

WORC ANNUAL REPORT 2015



WORC

is a regional network of grassroots community organizations that include 12,700 members and 39 local chapters. WORC's network includes: Dakota Resource Council (North Dakota); Dakota Rural Action (South Dakota); Idaho Organization of Resource Councils; Northern Plains Resource Council (Montana); Oregon Rural Action; Powder River Basin Resource Council (Wyoming); Western Colorado Congress; and Western Native Voice. WORC helps its member groups succeed by providing training and coordinating issue work.

OUR MISSION

is to advance the vision of a democratic, sustainable, and just society through community action. WORC is committed to building sustainable environmental and economic communities that balance economic growth with the health of people and stewardship of their land, air, and water.

GET IN TOUCH

Based in Billings, Montana, WORC has field offices in Montrose, Colorado, and Washington, D.C. Visit us online at www.worc.org.

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Billings, MT 59101
(406) 252-9672

110 Maryland Ave, NE #306
Washington, DC 20002
(202) 547-7040



BY THE NUMBERS

MEASURING OUR YEAR

12,700

TOTAL MEMBERS

Our largest membership ever, spread across 8 community organizations in 7 states.

493

NEW MEMBERS RECRUITED

Because more people = more power.

2,841

HOURS DEDICATED TO MEMBER GROUP CONSULTING AND SUPPORT

A big part of our mission is helping our member groups succeed. We devote hours to training, consulting, and coordination of issue work.

\$1,680

MONEY RAISED FOR WORC MEMBER GROUPS AND PROJECTS

WORC has a robust fundraising program, a major boon for our busy member groups.

An infographic with a light blue horizontal band. On the left, a large orange number '9' is positioned above the text 'TRAININGS HELD' and a paragraph. On the right, a large orange number '234' is positioned above the text 'PEOPLE WHO CAME TO OUR TRAININGS' and a paragraph.

9

TRAININGS
HELD

On organizing, fundraising,
grassroots leadership,
and more.

234

PEOPLE WHO CAME
TO OUR TRAININGS

We're building a network
of members and staff who are
equipped to take on the biggest
issues out there.

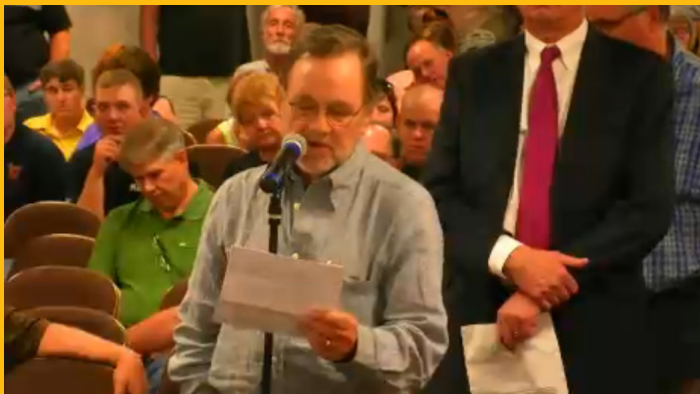
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6,921

ACTIONS TAKEN

We sent out 39 action alerts
in 2015, on topics ranging from
Keystone XL to federal coal leasing
to international trade policy, and
engaged thousands of
members and supporters
in key policy decisions.



AUGUST 2015

**Bob LeResche,
WORC chair
and Wyoming
farmer,
testifies at the
Department
of Interior's
coal listening
session in
Gillette.**

AUGUST 2015

**Supporters of federal
coal reform rally
outside the Bureau of
Land Management's
Billings office.**

2015 WAS A BIG YEAR FOR WORC'S COAL REFORM CAMPAIGN.

HERE'S A QUICK LOOK AT WHAT WE ACCOMPLISHED.



41% of all coal mined in the US each year is owned by the federal government. That means it's owned by taxpayers. However, the federal government often sells that coal to big companies for far less than it's worth—often for as little as \$1 per ton, when coal companies have turned around to sell it internationally for up to \$120 per ton. This is just one of the reasons why, in 2015, WORC once again made **reforming the federal coal leasing program** one of our top priorities, because we believe that the government should look out for us, rather than giving giant coal companies big breaks. And our work paid off. Early in the year, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell acknowledged that this program has major issues, and we pushed her to consider the perspectives of the farmers, ranchers, landowners, and other Westerners who live in coalfield communities. By January 2016, after hearing from us at a series of “listening sessions” all across the West, Jewell and her agency launched a complete review of the way that the federal coal program works, and **put a pause on new coal leases** until they've finished their review. Way to go, team!



