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Montana and Wyoming Defend Net Metering Laws

Our region recently achieved two major clean-energy wins by defending critical net metering laws in Montana and Wyoming. When these challenges to existing net metering laws were first introduced, the chances of defending the laws looked bleak. But, thanks to massive, sustained grassroots pressure, the tables turned and clean energy prevailed in these deeply red, coal states. Our recent net metering defense successes in Wyoming and Montana have demonstrated that our network can mobilize mass public engagement on even the most technical of regulatory proposals and fight for clean energy.

The Wins

Wyoming: On November 19th, Powder River Basin Resource Council (PRBRC) achieved a hard-won, narrow victory to defend a critical net metering law in Wyoming. After the 2019 winter/spring legislative session, an interim committee was tasked with studying Wyoming's net metering law, and to consider whether to introduce legislation in the next session to eliminate net metering or significantly restrict net metering for household or business solar systems. Seeing the disastrous ideas being proposed in the committee hearings, PRBRC recognized

the threat to rooftop solar users and the fledgling solar industry in the state. They launched a campaign to activate the public, solar users, and the newly formed Wyoming Solar Energy Association to speak out against these bills. PRBRC's coalition spent countless hours writing letters

to legislators, submitting numerous letters to the editor, and packing the final hearing room delivering scores of testimony against these bad bills. Not one person spoke in favor of the bills. PRBRC's diverse organizing efforts over the last year paid dividends when youth activists from Laramie, several members of the newly formed Wyoming Solar Energy Association (organized originally by PRBRC), and members of the public traveled from across the state to testify against the bills. It was a close vote, but PRBRC won and net metering was saved for Wyoming. In fact, members of the PSC eventually signaled that the net metering cap may be upped in the future, allowing mid-scale installations larger than 25kw to receive the benefits of net metering.

Montana: On November 25th, the Montana Public Service Commission voted 5-to-0 against a NorthWestern Energy proposal to add a demand charge onto new rooftop solar. Investor-owned NorthWestern Energy



Northern Plains members celebrate a big victory for solar energy outside the PSC.

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The View from WORC

By Linda Weiss, WORC Chair

As the holiday season approaches and the year comes to a close, it's a good time to reflect on the actions that our members have taken to ensure their voices are heard by decision-makers. Between submitting comments on various rule-makings, traveling long distances to testify directly at hearings, and protesting against bad policies, our members have come out in droves to speak out.



One of the biggest efforts this year was confronting the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) about its roll-back of 2016 Flaring and Venting Rules. The proposed rollbacks of these safeguards from methane and other harmful volatile organic compounds (VOC) endanger children, in particular, as well as waste a valuable resource that could fund state budget shortfalls. Along with submitting hundreds of comments to the EPA, members from Montana and North Dakota traveled to Dallas, TX, to testify at the only public hearing in this process. (Read more about the EPA methane hearing on pg.3) While our members have spoken out at hearings on methane pollution in years past, the Dallas hearing had a bigger turnout of people who were more engaged. They were more determined. And more media showed.

Some of our members have testified at almost all the hearings since the 2016 methane rule was established. They are at the forefront of the "enough is enough" camp. Recently, we've had members testify in Washington, D.C., on topics from hard rock mining to coal to agriculture. When industry profits are valued more than workers and communities health, our members step up and take action.

We have also taken direct actions through public protests around our region. Western Native Voice's members stood together with people affected by the proposed border wall in McAllen, TX. Northern Plains' members protested the Keystone XL pipeline hearing in Billings, MT. Dakota Rural Action members held a rally in Rapid City, SD, against permitting a uranium mine in the Black Hills, and Western Colorado Alliance's Youth Voter Initiative students turned out dozens of young people in Grand Junction, CO, for the youth climate march.

These actions elevate the narrative that Western people won't stand for bad policies. We are watching, and it's time for us to be heard.

So maybe instead of resolutions for the coming year, we should consider intentions—to answer those comment periods, to attend hearings, to give testimony. Clean air, clean water, and a place that's safe for us and the generations yet to come is worth it.

Linda K. Weiss

WESTERN ORGANIZING REVIEW

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WORC is a regional network of grassroots community organizations, which includes 15,190 members and 38 local chapters. WORC helps its member groups succeed by providing trainings and coordinating regional issue campaigns.

