

## **Western Organization of Resource Councils 2011 Mid-year Report**

### **Supporting independent livestock producers**

- Helped to organize two national call-ins with allies, which generated over 9,500 calls to the White House urging President Obama to finalize livestock market fairness rules proposed by the Grain Inspection, Packers and Stockyards Administration.
- Assisted Judy McCullough, a WORC and Powder River Basin Resource Council leader, in briefing Congressional staff in Washington about problems of and solutions to unfair livestock markets.
- Praised introduction of the Livestock Marketing Fairness Act in both the House of Representatives and Senate. The bill, based on proposed reforms developed by WORC, would restore livestock market competition by requiring open bidding to win contracts.
- Worked with Northern Plains Resource Council member and rancher Gilles Stockton on his participation on the Secretary of Agriculture's Advisory Committee on Animal Health.

### **Doing oil & gas right**

- Released *Coming Clean*, a call for strict disclosure of all chemicals used in the exploration and production of oil and gas, notification of landowners, and narrow exceptions for the protection of proprietary information by the companies.
- Received support for WORC's recommendations to increase federal oil and gas bonds from a Government Accountability Office report released in January.
- Prepared a report profiling the strongest state and local oil and gas standards in the United States for the Arkansas Public Policy Panel in response to natural gas development in Arkansas.

### **Protecting landowners from oil pipelines**

- Helped force the State Department to prepare, and then submitted comments on, a Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed Keystone XL tar sands pipeline. WORC said the study failed to demonstrate a need for the pipeline sufficient to justify condemnation of landowners or a finding that the pipeline is in the national interest. WORC criticized the document's failure to consider the risks of tar sands pipelines, lack of careful assessment of the potential for contamination of land and water, absence of an Emergency Response Plan for public review and comment, and review of liability at abandonment of the pipeline. A quarter of a million people submitted comments opposing approval of the pipeline.

- Held a news conference with Northern Plains, its local affiliate, the Yellowstone Valley Citizens Council, and other Billings conservation groups to release a dozen recommendations to minimize the long-term effects of the Exxon oil spill in the Yellowstone River and to urge extra scrutiny of the proposed Keystone XL tar sands pipeline.
- Helped Dakota Rural Action member Cory Heidelberger to meet with the South Dakota Congressional delegation in Washington to discuss concerns about the Keystone XL pipeline, local energy production, and agriculture issues. The next day, Cory participated in the Community Leaders Day put on by the White House, which brings local leaders from around the country to engage with various administration officials. Cory focused on energy and environment issues, local and homegrown renewable energy in South Dakota, and the Keystone XL pipeline.

### **Confronting coal**

- Met with Bureau of Land Management Director Bob Abbey and provided options to address the inadequacies of federal coal leasing activities in the Powder River Basin.
- Co-hosted the Powder River Basin Coal Summit with the Northern Plains Resource Council, Powder River Basin Resource Council, Sierra Club and WildEarth Guardians. Twenty-six participants from 14 groups identified 42 collaborative efforts to challenge coal expansion in the Powder River Basin.
- Published two public education pieces: *Exporting Powder River Basin Coal: Risks and Costs*, a white paper outlining the impacts to communities, including increased railroad traffic to West Coast ports, if U.S. coal companies mine and export up to 140 million tons of coal per year to Asian markets, and *Exporting Powder River Basin Coal: Risks and Costs*, a fact sheet.

### **Reforming uranium mining**

- Organized meetings between leaders Wilma Tope, Jay Davis, and Marv Ballantyne, Powder River Basin Resource Council staff attorney Shannon Anderson, and allies with nearly 50 Congressional offices in Washington to gather support for the Uranium Resources Stewardship Act, H.R. 1452. The bill would make uranium a leasable and locatable mineral through a competitive leasing program, require mining companies to pay a royalty fee, and give more discretion to public land managers to decide where uranium mining is and is not appropriate.

### **Challenging GM alfalfa**

- Joined with the Dakota Resource Council and Center for Food Safety in a lawsuit challenging the Department of Agriculture's decision to allow unrestricted planting of genetically modified Roundup Ready alfalfa. The suit contends the agency violated the

law by approving GM alfalfa without adequate analysis or measures to protect farmers and ranchers who want to grow organic or conventional alfalfa.

### **Engaging citizens in governance**

- Trained 15 legislators in a *How to Govern* workshop in February in conjunction with Wellstone Action. The workshop provided information on how members who hold a public office can better help WORC's member groups win their issues during the legislative session.

### **Building leaders, staff skills and organizations**

- Launched the Idaho Organizing Project to build a new, rural-focused, multi-issue, membership-based, and democratically-controlled citizens' organization in Idaho. The Project is recruiting an organizing committee and is focusing initially on natural gas development in Payette County as well as exploring other issues and organizing opportunities.
- Welcomed a new local community group, the Black Hills Chapter of Dakota Rural Action, into the WORC network.
- Trained 42 participants in two *Principles of Community Organizing* sessions held in June and July. Twenty-four participants were leaders or staff in the WORC network.
- Held a staff directors meeting in Washington, DC, to develop skills, meet with allies, funders and members of the Congressional delegations in the WORC states, and discuss major issue campaigns and programs.
- Produced a new how-to, *How to Recruit Candidates to Run for Office*.