But wait: we've got more. In 2012, we uncovered a loophole in federal coal rules that allows coal companies to sell coal to themselves at a fraction of what it's worth, before reselling that coal abroad, to a real buyer, at a far higher price. Why does that matter? Because coal companies pay **royalties** on the value of any federal coal that they sell. Selling it first for a much lower amount means that they're setting a false, way undervalued first “price,” and **shortchanging American**

taxpayers. In 2015, the DOI issued a draft rule that would close this loophole. Along with our member groups, WORC submitted substantive technical comments on the loophole, and contributed 1,282 grassroots comments to the total 210,000 comments filed by allied organizations across the country. The final rule is still in the works, and will likely be released in 2016.



Tired of coal yet? The list of issues is long—trust us, we know. But here's another important piece. Some states have allowed coal companies to **self-bond** for years, meaning they have promised to clean up their mines without putting up any cash or collateral as

a guarantee, based solely on the apparent strength of their balance sheets. Typically, you'd ask for something much more secure in this situation, like surety bonds—because in bankruptcy, all bets are off whether the remaining reclamation of mined lands ever gets done. In June of 2015, WORC released *Undermined Promise II*, which dug into the nitty-gritty of this practice; in combination with other efforts by WORC members and staff, especially at the Powder River Basin Resource Council in Wyoming, to repeatedly highlight this problem, the report's release forced regulators to take a hard look at this practice, and generated a spate of media coverage from the likes of *Reuters*, the *Casper Star-Tribune*, *Energy & Environment Daily*, and *The Washington Post*.



OCTOBER 2015

Members of Northern Plains and Powder River Basin Resource Council flew to Washington, DC, to discuss federal coal policy with representatives and senators.

"PUBLIC LANDS AND PUBLIC RESOURCES SHOULD BE MANAGED FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD--NOT FOR THE BOTTOM LINES OF PRIVATE CORPORATIONS."

STEVE CHARTER

Northern Plains member who lives and ranches on land above an underground coal mine containing federally-owned coal near Roundup, Montana.



When the federal government approves a permit to mine taxpayer-owned coal, it's supposed to create some opportunity for **public involvement**—in other words, for members of the public to offer input. It's a really important way for folks who live on or near land threatened by mining to have a voice in the process, and make sure the government hears their side of the story. As it turns out, the federal agency in charge of approving federal coal mining—the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement—wasn't doing such a good job of making sure the public was included in the mine permitting process. Along with our Montana member group, Northern Plains, WORC challenged the OSMRE in court over these failures—and **won**. OSMRE is now obligated to take a "hard look" at companies' mining plans before approving them.



Okay, last one. The national environmental standards for coal mines—and the water bodies around them—are lacking in important ways. And we're not alone in that opinion. In 2015, the federal government itself noted that coal mining has caused extensive damage to streams and other waterbodies. So when the federal Office of Surface Mining and Reclamation Enforcement proposed a new set of rules that would **tighten those standards**, and **better protect streams and other water bodies** from the detrimental effects of coal mining, we heartily supported them, and submitted substantive comments on the proposed rules, along with our member groups Powder River Basin Resource Council, Dakota Resource Council, and Northern Plains Resource Council. Until the final rules are released—and until we think they're as strong as they can be—we'll continue to press OSMRE on it.

WORC'S 2015 AGRICULTURE & FOOD CAMPAIGN: A FULL PLATE.



