.



THE GOOD NEIGHBOR AGREEMENT

A look back at how we celebrated 25 years of trust, partnership, and collaboration in 2025

BY CASEY KENNEDY

On May 8, 2025, the Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA) celebrated 25 years of partnership with Stillwater Protective Association, Cottonwood Resource Council, Northern Plains Resource Council, and Sibanye-Stillwater Mining Company.

Over two decades ago, Northern Plains members fought against Stillwater Mining Company to protect water quality and the communities in Stillwater and Sweet Grass Counties.

process for citizens to regularly meet with company representatives to address and prevent problems related to mining impacts, reclamation, wildlife, and other issues.

Today, the GNA has successfully protected the Stillwater and East Boulder Rivers and rural communities through the enforcement of strict water quality standards, implementation of a busing program to ensure public safety and preservation of country roads, and a structured decision-making process that gives both

citizen groups and the mining company an equal voice at the decision-making table.

"We know a lot more today than we did 100 years ago, and there are other ways to approach development now, and this is one that we've proved works," says Paul Hawks, rancher, Northern Plains leader, original negotiator for the Good Neighbor Agreement, and member of the East Boulder Oversight Committee. "If we're going to have a mine, it's going to be the best damn mine in the world."

To mark the momentous occasion, parties of the GNA hosted a panel and dinner in Columbus, MT, where long-time members from both the GNA Task Force and the mine spoke to the many lessons learned over the past two-and-a-half decades. Members of the community joined to reflect and learn from



Northern Plains leaders and original negotiators of the GNA Jerry Iverson (left) and Paul Hawks speak to a crowded audience at Wheatgrass Books in Livingston, Mont., May 8, 2025, for the launch of *A Seat at the Table*, a book outlining the history of Good Neighbor Agreement.

In 2000, spurred by action taken by Northern Plains members, the two sides worked together and negotiated an agreement to extend protections beyond state requirements to protect property, water, and area communities, while allowing platinum and palladium mining to proceed. The legally binding contract established a

the trust, transparency, and collaboration engendered by traditional adversaries, who continue to work together to responsibly operate in the Stillwater and East Boulder Valleys of Montana.

When members of the GNA weren't celebrating the 25th Anniversary or reviewing water quality reports, they were



[ABOVE] Paul Hawks (stage left) speaking at the California Economic Summit on the Driving Tangible Benefits to People and Places panel, with other state and national leaders working to reimagine developer and community relationship models.

[LEFT] As a requirement of the GNA, Northern Plains members, Mine Staff, and Technical Advisors all participate in annual biological monitoring of the Stillwater and East Boulder Rivers.



traveling to Colorado to present at the Colorado School of Mines Critical Minerals Symposium, flying to California to speak at the California Economic Summit, and continuing to strategize, negotiate, and implement environmental excellence through their regular meetings with the mine.

"We started getting all these inquiries about the Good Neighbor Agreement. And you know we'd been around for 24 years and nobody had said much of anything," Paul says. "And all of a sudden everybody wants to know about us! All these universities and think tanks were looking into community benefit agreements to see what could be done as this thing moves out to give the communities a voice. And so it turns out that was the drive.

And when they were looking around at the various Community Benefit Agreements (CBAs) that have been written over the last 20 years or so, most of them didn't exist anymore. They had fallen apart over time. And our Good Neighbor Agreement rose to the top."

Members of the Agreement are thrilled to see the recent upsurge in academic interest over the past year. They are hopeful that the recently proposed Good Neighbor Agreement Center at the Colorado School of Mines, which is based on our Stillwater model, will offer the necessary tools for other community groups and developers to protect the integrity and resilience of the places they call home.



Paul Hawks (Left), Dan Walsh, Jerry Iverson, Heather McDowell

At the 2025 Northern Plains Annual Meeting in Billings this fall, Paul Hawks (left), Jerry Iverson, and members of the DEQ and Sibanye-Stillwater Mine hosted a panel about the importance of the GNA and its lasting and developing legacy.

Listen to the full Annual Meeting presentation here!