## **Member Group Accomplishments**

### **Dakota Resource Council**

- Helped pass groundbreaking legislation to assist surface owners to receive fair compensation for production losses due to oil and gas activity on their land. Oil and gas companies must now negotiate with surface owners for annual production loss payments as well as a one-time ingress fee. The law also improved notice requirements for surface owners prior to oil and gas activity on their land.
- Intervened in a Montana-Dakota Utilities rate case to give wind energy equal rights with coal in new power generation. The Public Service Commission affirmed that MDU could recover costs for wind energy built to comply with renewable energy objectives in North and South Dakota and Montana's renewable energy standard. In addition, the settlement

reduced ratepayer responsibility for MDU's costs incurred by the now-defunct Big Stone II power plant.

- Joined with allies to turn out nearly 100 opponents of the proposed South Heart coal mine at a June 28 Public Service Commission informal conference. During the conference, mine promoters were forced to admit they have no immediate market for the coal.
- Exceeded its internal fundraising goal by more than 20%, with contributions totaling over \$46,000, in a four-month fundraising drive.

### **Dakota Rural Action**

- Launched the Black Hills Chapter with 15 new members. The chapter is working on bringing South Dakota-produced food into youth programs and health institutions in the Black Hills.
- Conducted its second Farm Beginnings class for eight families. The program offers instructions by knowledgeable farmers to aspiring farmers about the business.
- Started two new sites for the Online South Dakota Local Foods Co-op in the Black Hills region. Co-op members in Spearfish and Rapid City can now shop directly from South Dakota producers.

### **Idaho Rural Council**

- Focused on protecting family farmers near a proposed 13,000 dairy heifer feedlot. The proposed South View Dairy feedlot is just over a mile from the Minidoka National Historic Site, the former Hunt Camp for Japanese-American detainees during World War II. IRC is a party to a lawsuit challenging the feedlot pending before the Idaho Supreme Court.

### **Northern Plains Resource Council**

- Led a citizen rally "For the Love of Montana" during the 2011 legislature. More than 600 Montanans braved frigid weather and snow to take part in a boisterous rally on the Capitol lawn, and Northern Plains gathered more than 500 signatures in two hours asking the Governor to reject anti-environmental legislation that arrives on his desk.
- Won a state court ruling against an attempt by the State of Montana and Arch Coal to block its legal challenge of the state's lease of the Otter Creek coal tracts in southeastern Montana. This victory enables Northern Plains' lawsuit to proceed.
- Brought the voices of hundreds of citizens into numerous debates over legislative proposals to weaken environmental protections, citizens' right to participate in public decisions, and landowner rights. Members worked on both sides of the aisle to stop most of the worst attacks.

## **Oregon Rural Action**

- Hosted a successful 2nd Annual Eastern Oregon Solar Fair, featuring basic and advanced “going solar” and energy efficiency workshops, Union County Solar Home Open House, and vendor displays.
- Expanded the La Grande, Baker City, and Ontario community gardens and published the annual print and on-line versions of Union County/Baker County *Farm and Food Guides*.
- Held the First Annual ORA Barn Dance/Fundraiser and Drive to Thrive Fund Drive, increasing ORA sustaining circle members to 52, and total members to nearly 500.
- Pushed two bills through the legislature. One bill permits sales of pickled canned goods without requirement for use of a commercial kitchen. The second allows on-farm slaughter and sale of up to 1,000 chickens.

## **Powder River Basin Resource Council**

- Met with Wyoming’s new governor, Matt Mead, in January and later led him on a tour of areas affected by coalbed methane development.
- Convinced Rep. Cynthia Lummis to introduce a bipartisan bill, the Livestock Marketing Fairness Act, to end unfair meat packer practices harming independent ranchers and farmers.
- Convinced the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality to stop permitting discharges of coalbed methane water with high sodium levels and to implement a policy to stop downstream flooding of ranch lands.

## **Western Colorado Congress**

- Secured introduction of a local foods bill in the State Legislature and held the 3<sup>rd</sup> annual Citizen Lobby Trip to Denver. Legislative work included reigning in oil and gas industry influence, protecting renewable energy power generation, and keeping ATV's off state highways.
- Steadily increased online activism through the use of social media. In just a few months of launching WCC's Facebook and Twitter accounts, WCC has over 100 friends and followers in each social media accounts.
- Held its Inaugural Annual Alliance Conference in June. The event brought together all five of WCC's Community Groups, and included sessions on passing proactive legislation, bolstering citizen-to-citizen collaboration, and nurturing working relationships across geographical boundaries.