WORC'S NETWORK

*Dakota Resource Council
Dakota Rural Action
Idaho Organization of Resource Councils
Northern Plains Resource Council
Oregon Rural Action
Powder River Basin Resource Council
Western Colorado Alliance
Western Native Voice*

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CONTACT WORC

*220 South 27th Street, Suite B
Billings, Montana 59101
406-252-9672
billings@worc.org
www.worc.org*

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Your support enables us to work on
tough challenges facing our region*

(NWE) - the state's largest utility with approximately 370,000 customers - had proposed a new "demand charge" for future net-metered rooftop solar systems. First introduced in 2018, the charge would have cost the average homeowner with solar anywhere from \$50 to \$75 a month, instead of helping solar owners save money on electricity. Installers, solar users, and advocates all saw that this change would crush the burgeoning solar industry in Montana. Northern Plains Resource Council initiated a multi-pronged campaign to fight this deleterious proposal. Over the last year-plus, Northern Plains held numerous public education events, rallies, and phone banking events, eventually flooding the PSC with hundreds of public comments opposing the proposal. Almost 70 Montanans testified before the PSC in person and over 100 people submitted comments to the Commission via Northern Plains (we are looking into the total number of comments submitted to the PSC opposing the bill). In the end, the PSC could not argue with the flood of public outrage and the convincing arguments brought by the public that NWE could not defend. During the hearing, a Republican Commissioner even commented that, "I can't honestly see anything in the record that NorthWestern has provided that can reliably support us voting for any of their proposal here."

Fight Continues for Strong Methane Rules

For nearly two decades, WORC and our member groups have been fighting the waste of resources and hazardous air pollution present in oil and gas production. Today, unnecessary venting, flaring, and leaks from wells and their associated infrastructure can largely be prevented by common sense and cost-efficient controls. Without these controls, we have seen negative impacts to those living near production to their health, quality of life, property values, and more. Thanks to pressure from our groups, we have won important waste-prevention and air pollution standards across our region and at the federal level, but today these protections are under attack.

With a change in administrations, many of these landmark protections for our members and neighbors have been rolled back or gutted in the pursuit of profits. The future of the BLM's Waste Prevention Rule hinges on an upcoming court decision, while proposed rollbacks to the EPA's air pollution standards for methane and volatile organic compounds (VOC) could be finalized any day now. Despite these setbacks, our member groups and allies are continuing to win the war for strong oil and gas pollution standards.

Our case against the BLM's flawed rollback of the Waste Prevention Rule is looking strong -- we have won on multiple motions across several courts in the US. In early 2020, we expect the rule to go back into effect, with the potential to significantly reduce flaring on federally managed minerals across the West. In October, leaders from Northern Plains Resource Council and Dakota Resource Council travelled to the EPA hearing on the proposed methane pollution rule rollback, adding their voices to hundreds of thousands of comments our coalition will be submitting in opposition to the proposal.



Sue Beug speaks at Dallas press conference outside EPA methane hearing. Photo credit: Jay Brousseau

As the current impacts of climate change become more apparent across the West, the urgency to prevent methane from escaping oil and gas operations grows. While EPA estimates are lower, Clean Air Task Force estimates that by 2025 the impacts from two recent proposals will increase methane emissions by 4.3 million metric tons, VOC emissions by 1 million metric tons and hazardous air pollutant emissions by 38,000 metric tons. The additional oil and gas methane pollution emitted because of these rollbacks would, over the near-term, warm the climate as much as the carbon dioxide emissions of nearly 100 coal-fired power plants.

This administration's proposed roll backs of flaring, venting, and leak detection standards will compromise the quality of the air we breathe, and put the health of communities across the country, especially those near oil and gas operations, at risk. WORC and our member groups will continue to challenge these proposals at every opportunity, while illuminating a path forward with common-sense solutions in our states and in Washington, DC.

Around the Region

A look around WORC's network

Dakota Resource Council

In early November, Dakota Resource Council (DRC) members attended a North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality (NDDEQ) hearing to urge the regulators to reject a petition from Continental Resources, which sought to invalidate North Dakota's prohibition on VOC venting/leaks. Continental wanted the rule to be replaced with the EPA Methane Rule. DRC members and staff opposed this petition because it would make it so any wells drilled prior to the effective date of the EPA methane rule would be unregulated with regard to VOCs. As a result, DRC members and staff urged the NDDEQ to keep the prohibition on venting/leaks intact (ensuring all wells are covered by some regulation) and to separately adopt the EPA methane rule to cover new oil wells.