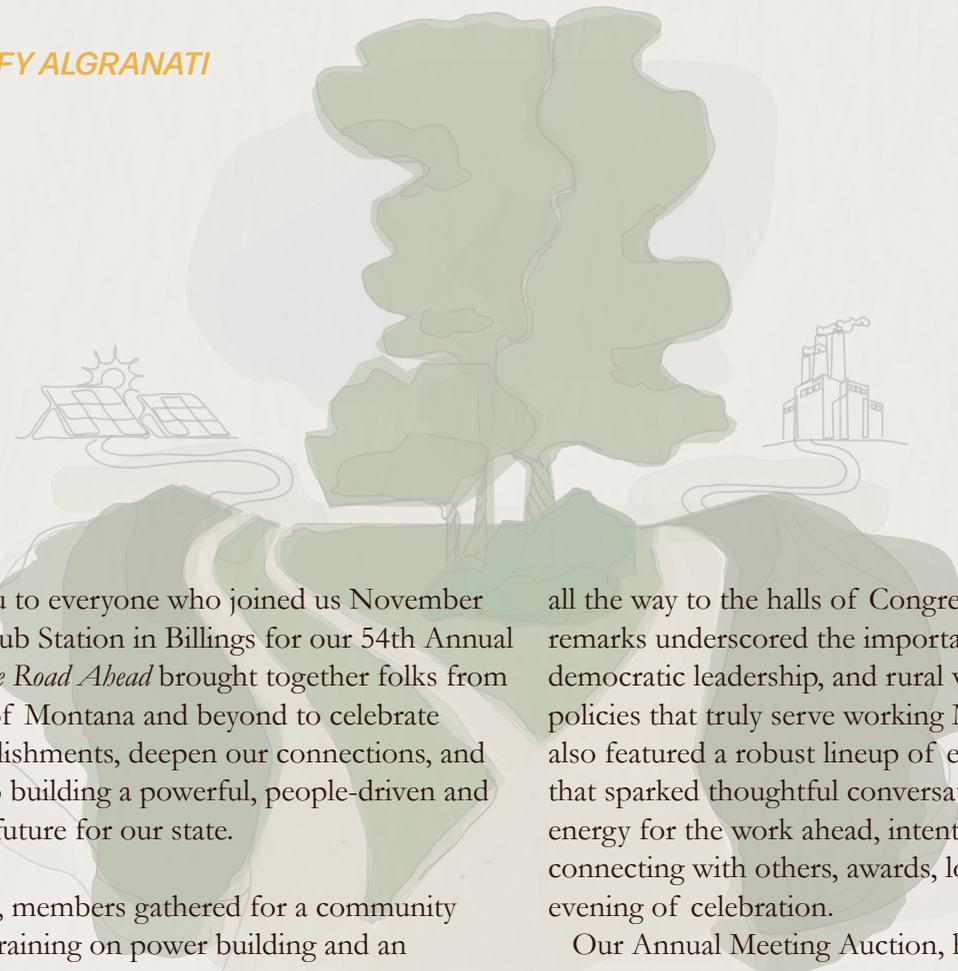
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THE ROAD AHEAD:

CULTIVATING THE FUTURE THROUGH CONNECTION AND PERSISTENCE

BY EFFY ALGRANATI



Thank you to everyone who joined us November 7–8 at the Pub Station in Billings for our 54th Annual Meeting. *The Road Ahead* brought together folks from all corners of Montana and beyond to celebrate our accomplishments, deepen our connections, and recommit to building a powerful, people-driven and sustainable future for our state.

On Friday, members gathered for a community organizing training on power building and an engaging Meeting of the Membership, followed by the always-popular Prairie Spread—complete with good food, poetry, a limerick contest, and a staff skit that did not disappoint!

The weekend's highlight was Saturday's keynote address from farmer and former U.S. Senator Jon Tester. Tester reflected on lessons from his decades of public service from the Big Sandy School Board

all the way to the halls of Congress in D.C. His remarks underscored the importance of persistence, democratic leadership, and rural voices in shaping policies that truly serve working Montanans. Saturday also featured a robust lineup of educational sessions that sparked thoughtful conversations and renewed energy for the work ahead, intentional time for connecting with others, awards, local food, and an evening of celebration.