It's been an exciting decade in the world of local food. Farmers' markets have been consistently on the rise, increasing by **76 percent** from 2008 to 2014 alone, and demand for local food has gone through the roof. It's not surprising, then, that the number of people interested in producing and selling food from their home kitchens has been on the rise, as well—and that consumers are jumping at the chance to buy from them. In the world of food policy, this is called the **cottage food industry**: the network of at-home producers who are making products like jams, jellies, baked goods, or other foods that don't have the potential to be hazardous—

plus the consumers who buy from them. Many of the food safety laws in the United States were designed to be one-size-fits-all, meaning that someone making and selling bread out of their home kitchen is expected to have the same equipment and safety measures as a big, industrial food processing company. Doesn't make much sense, right? That's what we thought. Here at WORC, we've been working hard to support burgeoning cottage food industries in each of our states. In 2015, three WORC member groups won laws and policies promoting cottage foods in their states, through campaigns informed by the past work



JULY 2015

Members and staff at the Idaho Organization of Resource Councils gather at Peaceful Belly Farm, for a summer Farm to Fork dinner showcasing the best of Idaho's local food scene.

MARCH 2015

Western Colorado Congress led a People's Lobby trip to Denver, and won an expansion of Colorado's existing cottage food laws.

of other member groups, energized by each other's ongoing efforts, and supported by WORC. Montana and Colorado both gained Cottage Foods laws in 2015, thanks in large part to the organizing work of Northern Plains and Western Colorado Congress, while Idaho finalized statewide rules for cottage food producers in 2015, thanks to the serious organizing, input, and political legwork of Idaho Organization of Resource Councils.



Ever heard of a **CAFO**, or a **Concentrated Animal Feeding Operation**? A CAFO is a fancy term for a farm or feedlot where animals are kept at high density for a significant portion of the year. CAFOs have all kinds of negative environmental implications; for starters, they produce enormous amounts

of animal manure, which contains lots of toxins and contaminants. Figuring out how to dispose of that manure safely and efficiently has been a serious challenge for farms and regulators alike; most often, the manure gets applied to the soil in far greater quantities than it should, meaning that when it rains, some of the contaminants it contains run off into nearby streams and rivers or seep into groundwater aquifers. Meanwhile, emissions from the degrading manure and from livestock digestive processes produce air pollution, which can have serious implications for air quality in communities surrounding CAFOs. And these issues are just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to CAFOs. In 2015, two WORC member groups organized to limit the environmental, social, and health impacts CAFOs have in their rural communities. Below are some of the highlights of their work.

In South Dakota, WORC member group **Dakota Rural Action** worked hard to bring community members' concerns about CAFOs into the spotlight, and provided valuable visions of what different agricultural models could look like. DRA members helped kill two of three pro-CAFO bills in the legislature, co-hosted an event highlighting CAFO development in the state, and forced both state and federal agencies to begin reviewing the process by which CAFOs are approved.

In North Dakota, WORC member group **Dakota Resource Council** drew upon the state's progressive populist agrarian heritage to stop a rollback of the state's long held ban on corporate farming. DRC members collected over 21,000 signatures in partnership with the North Dakota Farmers Union to put a measure on the June 2016 ballot to protect the state's law. The future of corporate farming in North Dakota will now be decided by North Dakotans—a major victory for the family farm movement, and for DRC.



Did you know that **84% of beef** in the United States comes from **four giant companies**? When the market is that concentrated, prices paid to producers (the farmers and ranchers raising beef cattle) plummet. As a result, the small- and medium-sized family farms and ranches that make up most of the American West struggle to earn a decent living. WORC members have been fighting the unfair, anticompetitive practices of the powerful meatpacking lobby for decades. In 2015, we built on that organizing history by hosting a **Good Meat Summit** at our home office in Billings. Member group leaders, staff, and expert guests spent two days digging into this issue, and came out of the meeting with new ideas, renewed energy, and concrete plans for action, in both their states and across the region. Among those plans? WORC member groups across the network plan to launch local food procurement campaigns all over the region. Meanwhile, WORC will be ramping up efforts to reform the federal government's oversight of small and medium-sized meat processors. Keep your eye on us; we plan on pushing this work forward in 2016!



Hang in there! We're almost finished. Too bad our list of successes isn't shorter, right? In May of 2015, WORC partnered with Montana member group Northern Plains Resource Council to host a **field seminar on soil carbon capture**. Turns out that healthy soil microbes and fungi have the potential to capture and pull carbon out of the atmosphere, and retain water and other nutrients that make grass and soil more fertile (and more profitable!). We learned all of this from New Zealand agro-ecologist Nicole Masters, who taught the seminar to 77 eager attendees at the Charter Ranch in Shepherd, Montana. We plan to continue building our collective knowledge around healthy soil, and seizing all the opportunities we can to learn creative solutions to our region's—and our world's— biggest problems.