Dakota Rural Action

In late October, Plaintiffs and the State of South Dakota agreed to settle the "Riot Booster" case, filed last spring by the ACLU on behalf of Dakota Rural Action, NDN Collective, Indigenous Environmental Network, Sierra Club, and two individuals after Governor Kristi Noem signed into law an act to criminalize free speech in South Dakota.

Used to target people and organizations who protest or speak out through words, peaceful actions, or financial means, the specific goal of this legislation was to criminalize opposition—specifically against the Keystone XL pipeline. However the bill's language was so broad as to target anyone who spoke out against a project or policy, or urged others to do so.



DRA Board Chair and Winner-area rancher John Harter said about the decisive victory: "...the whole process of pushing pipelines through this state – from the use of eminent domain to benefit a foreign corporation, to cracking down on citizens protecting the land and water – violates our constitution and leaves taxpayers, once again, to foot the bill.

We are proud to have stood alongside our Native allies to fight for the rights of all South Dakotans, and we thank the ACLU for their work on this crucial case."

Idaho Organization of Resource Councils

Idaho Organization of Resource Councils (IORC) has much to celebrate this December. Their existing chapters have seen a tremendous interest in solar energy. Their brand new chapter, Vision 2C, is preparing to launch at the beginning of 2020. They held a successful membership drive in September and October. Most recently, they are thrilled to welcome Samantha Guerrero as IORC's Bilingual Agriculture and Food Community Organizer. The IORC team is looking forward to a strong and inspiring 2020!



Northern Plains Resource Council

In conjunction with WORC, the Northern Plains Resource Council (NPRC) organized a rally in Billings to give speakers from across the West an opportunity to speak out against the Keystone XL (KXL) pipeline. The rally was held just before the nation's only "public meeting" organized by the State Department to coincide with a comment period for a draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) for the pipeline. The Draft SEIS is crucial to the future of KXL, and will be relied upon to determine the issuance of the final federal permits needed for the dangerous tar sands pipeline.

Despite frigid temperatures, speakers came from the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana, the Fort Berthold



Bill Whitehead, Northern Plains member and Chairman of the Assiniboine and Sioux Rural Water Supply Commission on the Fort Peck Reservation

Reservation in North Dakota, the Nebraska plains, and other locales. The State Department meeting was designed



to limit the public's voice (the event did not include a hearing), but speakers and rally-goers spoke to the press about the threat KXL poses to clean water, a healthy climate, landowner rights, and tribal sovereignty.

State, local, and national news outlets covered the rally allowing speakers to carry their message to audiences ranging from local television to nationwide distribution on National Public Radio.

Oregon Rural Action

Oregon Rural Action (ORA) is in the beginning steps of creating a rural narrative initiative project in Eastern Oregon. With the help of Eastern Oregon University (Oregon's designated rural university), ORA will capture voices from around Eastern Oregon to show the diversity, importance, and agency of rural community members. The project aims to build name recognition for ORA and is a tool for ORA to establish contacts in various communities. Students will begin by collecting interviews with friends and family that will eventually be hosted on ORA's website.



Powder River Basin Resource Council

Approximately 150 people attended Powder River Basin Resource Council's 47th Annual Meeting to listen to the panel discussion "When Coal is No Longer King: A Conversation on Wyoming's Future." The discussion focused on what Wyoming must do now to stave off a looming economic crisis precipitated by the declining coal industry and Wyoming's lopsided tax structure.

Topics ranged from the market forces prompting coal's decline to addressing the needs of the coal mine workers who were displaced by the Blackjewel bankruptcy, the need for retraining mine and power plant employees, and solving Wyoming's tax dilemma, which relies heavily on fossil fuel extraction. While the topic is sobering, the panelists were optimistic that these challenges can be overcome, but the state must face reality and begin work immediately.



Western Colorado Alliance

Western Colorado Alliance (WCA), had a very successful fundraiser with their annual *Mountainfilm On Tour* presentation on November 16, which filled the 1000+-seat Avalon Theatre in Grand Junction to near capacity. WCA has also been very active in the series of rulemaking meetings which have been occurring in Colorado in the wake of SB-181, the historic oil and gas regulation legislation that passed earlier this year. The West Slope Youth Vote initiative has been continuing to rack up landmark successes, including registering over 90% of the Ouray High School senior student body. In the wake of the Delta-Montrose Electric Association's successful effort to leave Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association as an energy provider, they are seeing real movement in the area of renewables and clean energy and will be engaging in talks with Mesa County commissioners to build support for C-PACE.



