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Members demand action on waste, flares and abuse

Kristi Mogen let some of her frustration and fear show as she described the costs to her family's land and health from flaring and venting of methane laced with unburnt hydrocarbons and fracking fluids, from oil and gas wells near her Douglas, Wyoming home.

Deputy Department of Interior Secretary Mike Connor, Deputy Bureau of Land Management Director Linda Lance and other BLM officials heard Kristi, a member of the Powder River Basin Resource Council (PRBRC), and 19 other members of WORC and the Ft. Berthold Tribe at a forum in Dickinson, North Dakota, May 9. The forum was held to hear ideas on rules BLM is developing to control flaring and venting of methane from federal oil and gas wells.

Huge amounts of natural gas—enough to heat at least two million homes—are burnt off or escape as fumes from oil and gas wells across the country every day. A lot of that is in the Bakken oil field, in which Dickinson sits. More than a third of the natural gas produced in the Bakken is flared off — wasted. Theodora Bird Bear, Chair of the Dakota Resource Council's (DRC) Oil and Gas Task Force, told the BLM



Theodora Bird Bear tells the Bureau of Land Management about flaring on the Ft. Berthold Reservation in North Dakota, where companies waste up to two-thirds of the gas.

that on the Ft. Berthold Reservation, it's even worse—half or two-thirds of the gas is flared.

Why they flare

Kristi, Theodora and others in Dickinson told the BLM that flaring, venting, and leaking of methane and other gases have to stop. These industrial discharges are being released into neighborhoods all across America, they are loud, dirty nuisances, full of known carcinogens. To make all of those worse, flares, vents and leaks accelerate global climate change, and lead to ground level ozone and acid deposition causing to lower crop yields and endangering human health.

Oil companies flare gas from oil wells because the gas isn't worth as much as the oil and it takes time and money to get pipelines and other infrastructure in to capture the gas and send it to a market. Most gas leaks from wells and pipelines can be prevented with

“Flaring” continued on page 10

IN THIS ISSUE:

The View from WORC	2
Around the Region	3
WORC announces transition of Executive Director Patrick Sweeney	4
Powder River and WORC test mine plan	5
New, clear standards protect clean water.....	6
EPA proposes to lower carbon from existing coal plants.....	7
Oregon Rural Action prescribes health care reform.....	8
Is Keystone XL pipeline the answer to exploding oil trains?.....	9
Voting rights key concern of Western Native Voice.....	10
Coal mine cracks.....	10
<i>The Meat Racket</i>	11

The View from WORC

By Norm Cimon, WORC Chair

While our path from La Grande, Oregon, to Sheridan, Wyoming, may look straight on a flat map, the reality was anything but. Shelley and I made our way to WORC's summer board and staff meeting from northeast Oregon, down and across southern Idaho, stopping to camp in Yellowstone, and finally up and over the Bighorn Mountains. There was a lot to focus on in between. The park was in full flower, with elk and buffalo everywhere, the Irma hotel in Cody beckoned us for lunch, and the small towns and settlements in the Bighorn Basin pulled us along to our final destination.

All of that was good preparation for the focus everyone brought to the meeting itself. You've probably experienced something similar to this: the days just flew by, packed with stories about the Powder River Basin Resource Council and the Northern Plains Resource Council, their members, and the places where they live.

An aerial view of the nearby strip mines was sobering. I'd foolishly thought those mines might be tucked into the hogbacks that break across the Powder River Basin in waves. Not at all. Between those waves are expansive grasslands. Those had been ripped open to get to the coal, creating long, wide gashes in the prairie, massive shovels pushing piles of unwanted soils and rock into ever higher mountains of tailings. The idea of rebuilding the water table in such a torn up landscape seems a remote possibility at best.

The on-the-ground effects were brought home on a field trip to the Decker coal mine. We circled the edge of that property to get a feel for the industrial-scale activity—loading docks, train tracks, and more massive shovels stripping the exposed coal seams. Even as markets in the United States pullback, coal companies hope that Asia will be the salvation, something WORC is working hard to prevent.

As the buses prepared to leave the mine site, the impact on small towns from Montana to Washington and Oregon was made clear. We waited ten minutes for a loaded 125-car coal train to pass. Do that 30 times a day and you've lost five hours to those trains, that's before counting the ones headed the other direction.

Next was the Rosebud Battlefield, where local landowners succeeded in stopping coalbed methane drillers in their tracks, at least for now. Then on to Dayton, Wyoming, to get a taste of local foods, and to hear about how markets are developing for those foods. The best part was meeting the people behind that effort—and sharing the tasty barbecue they'd so graciously prepared.

The day echoed the outstanding work by WORC affiliates on coal mining and export, and on wasted methane emissions from gas flaring. That's an issue gaining traction thanks to dedicated staff and members. The unregulated emissions on the Ft. Berthold tribal lands are a national embarrassment and tribal members, supported by good staff work, are stepping forward to say just that.