PHOTO

WORC and Northern Plains co-hosted a field seminar on soil carbon capture in Shepherd, Montana.



OUR OIL & GAS CAMPAIGN IS HEATING UP.

HERE ARE THE STRIDES WE MADE IN 2015.

One of the most contentious issues in oil & gas land in recent years has been the rise of **fracking**, or hydraulic fracturing. Fracking is an oil and gas extraction technique in which companies, quite literally, smash their way through layers of rock to access oil and gas that was once inaccessible. The practice has facilitated a massive expansion in oil and gas drilling. Unfortunately, as development has spread, a laundry list of associated impacts has spread along with it. WORC members and others across the West have seen their groundwater contaminated, their water wells dry up, their respiratory health damaged, and their quality of life changed entirely— to name just a few impacts. In 2015, WORC's oil and gas campaign focused in large part on finding ways to **better protect people from these impacts**, and **amplify the voices of those already bearing them**. Here are a few of our biggest accomplishments on that front.



WORC played a major role in securing the **first-ever set of federal rules regulating fracking** on federal land. Called the “fracking rules” for short, these regulations provided a series of important new protections for Westerners, such as requiring companies to disclose which chemicals they use, and instituting a better system for containing waste fluid. WORC pushed for many of these provisions, and put pressure on regulators and decisionmakers by turning out members and leaders to speak at hearings, submitting substantive comments on the proposed rules, generating comments from grassroots supporters, and directly engaging decisionmakers at the Bureau of Land Management. Though we supported the rules overall, we also felt that they were missing several key provisions – like the requirement that companies test landowners’ water before they start drilling, so there’s a baseline against which later data can be compared. Late in 2015, the rules hit a snag in Wyoming’s federal district court, where a judge placed them on hold. In the coming year, WORC intends to keep pushing for the rules to be implemented, and for stronger standards to protect water from fracking.





Oil and gas extraction doesn't just have implications for land and water. It also comes with substantial **air emissions**. Companies across the West flare (burn off) or vent (release into the air) natural gas that isn't profitable for them to capture and market. In 2015, WORC's oil and gas campaign team made the **flaring, venting, and leaking of natural gas** a priority issue; our members were tired of seeing their communities suffer the health impacts of breathing in these emissions, and frustrated by the unnecessary waste of an important natural resource. In coalition with groups around the nation, WORC and its member

groups pushed both the Environmental Protection Agency and the Bureau of Land Management to take on this issue; both agencies have since launched rulemakings around oil and gas air emissions. Over the course of 2015, WORC worked hard to ensure the success of each rulemaking, by turning out members to share their stories at public hearings, flying members to Washington, DC, to meet with decision-makers, writing substantive comments on the rules themselves, and generating public comments from supporters all around the country. We'll continue to keep the pressure on, until we achieve a strong set of methane rules for our members.



NOVEMBER 2015

WORC members from North Dakota, Wyoming, and Colorado traveled to Washington, DC to meet with federal regulators, share their stories, and garner support for new national methane standards.



2015 was also a big year in the world of oil and gas **transport**; most notably, it was the year **President Obama rejected Keystone XL**, a proposed 1,789 mile-long pipeline that would have run from the Canadian oil sands to the Gulf of Mexico. Along the way, Keystone XL would have crossed the farms, ranches, and backyards of hundreds of rural Westerners, through areas that TransCanada, the company proposing the pipeline, and federal regulators deemed to be “low consequence.” WORC’s member

groups Dakota Rural Action and Northern Plains Resource Council organized folks living in those “low consequence” areas to stand up to TransCanada, and rally for their property rights. Meanwhile, at the federal level, WORC urged federal decision-makers to take into account all the rural landowners who would be losing productive agricultural land, facing decreased property values, and weathering the certain threat of oil spills. The president’s decision was a **major victory for rural communities across the West**, and a major accomplishment for WORC!

JULY 2015

Dakota Rural Action members, in coalition with other grassroots groups across South Dakota, organized a Resistance Ride and March in opposition to the proposed Keystone XL pipeline.