Avalon Theatre in Grand Junction was near capacity for WCA's Annual Mountainfilm on Tour fundraiser

Western Native Voice

Western Native Voice (WNV) is continuing to grow its state, regional, and national media presence. Messaging around campaigns like Savanna's Act, as well as highlighting community members in their Community Spotlight series, has stretched their capacity. In 2020, WNV plans to hire a Communications Director to keep up with the increasing volume of work. They are hoping to have this position filled quickly, and be ready as their 2020 Census work takes off.



Inspiration and Great Music at the 34th Annual Farm Aid

Over 37,000 family farm advocates and music lovers gathered on September 21st for Farm Aid 2019. The show was streamed live online from Alpine Valley Music Theater in East Troy, WI, and reached people in 137 countries. Members and staff from Dakota Rural Action, Idaho Organization of Resource Councils, and WORC joined allies and longtime friends to build relationships, learn, and strategize for building an agriculture and food system that works for families, workers, communities, and the environment—not just corporations.

“To work all year long with producers and family farm advocates across South Dakota is such an honor. However, it often feels isolating,” said Stephanie Peterson, family farmer and DRA member. “Attending Farm Aid each fall and seeing all the amazing people from all over the country dedicating themselves to this work is overwhelming and makes me realize that we are not in this alone.”



Leaders and staff from IORC, DRA and WORC networking and finding inspiration at Farm Aid

This concert was rainy and wet but the show went on without a hitch. Willie Nelson, Neil Young, John Mellancamp, Dave Matthews/Tim Reynolds, Bonnie Raitt, Tanya Tucker, Margo Price, and Nathaniel Rateliff and the Nightsweats were just some of the 17 musical performances. The concert was wonderful but one of the most meaningful parts was the Roots of Wisconsin farm tours. The tours showcased what is possible when it comes to transforming our food system in a way that puts people and communities before corporate profits.

The “Good Land” Milwaukee Farm Systems tour was one option that dozens of people went on. Milwaukee means “good land” and is translated from traditional Ojibwe, Menominee and Potawatomi languages. Highlights on this tour included:

- **Hunger Task Force.** The Hunger Task Force addresses hunger by providing healthy food, free of charge, to 50,000 people each month through local pantries, meal programs, and senior centers. Their farm is 208 acres and produces 26 types of fruits and vegetables. Festival goers donated about 4,500 pounds of food that went to the Hunger Task Force.
- **Mequon Nature Preserve.** This 444 acre preserve includes the FONDYfood Center’s 40 acre farm project which provides 26 predominantly immigrant Hmong farm families the opportunity to grow food. One of the more interesting crops they are testing is rice. Wisconsin is becoming wetter from climate change and rice could be a crop that is well suited for the upper Midwest.
- **Alice’s Garden.** Located in urban Milwaukee, Alice’s Garden is inspiring because it provides young people from the city the opportunity to garden and learn about agriculture. The garden is a green space that is a refuge from the city. At this stop, another highlight was the Rural/Urban Flow, which is a movement to build relationships and cross-cultural understanding between rural and urban folks.

Since its inception in 1985, Farm Aid has raised \$57 million to support family farms. WORC and its member groups are grateful to be part of the Farm Aid community and we are excited and more determined than ever to continue the fight for family farms and ranches.

Willie Nelson, founding member of Farm Aid, summarized the challenges and opportunities best, “With devastating weather, low prices and harmful farm and trade policies, America’s family farmers are facing immense challenges to hold onto their farms. It’s not right... family farmers are essential for all of us. At Farm Aid 2019, we’ll highlight solutions and show our support for family farmers’ contributions to our health, economy and environment.”

Who Will Pay to Clean Up Coal Strip Mines?

The past year saw the bankruptcies of Cloud Peak Energy and Blackjewel LLC, whose mines are now controlled by unknown newcomers to the basin. Nearly every major coal mine in Montana and Wyoming has had an ownership change in the last five years, as have many others in Utah and Colorado.

Most newcomers have paid a pittance to take control of large but economically marginal coal strip mines. In some cases, mine owners have even paid new companies millions of dollars to take over mines. Why? Every strip mine in the country is facing extensive mine cleanup that must be completed after mine closure, and very few are bringing in significant income.