There were also excellent sessions on the work of organizing: strategic planning, outreach to members, and technology. In short, all the stuff that makes WORC and its member groups one of the best organizations I've ever had the privilege to be part of.



WESTERN ORGANIZING REVIEW

The *Western Organizing Review* is published quarterly by the Western Organization of Resource Councils.

WORC is a regional network of grassroots community organizations, which includes 10,000 members and 41 local chapters. WORC helps its member groups succeed by providing trainings and coordinating regional issue campaigns.

WORC's NETWORK

Dakota Resource Council, North Dakota
Dakota Rural Action, South Dakota
Idaho Organization of Resource Councils, Idaho
Northern Plains Resource Council, Montana
Oregon Rural Action, Oregon
Powder River Basin Resource Council, Wyoming
Western Colorado Congress, Colorado

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Around the Region

A look around WORC's network

Dakota Resource Council member Caleb Kobilansky finished a 13-day, 360-mile run from Grand Forks to Williston, North Dakota, June 13. He undertook the run to increase awareness of the effects of the Bakken oil boom on North Dakota.

Caleb and his crew completed the majority of his run on back roads. The run was tame until they reached Minot. "It was terrifying," Kobilansky told the Associated Press. "Our eyes were hurting pretty bad from all the dust they kicked up and we were coughing—it was definitely pretty dangerous."

Upon reaching Epping, about 25 miles from Williston, Caleb and his crew decided to hitch a ride to Williston to avoid the danger of oil truck traffic and the related dust. In Williston, Caleb delivered a letter of solidarity to Mayor-elect Howard Klug. The letter is intended to help bridge the east-west disconnect in the state. "With the east [side of North Dakota] feeling many of the benefits of the oil boom and the west feeling many of the impacts, it is important to show the people in western North Dakota there are folks in the east that understand their struggle," Kobilansky said.

Dakota Rural Action (DRA) gained a voice in a utility company's proposed rate hike. The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission granted commenter status to DRA on June 24 on a 9.27 percent electricity rate hike request by Black Hills Power, based in Rapid City. Western South Dakota customers would see their bill increase nearly \$11 a month. The increase would help the utility recover some losses from investments, including a coal-fired power plant in Wyoming that was not built.

The **Idaho Organization of Resource Councils** is leading a statewide grassroots effort to legalize cottage foods production. Idaho is one of a handful of states without a cottage foods law. Direct marketing processors must use a commercial kitchen, which is difficult and costly for small operations, especially in rural communities. A kick-off campaign planning meeting will take place July 13 with IORC members from around the state. Actions to follow include petition gathering, house meetings, tabling at farmers markets, and a film screening in Boise. The cottage foods campaign is IORC's first statewide campaign.

On June 26, the **Northern Plains Resource Council** welcomed its 13th active affiliate. A six-month affiliate assessment and organizing drive culminated in a party and first meeting for the Yellowstone Bend Citizens Council, based in Livingston, Montana. Officers now will be elected. Livingston was once a major railroad town and is a gateway to Yellowstone National Park. Citizens are concerned that if coal export facilities are built in Oregon and Washington, the number of coal trains passing through town from the Powder River Basin will double or triple. Interest also is high in wind, solar, and energy efficiency.

Oregon Rural Action helped to organize and sponsor the first-ever Eastern Oregon Growing Farms Workshop in April. Sixteen farmers attended the workshop designed for people in their first five years of farming, people seriously considering starting a farm business, and people thinking about major changes in their farm. The program provides

farmers with tools and knowledge to manage the biological and financial risks of farming and links them to experts in those fields.

Powder River Basin Resource Council's (PRBRC) Local Food and Ag Committee is looking forward to changing county zoning regulations that prohibit retail sales of Ag products, especially locally grown food, produce from year-round greenhouses, and even roadside stands. Current regulations discourage farmer-entrepreneurs from starting local food growing businesses.

After meeting with Sheridan County officials, the county commissioners and planning staff took the committee's proposed zoning amendment and are offering it to the public in the process to change zoning regulations.

"By listening to my story and helping in our struggles to deal with county zoning regulations that made starting a small truck farm and day range poultry operation so difficult, PRBRC has made our efforts successful," said committee member Brad Holliday, a greenhouse operator and farmer.

Western Colorado Congress (WCC) held a training in Grand Junction for members and the public on labeling of genetically modified organisms and related ballot measures. In May, WCC teamed-up with Vitamin Cottage, a health food chain, to offer a workshop on the critical food and consumer information issue. WCC provided a session on how to gather petition signatures for a ballot measure, and spent time reviewing what would happen if GMO foods had to be labeled in Colorado.



WORC announces transition of Executive Director Patrick Sweeney

On July 8, 2014, WORC announced that Patrick Sweeney will transition from his position as the organization's Executive Director on January 1, 2015 and phase out his employment at WORC over three years. Sweeney will serve as a part-time senior advisor and focus on special projects, WORC's civic engagement and voter participation programs and consulting on fundraising with the new executive director, the directors of the seven member organizations, and WORC's development staff.