Pipelines make up only one part of the vast web of oil transport infrastructure. Oil gets moved around the country in all kinds of ways: through pipelines, in trucks, and by **rail**. Crude oil is highly explosive, though, particularly when it comes from the Bakken formation in North Dakota and Montana. A series of derailments and explosions in U.S. and Canadian cities over the past decade, including a July 2013 derailment in Quebec that killed 47 people, is worrying news for Westerners who live along rail lines. WORC and our member groups have long been working to achieve **better safety standards**.

In 2015, that work came to partial fruition when we helped secure a new set of rules from the Department of Transportation that govern oil by rail transport. The DOT rules implement a number of important measures, like phasing out dangerous DOT-111 tanker cars, but they fell short of our expectations in big ways, too. We plan on continuing our work around this issue in 2016 and beyond--and working towards protections for rail-line communities that don't go only halfway.

“GRASSROOTS GROUPS HAVE BEEN THE BOOTS AND MOCCASINS ON THE GROUND IN THIS FIGHT. NEVER AGAIN WILL A COMPANY SUCH AS TRANSCANADA SO SERIOUSLY UNDERESTIMATE THE POWER OF GRASSROOTS OPPOSITION.”

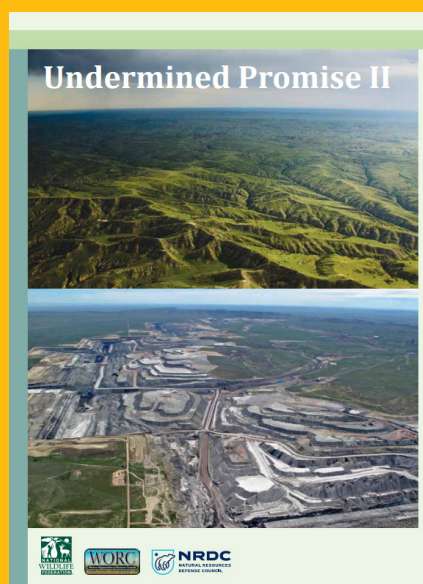
PAUL SEAMANS

Dakota Rural Action member, and a landowner crossed by the former proposed Keystone XL route.

REPORTS & PUBLICATIONS

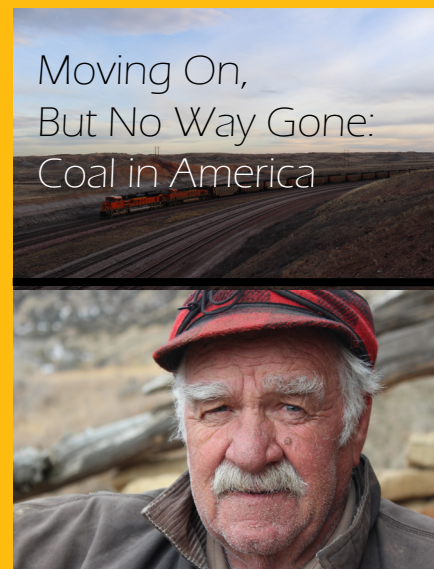
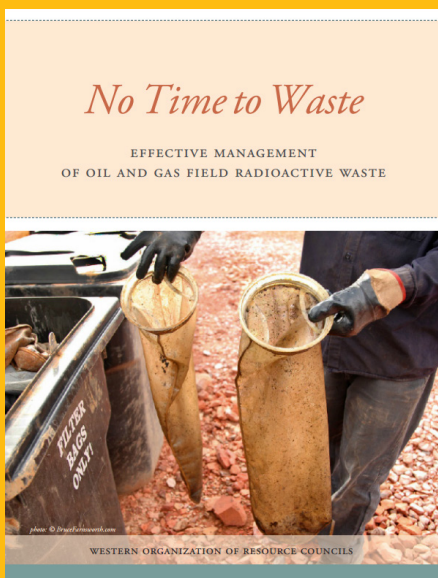
WE DON'T JUST ORGANIZE ON OUR ISSUES.

WE RESEARCH THEM, TOO.