WORC set out to investigate what the western coal industry's continued decline means for cleanup of the hundreds of square miles of coal mines that stretch from North Dakota to Navajo Nation. As long-time coal companies are replaced by unknown firms without track records in the region, what has happened to the companies guaranteeing mine cleanup?

Mine Cleanup Funds are Guaranteed, Usually

Coal companies are required by law to post reclamation bonds with regulators as collateral for full mine cleanup. The bonds provide emergency funds to finish reclamation, or mine cleanup, if coal companies go broke and abandon their mines. Reclamation bonds must be maintained throughout the life of a coal mine, and are released back to the mine operator as regulators verify successful reclamation. This is done to incentivize coal companies to perform reclamation as they mine.

Reclamation bonds must be secure, liquid, and reliable because there are more than 200 square miles of unreclaimed coal mines across the West. Many coal-producing states' budgets are already under stress as coal revenue declines. The distress would only be compounded by having to pay to clean up massive strip mines: the total dollar amount for all reclamation bonds for coal mines in these states is just over \$3.9 billion. The largest mines carry bonds in excess of \$400 million.

The vast majority (82%) of bonds are in the form of surety bonds, contractual promises issued by a third-party surety company. If the mine operator fails to complete reclamation, the state agency will demand prompt payment of the full bond amount from the surety company. Given the substantial amount of reclamation that remains to be completed (\$3.2 billion), the total value of some surety companies' underwritten bonds is hundreds of millions of dollars.

Risk Grows as the Face of the Coal Industry Changes

In recent years, major coal companies have filed bankruptcy and dumped many of their least profitable mines to financially weaker companies. The risk that these weaker companies will fail increases as demand for coal continues to decline each year.

In light of the increasing risk that state regulators will manage the cleanup of massive western strip mines, it is encouraging that the majority of reclamation bonds are today backed by highly-rated global insurance firms. But as coal mines change hands, new owners may choose, or be forced due to the financial risk they pose, to obtain surety bonds from more poorly capitalized companies instead of continuing coverage with highly-rated sureties. The importance of secure, liquid, reliable reclamation bonding has never been higher.

Although surety bonds are more protective than other forms of reclamation bonding, regulators must be vigilant to only accept surety bonds from solvent companies. If reclamation of an abandoned coal mine is backed by a surety company that is unable to pay



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Even Being Deaf Doesn't Block Out the Noise of Drilling

Dawn Stein stood in her front yard, shaded by a canopy of rustling, century-old cottonwood trees. A well-manicured lawn surrounded her tidy white house. On Dawn's front porch, a low table and chairs beckoned a relaxing summer afternoon of gazing out over her Greeley, Colorado neighborhood. A massive sound wall blocked the view, however, and dwarfed both the six-foot fence and even her house.



Dawn Stein in front of her home in Greeley, Colorado

“Before they started drilling, Extraction Oil and Gas surrounded my property with a 32-foot sound wall,” Dawn said. “It was horrible. You couldn't even see the sun. It was like being in prison. The company never talked to me before putting up the wall.” The tops of drill rigs sited about a thousand feet from Dawn's house, rose above the looming walls. An oilfield truck drove by on the access road just behind the wall, lofting dust into the air. The wall hid the crunch of the truck's tires on the gravel, but only dulled the low grunt of the diesel engine. Both the dust and the industrial sounds drifted over the walls making the air taste dry and feel heavy. Even with the walls in place, the noise impacted her life, which was surprising because Dawn is deaf.

“In some ways, I'm glad that this has happened to me because I'm deaf and can't hear all the awful noises,” she said. “When I have folks over who hear normally, they always ask: ‘how can you live with the noise?’ And I have to remind them that I am deaf.”

Being deaf doesn't mean she couldn't feel the sounds of oil development. From the easily explained rumble of water trucks to the more ominous shakes and booms that rattled the whole house and left pictures crooked on the walls, the noise still impacted Dawn. The Triple Creek project, a complex of 22 wells in Dawn's neighborhood is just one example of oil and gas development moving into residential areas. As industry moves closer to homes, it brings the dangers with it, from noise to truck traffic, to even more dangerous impacts.