Our Annual Meeting Auction, held both in-person and online, was a huge success once again. Thank you to everyone for donating items, bidding generously, and helping raise critical funds to support putting on the Annual Meeting.

We're deeply grateful to all who attended—whether in Billings or over Zoom. Here's to the road ahead and to walking it together, shoulder to shoulder.



AWARDS

BOB TULLY SPIRIT AWARD

The Bob Tully Spirit Award recognizes a member who has demonstrated outstanding leadership abilities, creativity in the face of adversity, and unwavering courage. John Brown presented this award to CCRC member and Bridger resident Tom Tschida. Congratulations, Tom!

MARY DONOHOE TELL IT LIKE IT IS AWARD

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." Tom Baratta presented this award to YVCC Chair and Billings resident Kris Glenn. Congratulations, Kris!

ELECTIONS

Please welcome our new Board Chair, Norane Freistadt, and our newest Board Officer, Tom Tschida!



Newly elected Board Chair Norane Freistadt



Newly elected Asst. Secretary of the Board Tom Tschida, accepts the *Bob Tully Spirit Award*.



Northern Plains Vice Chair and Chair of Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council Kris Glenn, accepts the *Mary Donohoe Tell It Like It Is Award*.



Chair of Carbon County Resource Council Karen Walmsley, accepts the *Largest Percentage of New Members Award*.

AFFILIATE AWARDS

Carbon County Resource Council was presented with the award for "Largest Percentage of New Members."

Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council was presented with the "Most New Members Award." Congratulations CCRC and YVCC!



**KEYNOTE SPEAKER:
SEN. JON TESTER**







Northern Plains members gathered at the Meeting of the Membership to discuss and debate four proposed resolutions. Northern Plains resolutions are an opportunity for the organization to determine our position and direction on issues relevant to our members. Resolutions can be brought forward by any Northern Plains member, or body of members, for consideration at the Annual Meeting. Discussion and debate around resolutions always proves lively and inspiring, showcasing our members' depth of knowledge and our commitment to democratic processes.

The four resolutions before the membership in November were:

- An amendment to the resolution to commit to celebrating, promoting, protecting, and defending the 1972 Constitution of the state of Montana.
- A resolution to oppose the development,

RESOLUTIONS

construction, or use of nuclear fission-powered energy infrastructure in the State of Montana - including the mining, transportation, processing, and enrichment of uranium, as well as disposal of spent nuclear fuel and other radioactive waste materials.

- A resolution to oppose any policy or regulation that aims to facilitate the development, construction, or operation of hyperscale data centers in the State of Montana that puts ratepayers, communities, and our environment at risk; and oppose the development, construction, or operation of hyperscale data centers that do not take all necessary measures to mitigate any harms the data center may inflict on Montana's ratepayers, communities, and our environment.
- A resolution to develop a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization in addition and as a companion to the c3, and the Board will work over the next year to align our budget and programs to make the most of this new structure.

All four resolutions were passed and adopted by the members gathered at the 2025 Annual Meeting. Final text for each resolution follows below.

Questions about resolutions? Contact Caroline at caroline@northernplains.org

Resolution No. 2025-01

A RESOLUTION OF THE MEMBERS OF NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL TO CELEBRATE, PROMOTE, PROTECT, AND DEFEND THE 1972 CONSTITUTION OF THE STATE OF MONTANA.

WHEREAS, Montana voters elected 100 fellow Montana citizens to convene to draft a new state constitution in 1972 in order to protect citizens' rights, open state government to public participation, and rectify absent elements and provisions in the 1889 constitution; and

WHEREAS, constitutional convention delegates worked in open, collegial, and bipartisan committees in 1972 to draft the fourteen articles in the document; and

WHEREAS, the Constitution of the State of Montana was then ratified by a vote of citizenry of the state on June 6, 1972; and

WHEREAS, the extraordinary protections afforded Montanans by the 1972 Constitution of the State of Montana as regards the right to a clean and healthy environment, government transparency and accountability, honoring the cultural heritage of Montana's indigenous peoples, and other important rights within the Montana Constitution that are under threat by special interests;

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

That members of Northern Plains Resource Council commit to celebrate, promote, protect, and defend the 1972 Constitution of the State of Montana.