When coal companies are granted permits to strip-mine coal, they make a promise to the government and to taxpayers that they'll reclaim all the land that they disturb— or, in other words, clean up after themselves. **Undermined Promise II**, a report released jointly by WORC, the Natural Resources Defense Council, and the National Wildlife Federation, highlights the alarming amount of acreage that remains unreclaimed across the West, and the degree to which coal companies have dodged their legal obligation to clean that acreage up. This is big and concerning news for the American West, because if the coal companies don't do the work, the roughly \$2 billion in cleanup costs will be passed on to taxpayers. WORC's coal campaign is fighting hard to make sure that doesn't happen.

Some of the waste produced during oil and gas extraction is radioactive– and state and local governments are struggling to figure out how to regulate it. [**No Time to Waste**](#) examines the laws (or lack thereof) around radioactive oilfield waste in six WORC states: Colorado, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming; and provides a series of recommendations for managing and regulating this unique waste stream.



[**Moving On, But No Way Gone: Coal in America**](#) is a sound-rich, half-hour special from High Plains News, a project of WORC. In this special–produced in association with Mountain West Voices, West Virginia Public Radio, and Allegheny Front–we look at the present and future of coal in America, moving from Central Appalachia to eastern Kentucky to the Powder River Basin of Montana and Wyoming. Powder River Basin Resource Council member and Wyoming rancher LJ Turner is featured in the special, sharing how his lands, water, and health have been imperiled by coal mining activity.

AROUND THE NETWORK

HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR MEMBER GROUPS

OREGON

For the second year running, **Oregon Rural Action** hosted SolWest, a three-day renewable energy and sustainable living fair in LaGrande, Oregon; over the past two years, the fair has attracted a whopping 2,000 attendees. This year, SolWest featured almost 30 one-hour workshops on topics ranging from how to install a low-cost, do-it-yourself solar array, to preserving food, to raising small livestock.

IDAHO

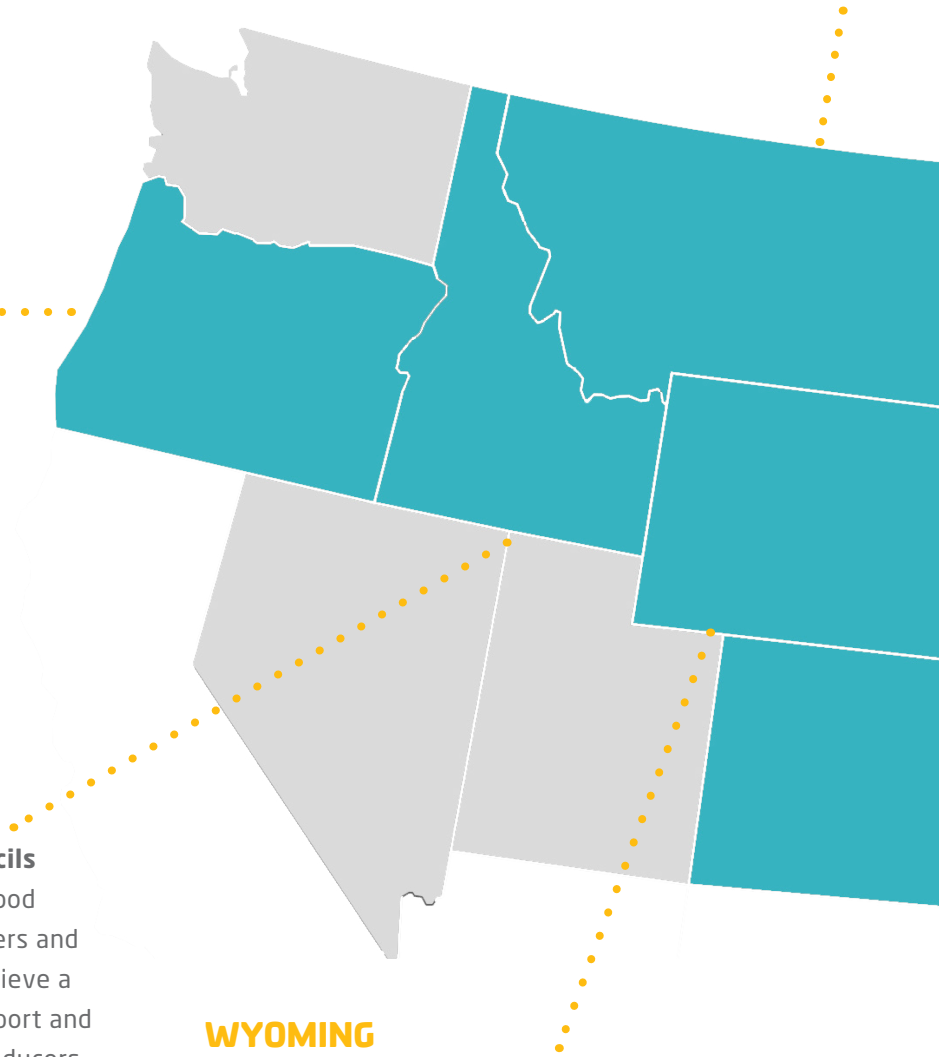
The **Idaho Organization of Resource Councils** has been working hard to build Idaho's just food movement and grow the power of both farmers and consumers. One way they did this was to achieve a set of statewide cottage food rules that support and make sense for homegrown, independent producers. IORC played a crucial role in making this happen; they pressured the Department of Health and Welfare, provided testimony at three hearings, and gathered more than 800 petition signatures and 300 written comments in support of the rule. Look out, Idaho—here comes homemade, artisan, small-batch bread!