After feeling a bunch of movements early on in the project's development, Dawn filed a complaint with the Colorado Oil and Gas Conservation Commission (COGCC). They sent out an inspector who checked the driller's records and told her that there was nothing that the company was doing that would cause her house to move. “They basically blew off my complaint,” she said.

The inspector didn't provide much comfort. An explosion killed two people in the nearby community of Firestone, highlighting the dangers of living close to oil and gas infrastructure. In April, Dawn felt a particularly house-jolting boom. “All my lights flickered and I honestly thought one of the limbs from one of my 120 year cottonwoods had fallen on the house,” she said. “I went outside with a flashlight and I saw nothing.”

After that second big boom, she filed another complaint with the COGCC. “They said it was probably just noise,” Dawn remembered. “I said it was not noise and that they should be taking complaints like mine more seriously—especially after what happened in Firestone.”

Months later, she still hadn't heard back from the COGCC about her second complaint.

As residential areas expand and operations saturate the best performing “sweet spots” in less populated areas, more neighborhoods are going to be turned into oilfields. It's critical for people facing oil and gas development near their homes to organize with their neighbors in order to preserve their quality of life. Getting involved early may be the only way to avoid the worst impacts.

“I'll never be able to enjoy my property like I once did,” Dawn said. “What happened to my property is something that should never have happened.”

Pipeline Leaks are a Part of Daily Life; KXL Won't be Different

My name is Lisa DeVile. My Indigenous name in white mans' language is, "Accomplishes Everything." I am an enrolled member of the Mandan, Hidatsa, and Arikara Nations, living with my family in Mandaree on the Fort Berthold Reservation in North Dakota. Every day, we witness the environmental, health, and social impacts of living on the front lines of oil and gas extraction. We are losing our way of life because we are allowing Mother Earth to be killed as pipelines are dug into the earth as if they are her blood veins. At least 18 pipelines cross under Lake Sakakawea. I strongly oppose KXL pipeline because I have seen up close and personal what pipelines can do when they malfunction.

Late on the evening of October 29th the Keystone 1 pipeline in NE North Dakota began to spill more than 383,000 gallons of tar sands oil into nearby wetlands. The 1,500 foot long and 15 foot wide spill will permanently damage wetlands-which act as kidneys of the Earth-that clean water and serve as critical habitat to migratory water birds such as Canada geese, upland sandpipers, and the American bittern. This is the 42nd documented time we have seen the Keystone 1 pipeline leak in North America.

On that same cold October evening, at the US State Department's only hearing on the newest Environmental Impact Statement for the proposed Keystone XL pipeline, I shared a dire message with the crowd at a sub-freezing rally: no oil and gas pipeline is safe. Mandaree, my community, was subjected to one of the biggest oil and gas saltwater spills in North Dakota history. Saltwater produced from oil and gas operations is typically 10-30 times saltier than the ocean and may contain petroleum and residue from hydraulic fracturing.



The DeVile family stands near one of the many oil drilling rigs operating on the Fort Berthold Reservation.

In July of 2014, a pipeline operated by Crestwood Midstream Services Inc. broke and spilled one million gallons of produced water just uphill of Bear Den Bay and our drinking water intake. Not too long after, in August 2014, another Crestwood pipeline broke and spilled 250,000 gallons in the Independence area east of Mandaree near Lake Sakakawea. Crestwood was not held accountable, nor were they fined. Pipelines continue to spill in Mandaree area, and the grasses, shrubs, and trees stand dead around those 2014 pipeline spills, as the salt contamination continues to spread.

The proposed Keystone XL pipeline would be placed just downstream of the Ft. Peck Dam, which occasionally releases torrents of water down the Missouri, and just upstream of the water intake for the Assiniboine & Sioux Rural Water Supply System, which will soon serve more than 30,000 in native and rural communities across Montana. What spills into Missouri River upstream, flows down-stream, jeopardizing drinking water for all nations along the Missouri. My ancestors lived on the Missouri for many years before we were put on reservations. Oil and gas industry can leave when they want. We will live with the aftermath.

After being shut down by the federal government for more than a week, TC Energy has resumed operation of their frequently leaking tar sands pipeline. We cannot afford another, larger, version of this flawed pipeline. We must honor our original instruction as indigenous people of this land, to honor and protect all life with-in their so-called boundaries.

Coal con't from page 7

the full cost of reclamation or refuses to pay, state regulators will come up short of funds.