Resolution No. 2025-02

A RESOLUTION OF THE MEMBERS OF NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT, CONSTRUCTION, AND USE OF NUCLEAR POWER IN THE STATE OF MONTANA.

WHEREAS, the 2025 Montana Legislature passed and the Governor signed two pieces of legislation, HB 696 and HB 623, that set the groundwork for nuclear power development in Montana by legalizing the construction of facilities for uranium processing, enrichment, and storage of spent nuclear fuel; and

WHEREAS, the demand for energy is rapidly increasing, in large part driven by the expansion of generative artificial intelligence (AI) technology and the data centers required to power them along with the narrative promoted by its advocates that nuclear-powered energy is a critical resource needed to meet that energy demand; and

WHEREAS, nuclear-powered energy is among the most expensive and capital-intensive sources of energy; and

WHEREAS, because their profit

margins are a function of the expense of their investments, investor-owned utility corporations are incentivized to finance costly energy infrastructure projects resulting in increased costs for ratepayers; and

WHEREAS, the generation of nuclear power is extraordinarily water intensive, further exacerbating the problems of declining water resources in arid Montana and potentially complicating the contentious legal issues of water rights in our state; and

WHEREAS, historically, fossil-fuel mining and electric generation facilities have impacted rural communities, and those communities are again the targets of nuclear energy development, which potentially reinforces this boom-and-bust cycle and further contributes to environmental degradation; and

WHEREAS, highly radioactive

waste material from nuclear fission energy production shall remain a threat to humans and the environment for thousands of years; and

WHEREAS, because roughly 70% of the world's minable uranium are beneath or adjacent to indigenous lands, the mining of uranium has disproportionately impacted indigenous communities, who deserve to be consulted about the impacts of further mining and electrical generation on their communities; and

WHEREAS, localized deposits of mineable uranium exist throughout Montana, and the proliferation of nuclear-powered energy infrastructure could make in-state uranium mining economically feasible resulting in further impacts on communities, water resources, and the environment; and

WHEREAS, the development of nuclear facilities would require



are cheaper, safer, and more technologically viable.

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

That Northern Plains Resource Council opposes the development, construction, or use of nuclear fission-powered energy infrastructure in the State of Montana - including the mining, transportation, processing, and enrichment of uranium, as well as disposal of spent nuclear fuel and other radioactive waste materials.

the transportation of uranium ore through the State of Montana, potentially risking the health of humans and the environment from

radioactive uranium dust; and

WHEREAS, nuclear energy is not necessary because alternative sources of carbon-free energy

Resolution No. 2025-03



A RESOLUTION OF THE MEMBERS OF NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL REGARDING THE CONSTRUCTION, OPERATION, AND REGULATION OF DATA CENTERS IN MONTANA THAT HAVE AN ELECTRICITY LOAD REQUIREMENT OF 50 MEGAWATTS OR MORE.

WHEREAS, for the purpose of this resolution, the definition of a “hyperscale” data center is a data center project that has an electricity load requirement of 50 megawatts or larger; and

WHEREAS, at minimum, six Montana communities will potentially see the construction and operation of hyperscale data centers; and

WHEREAS, the currently proposed data center projects in Montana would increase our energy load growth far beyond our existing capacity, projecting a load growth of an additional 2100+

Megawatts (or nearly three times the existing load of all current energy use in Montana); and

WHEREAS, most hyperscale data centers utilize more power to operate the facility than the entire use of all NorthWestern Energy customers, collectively; and

WHEREAS, given that NorthWestern Energy’s CEO has cited increased load demand as a reason for raising customer’s energy rates, without a separate rate class for new data centers, Montana’s ratepayers are susceptible to costs associated with construction of new electrical

generation facilities and electrical transmission upgrades needed for data center deployment; and

WHEREAS, hyperscale data centers can use up to 5 million gallons of water per day, equivalent to a town of 10,000-50,000 people, posing a serious threat to water sources in Montana; and

WHEREAS, under Montana statute, hyperscale data centers shall pay property taxes at a class 17 rate, 1.25%, lower than any other commercial or industrial property tax rate in the state; and

WHEREAS, most hyperscale data facility proposals in Montana are



owned by out-of-state corporations and private equity firms with little to no investment in Montana's communities.