MONTANA

For more than 30 years, **Northern Plains Resource Council** has fought the Tongue River Railroad— a railroad that would have carried coal from the Tongue River valley to an export terminal that doesn't exist in order to exist. In order to build the railroad, the Tongue River Railroad would have used the power of federal eminent domain to condemn family land. The railroad would have existed all for the sake of shipping Montana coal to Asia. In 2011, the Tongue River Railroad put its project on hold, after 39 years of hearing from ranchers in the Tongue River valley. (Here's a sneak preview of our 2015 report on the Tongue River Surface Transportation Board rejected the permit.) Cong

WYOMING

Powder River Basin Resource Council's oil and gas campaign had all sorts of accomplishments in 2015. First, in April, they pushed the Wyoming Oil and Gas Conservation Commission to increase setbacks—or, the mandatory buffer between homes and drilling operations—from 350 to 500 feet. Later in the year, they worked hard to garner flaring rules for the state. In February of 2016, Wyoming regulators finally approved new rules aimed at curbing methane emissions from oil and gas wells, beating the national rulemaking to the punch. Way to go, Powder River!



uncil has been fighting the proposed
d coal from a coal mine that doesn't
sell coal to an Asian market that doesn't
ilroad Company would have been granted
ranchland in southeastern Montana--
5, the company finally, formally placed
ers and Northern Plains members in the
6 annual report: In 2016, the federal
rats, Northern Plains!

WESTERN NATIVE VOICE

Western Native Voice made Medicaid expansion a priority in 2015, campaigning hard to achieve health care coverage for the 70,000 low-income Montanans--20,000 of whom were Native American-- who were ineligible for Medicaid, but also didn't qualify for subsidies for private health care insurance. In November, their efforts paid off-- federal health officials approved Montana's program, and made Montana the 30th state to achieve Medicaid expansion. Coverage for the 70,000 people now eligible for Medicaid started in January 1 of this year.

NORTH DAKOTA

In 2015, North Dakota's Corporate Ag lobby tried to weaken the state's crucial family farming law, with a proposed bill that would allow nonfamily corporations to own and operate dairy and swine farms on up to 640 acres of land. Members of **Dakota Resource Council** fought hard to block this bill by collecting more than 21,000 signatures, and successfully sending the bill to referendum. Voters will get to weigh in on the bill on the primary ballot in June 2016.

COLORADO

Western Colorado Congress has been working on oil and gas issues for decades. In 2015, they built on that history with a robust oil and gas campaign that achieved precedent-setting conditions of approval for permits to drill within Battlement Mesa, prevented the drilling of 108 wells in Grand Junction's watershed for one more year, built strong community resistance to wastewater disposal in the Whitewater area, and co-founded a statewide coalition of groups working to protect communities from residential drilling.

SOUTH DAKOTA

2015 marked the seventh year that **Dakota Rural Action** held its annual Farm Beginnings program, a farmer- and rancher-led training and support program that provides participants with an opportunity to learn first-hand about low-cost, sustainable methods of farming. This year's program graduated 20 individuals, from 13 family farm units. We can't wait to see what these new farmers do!

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