The coal industry's ongoing decline may well lead larger, better-capitalized surety firms to exit the coal industry. If western coal mine sureties undergo a transition from blue-chip firms to unknown or more poorly capitalized companies, the residents of western coal-producing states will increasingly bear the risk of paying for coal mine cleanup.

If reclamation is backed by solvent surety firms, however, it will allow state regulators to spring into action, putting a coal mining workforce back to work restoring diverse and healthy ecosystems for native wildlife and plant species that will support future agricultural use. It is imperative that the public in coal-producing states can trust the solvency of reclamation bond guarantors.

Holding on to the Ranch

Homegrown Stories

Don Lumbardy was born in 1948 in Mesa County, just 20 miles west of the ranch he stands on today. Lumbardy Ranch is nestled north of the Gunnison River, several miles north of the 209,610-acre Dominguez Escalante National Conservation Area, and at the western foot of the Grand Mesa National Forest. Throughout his life, he watched as development endangered his values, vastly changed his surroundings, and altered the way of life he knew and loved.

Don always knew he wanted to be a farmer and rancher. He remembered waking up early to help his dad with the cattle and the cool, dry, high desert chill on his face. He recalled helping his mom pull weeds in the garden in the late afternoon, the sun beating down on his back while his hands slid through the soil. He said it was moments like these, the peace and quiet of the ranch, working with his hands, and living off the land that made him want to follow in his family's footsteps.

Don's upbringing on the ranch coincided with one of the biggest shifts in agriculture to date.

"All of a sudden, it just felt like you needed a million dollars worth of equipment to be able to farm, or stand a chance to make a living," Don said.

Don said this focus on quantity over quality began to echo throughout the high desert. Don recalls Earl Butz coming to power as the Secretary of Agriculture in the 1970s, right as Don was getting more involved in the long-term planning on the ranch. In the 1980s, the fragility and shortsightedness of Butz's plan was exposed. As farmers over-produced, the market collapsed under them. Prices plummeted and farmers fell behind paying their loans, causing interest rates to spike and farm incomes disintegrated. At this time, thousands of farms and ranches went under.

Don's father was able to lease out the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land to keep his herd fed and maintained. That lease was essential to the operation. Without it, "scaling up," purchasing more cattle and land on credit could have bankrupted the family.

"A lot of farmers and ranchers in this area felt they could no longer work the land in the ways they had for generations," Don said. "The smaller family ranches and farms went under."

Don watched as neighbors and friends closed up shop. The money to be made in agriculture felt like it just wasn't there. Don said many families in the community sold their land to developers.

"This county looks a lot different than it did when I was growing up."

Don felt the pressures of "get big or get out" through pivotal years on the ranch. Don left the ranch for a short while in his early 20s but returned after getting married. Unfortunately, his marriage was short-lived and his ex-wife moved to town with their two small daughters. Don painfully realized it was necessary he keep a full time, off-ranch job to pay child support and mortgage payments.

Don drove a truck for the county road department, worked construction for a farm machinery dealer, and took care of mentally disabled adults and children, all while dreaming of working on the ranch full time.

61 percent of farmers and ranchers today, have had to work off-farm part-time to support themselves. 52 percent of U.S. farmers actually have a primary occupation and only farm part-time.

15 years ago, Don was able to return to work on the ranch full time.

"I wish I could have done this life full time when my body was in better shape for this work, but like most farmers and ranchers today realize, money is the biggest obstacle," Don said.



Don Lumbardy at home in Whitewater, Colorado

Today, Don's hardest decision is who will continue the ranch once he passes on. Don's youngest daughter lives a few miles away and helps out on the ranch when she can, but she works full time coding medical procedures for insurance purposes for several hospitals. Her son, Don's grandson, enjoys helping out on the ranch when he can but is not sure he wants to make a career in agriculture.

Like so many farm and ranch families, the trials and tribulations endured over the last four decades are a victory but also a warning to the next generation.

When Don moved home to the ranch full time, he looked around and didn't recognize much. New homes were constructed and hobby ranches were put up. Don said shortly after moving back he was approached by a developer and told he could make about two million dollars selling his land to create a subdivision.

"Realtors thought I was crazy for putting all of the ranch property in a permanent conservation easement after both of my parents passed away," Don said. "I was not going to allow this ranch to be destroyed after all the years of hard work and struggle that my parents and myself worked so hard for. Money will make life easier but it does not buy happiness."