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

MEETING ASSEMBLED:

That Northern Plains Resource Council opposes any policy or regulation that aims to facilitate the development, construction, or operation of hyperscale data centers in the State of Montana that puts ratepayers, communities, and our environment at risk; and

That Northern Plains Resource Council opposes the development, construction, or operation of hyperscale data centers that do not take all necessary measures to mitigate any harms the data center may inflict on Montana's ratepayers, communities, and our environment.

Resolution No. 2025-04

A RESOLUTION OF THE MEMBERS OF NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL TO LAUNCH A NEW 501(c)(4) CORPORATION.

WHEREAS, Northern Plains Board of Directors unanimously approved the 2025 strategic plan that included the decision to form a 501(c)4 corporation and thereby adding a tool to work to elect candidates who support our issues – independent of political party – into our strategy. The Strategic Plan was thoughtfully developed by 54 leaders and staff over a period of 6 months and over 50 hours of meetings; and

WHEREAS, several affiliates and task forces want to engage in activities not allowable as a 501(c)(3) corporation, including holding candidate forums, issuing voter guides, supporting certain candidates, etc., and a new entity could make that work possible; and

WHEREAS, 501(c)(4) tax-exempt organizations are free to do everything that can be done by a 501(c)(3) organization in addition to participating in electoral activities; and

WHEREAS, it is a broadly accepted practice for 501(c)4 organizations to maintain similarly



situated 501(c)(3) organizations to allow flexibility for operations and fundraising; and

WHEREAS, eighty five percent of members responding to our Strategic Planning survey said that, to build our power, Northern Plains needs to engage in work to elect candidates (independent of political party) who support our issues; and

WHEREAS, the ultimate form of power in our system is the ability to “hire or fire” our elected officials; and

WHEREAS, our democracy is under attack, and there is an urgent

need to engage more in the process of electing our local and statewide leaders who will defend our state.

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

Northern Plains Resource Council will develop a 501(c)(4) nonprofit organization in addition and as a companion to the c3, and the Board will work over the next year to align our budget and programs to make the most of this new structure.



COUNCIL ROUNDUP



Sleeping Giant plots their course

By Bryce Johnston

SGCC members have spent the last few months identifying a new campaign for their affiliate to work on. This issue identification process began with identifying and understanding the interests of SGCC membership, and the issues facing the community at large. After hearing about the strategic plan and making connections there, the group did exercises to identify which issues would be strategic to pursue and build power for the affiliate. Through this process, members are hoping to hit the ground running in 2026 with a new base to build and issue to tackle.



BA members continue dark skies efforts

By Jack Leuthold

The snow is piling up in Cooke City and Silver Gate as winter arrives for Beartooth Alliance members. The snow isn't stopping BA members however, from continuing their engagement with the community regarding their dark skies project. The outreach to residents and small businesses is continuing in an effort to get the community dark skies certified - an achievement that will add even more beauty to such a special place.

Central Montana Resource Council

Caring for their community this winter

By Jordan Buser

Central Montana Resource Council continues their work to protect clean water and improve food security. Members of the Water Task Force are compiling data from water samples taken this summer on Ross Fork Creek into a final report. Results from this report will be shared with the community at a town hall in February.

In addition, members of the Green Share Garden project raced to support their community in the wake of federal cuts to SNAP by establishing the "Fergus Free Fridge". This program provides access to free shelf stable foods and lunches, ensuring no one goes hungry.



EMRC beats the recruitment drum

By Annalise Eiffert

After two organizing trainings and months of group reflection, EMRC is launching its new organizing trajectory! Member leaders will meet with local residents individually and face to face, listening to the values, hopes, and worries that people have for their communities. The group hopes to use these conversations to build a base for local power, and determine what to focus on in their next campaign. EMRC is also fighting the most recent Montana-Dakota Utilities rate increase by sharing information and public comment directions.