Don was finally home and no amount of money could deter him from the place he had dreamt of for the last six decades. Don felt comfort in the familiarity of the early morning, high-desert chill on his face as he rose for chores and the late afternoon sun beating on his back as he restored his mother's garden to its original glory.

Staff Changes at WORC

Kevin Williams, WORC's Director of Organizing, is retiring after 35 years. In 2020, he will provide some consulting services to WORC focused primarily on the Nebraska/Kansas expansion organizing assessment. He is considering a run for the Montrose City Council, and wants to devote more time to organizing his own community by participating in WCA's local chapter, the Uncompahgre Valley Alliance.

Rachel Zatterstrom was promoted to Leadership and Capacity Director. She transitioned into her current role mid-way through 2019, as Kevin Williams moved into a part-time role and is retiring at the end of this year. Rachel oversees all of WORC's regional trainings and events, including Principles of Community Organizing and our Summer and Winter Board meetings, and works with WORC's staff team to identify and deliver a wide-variety of capacity-building assistance to WORC's member groups.

Eileen Hanchett is retiring after 33 years as WORC's Comptroller. She plans to do volunteer work, spend more time with her grandson and family, enjoy the outdoors, take up golfing again, and maybe look into a new hobby to explore. Her last day in the office was December 20.

We will be combining Eileen's position with WORC's current Development Director, **Kerri Wolenetz's** position. Kerri will be combining her current financial oversight and grant administration work with Eileen's responsibilities, and looking for ways to make some of our bookkeeping and financial work more efficient.

In December **Anna Lucas**, WORC's Political Director, moved back home to the greater DC area to be closer to her family. She will be completing her tenure from WORC's DC office until February when we expect to hire and onboard a new Political Director based out of Billings.

Tim Glaza joined the WORC staff team in June as a Regional Organizer on agriculture and food issues. Born and raised in Iowa, Tim has extensive experience managing canvass teams, worked as an organizer with Dakota Resource Council, and served as a Peace Corps volunteer working with family farmers in Zambia on regenerative agriculture and forestry. He earned a B.A. in Political Science from Iowa State University and a M.S. in Political Science from Illinois State University.

Career opportunities in the WORC network

Dakota Rural Action
Community Organizer
Brookings, SD

Oregon Rural Action
Community Organizer
La Grande, OR

Western Native Voice
Communications Director
Billings, MT

WORC
Regional Political Director
Billings, MT

Organizing & Training
Coordinator
Montrose, CO

*For more information visit
our website at:
<https://www.worc.org/who-we-are/career-opportunities/>*

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PUBLICATIONS

NOW IS THE TIME TO END SELF-BONDING Makes the case for why Congress and states should act now to protect coal communities from picking up the bill for coal mine cleanup.

TOO GOOD TO BE TRUE: THE RISKS OF PUBLIC INVESTMENT IN CARBON CAPTURE AND SEQUESTRATION Pulls back the curtain on the role that CCS is likely to play in reducing global greenhouse gas emissions and profiles the difficulties that companies have encountered in designing carbon capture plants

SOWING THE SEEDS OF SUSTAINABILITY Examines the local food systems in the seven states in which the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC) has member groups. Using publicly-available data, we analyzed multiple aspects of food systems in order to understand where each state stood, in terms of the strength of both the production and demand side of the local food market.

NO TIME TO WASTE Examines standards and disposal practices around radioactive oil and gas waste in Colorado, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Wyoming

UNDERMINED PROMISE II Examines coal production in the West and finds that mining companies and regulatory agencies are falling short on keeping promises made in the Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act

FLARING BOOM Explains the underlying causes and the problems caused by flaring and venting methane from oil and gas fields in six western states

Download these publications at www.worc.org

2020 EVENTS

IDAHO ORGANIZATION OF RES. COUNCILS BOARD MEETING
Boise, ID.....January 18

DAKOTA RURAL ACTION BOARD MEETING
Pierre, SD (tent).....January 21

POWDER RIVER BASIN RES. COUNCIL BOARD MEETING
Casper, Wyoming.....January 24

NORTHERN PLAINS RESOURCE COUNCIL BOARD MEETING
Billings, MontanaFebruary 22

WORC'S SUMMER BOARD AND STAFF MEETING
Saddlestring, WYJune 4-6

WORC'S WINTER BOARD AND STAFF MEETING
Billings, MT.....December 4-5