Promoting responsible mineral development

By Jordan Buser

Stillwater Protective Association continues to remain involved in the Good Neighbor Agreement. Members are working to advance community and environmental interests throughout Stillwater Mine's proposed expansion of their Tailings and Waste Rock storage facilities. This involves engaging with agencies and technical experts to promote best practices and minimize waste footprints.

Through their involvement with Stillwater Mine, SPA is proving that it is possible to protect our natural landscapes and rural quality of life while allowing responsible mineral development.

CCRC flows smoothly into 2026

By Max Maynard

Carbon County Resource Council successfully hosted a sustainable home and business tour in Red Lodge! The lucky attendees of the tour bounced between four homes and businesses that incorporate energy-efficiency and sustainability into their designs. Residents of Carbon County can expect to see another tour on their calendars sometime in the future.

CCRC members are hosting an event on January 15th to inform the community about why the county growth policy matters. And, after several years of water testing on Rock Creek, CCRC has received a comprehensive data analysis that they hope to share with the public in February.

COUNCIL ROUNDUP



CRC starts strong for 2026

By Gusty Catherin-Sauer

Cottonwood Resource Council's annual meeting was a memorable experience! Held at long-time community gathering place, Dallman Hall, many members braved the winter weather to enjoy a local food feast and usher in the affiliate's new leadership and set priorities for 2026.

Members of Cottonwood Resource Council continue to host a community engagement series, *Cottonwood Connects*, with the goal of energizing, educating and hopefully bringing in new members this year. Additionally, we aim to stay apprised of issues surrounding the sale of water to Crazy Mountain Ranch, the decision making in conjunction with the Good Neighbor Agreement, and other important community concerns.



Golden Triangle builds their base

By Bryce Johnston

Golden Triangle Resource Council members have focused on reaching out to the community and bringing more people into the movement. Recently, they co-sponsored an event with other community groups bringing a plaintiff from the *Held v. State* case to present in Great Falls, turning out people to connect them with community action groups. Additionally, the affiliate is helping put on a community conversation around data centers in the Great Falls area, looking to build their base on standing up to the impacts of potential data center development.



YVCC members are sharpening their organizer skills

By Caitlin Cromwell

Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council members spent the fall participating in a series of organizing trainings to deepen their skills, learn organizing concepts, and get clear on the power they want to build together. They also put the finishing touches on the new organizing plan for Yellowstone County that will kick off with a listening campaign. YVCC members plan to sit down with their neighbors and networks to ask them what they care most about, and what they want for their community. YVCC is getting serious about building real people power and becoming a political relevant force to contend with here in Billings.



Re-centering organizing in Park County

By Jack Leuthold

It is an exciting time for Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council (YBCC) as we start the new year. Using Northern Plains' strategic plan as a guide, YBCC is starting the process of launching an affiliate-wide effort that is built around the interests and concerns of the community. YBCC will be working through a process that involves organizing training, listening campaigns, and the ultimate development of a platform. While this shift is new for YBCC, it presents an exciting time for power building in Park County.



**Bull Mountain
Land Alliance**

Building power by listening

By Brady McGinley

BMLA members have re-committed to organizing and base building in Musselshell County by embarking on an organizing trajectory that aims to build new relationships and grow the group's power. Right now, they are honing their understanding of power and learning how to conduct one-on-ones so that member-leaders are equipped to do the work of organizing in their community. In 2026, they look forward to surfacing the issues that matter to folks in Musselshell County and organizing their neighbors into action.

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!

BUILD A BETTER TOMORROW, TODAY

Join other members like you! Become a part of **Northern Plains Legacy**. Our planned giving program offers clear ways to support Northern Plains and will sustain your values for years to come.

Whether you're from the plains, mountains, cities, or towns, all of us share a common goal: To protect this place we love and call home so that future generations may thrive and prosper.

To learn more about Northern Plains Legacy and all the ways you can make a lasting gift.

visit: NorthernPlains.org/plan-your-legacy

Contact Caleb Lande at caleb@northernplains.org

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