Sweeney is the founding director of WORC. He also served as one of the original staff and as Staff Director of the Northern Plains Resource Council, WORC's Montana member organization, and has served WORC and Northern Plains for over 42 years.

"Since Pat was a young man of 22 he's dedicated himself to building grassroots rural power - helping people speak out for clean water, healthy small towns, and family farmers and ranchers," said Norm Cimon, WORC chair. "Pat is a very strong leader and has grown WORC into a unique and successful rural, regional community organizing network. He developed WORC from the founding three member groups in 1979 to seven organizations today. The WORC Board is very grateful for his innumerable contributions and appreciates his willingness to continue to be part of WORC over the next three years. This plan ensures there will be continuity and stability in the transition."

"I find it is time to transition to new staff leadership at WORC, and, reaching 65 this year, to turn some new pages in my life," said Pat Sweeney. "I plan to take on other interests beginning next year. But I'm not leaving WORC high and dry. I will continue to work part-time over the next three years on special projects."

At its June Board meeting, WORC's Board of Directors adopted a leadership transition plan that names John Smillie as the new Executive Director effective January 1, 2015. Smillie currently serves as WORC's Campaign Director. A graduate of Stanford University, Smillie was an organizer and research coordinator for the Northern Plains from 1979 to 1986 and has been with WORC since 1986.

The Board promoted Kevin Williams to be Director of Organizing and Campaigns, also effective January 1, 2015. Williams earned a Master of Science Degree in Forest Resources from the University of Idaho. Williams joined the WORC staff in 1995 and is currently WORC's Organizing Director. From 1984 to 1994, he served on the staff of the Western Colorado Congress, the last eight years as Staff Director. Western Colorado Congress, also one of WORC's member groups, is an alliance for community action empowering people to protect and enhance their quality of life.

"WORC is fortunate to have two outstanding senior staff with 65 years of experience between them, ready to step up and provide their leadership skills to the management and direction of WORC," said Cimon. "Working with the member groups and the WORC Board of Directors, and with the support of the strong staff we have at WORC, I have no doubt that John and Kevin will continue to do exceptional work in their new positions."

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Powder River and WORC test mine plan

On May 13, Powder River Basin Resource Council (PRBRC) and WORC filed a challenge in federal court to the Office of Surface Mining’s (OSM) approval of a mining permit on a coal lease for the North Antelope Rochelle Mine, owned by Peabody Energy, in Campbell County, Wyo.

The groups argue that the Department of Interior did not properly consider reclamation status at the mine when issuing its approval in March. The groups contend that Peabody has failed to reclaim lands contemporaneously with mining operations – a requirement of the federal surface mining law.

Wyoming has released mining company reclamation bonds for Phase II of reclamation on only 13% of the 171,000 disturbed acres. Phase II only indicates that the pit has been filled and regraded and soil has been replaced and seeded. It does not indicate that the plant community meet the permit requirements for post mining use or have withstood the test of weather and time.

Phase III—which is the final indication of reclamation success—has been achieved on less than 1% of disturbed acres in Wyoming.

“Our federal agencies need to do a better job of requiring Powder River Basin mines to reclaim the land and restore the water,” said L.J. Turner, a PRBRC member. “Our ranch has lost thousands of acres of grazing leases to the

mines, and unfortunately we are not alone in these impacts. After decades of mining, it’s high time the mines return some land back to the people.”

The appeal addressed OSM’s decision to authorize Peabody Energy to mine the North and South Porcupine federal coal leases. Together, the leases would add over one billion tons of coal to the mine, covering 9,600 acres of surface lands in the Powder River Basin. The leases are largely located on the Thunder Basin National Grassland, an area widely used for recreation, hunting, and grazing. The North and South Porcupine tracts extend across 6,717 acres of National Grasslands or 70% of the area approved for mining by Peabody.



Photo Courtesy: Bruce Gordon, Ecofight, www.ecofight.org

Peabody’s North Antelope Rochelle Mine is the nation’s largest coal mine, producing 110 million tons of the black mineral annually. The mine’s permit covers 57,198 acres—or almost 90 square miles.

New, clear standards protect clean water

The health and water quality of streams, lakes and rivers depend on the smaller streams and creeks that flow into them. Small streams make up over 60% of tributaries nationwide and, together with wetlands, contribute to our drinking water supplies, filter pollutants, and help to protect from flooding.

These simple facts are common sense and well supported by scientific research, but have been called into question by lawsuits that have muddied the waters over whether these important water bodies are sufficiently connected to navigable water bodies to be protected by the Clean Water Act. A newly proposed standard would clarify which water bodies are and are not protected by federal law.

The Clean Water Act requires that polluters such as mines, oil and gas wells, and factory farms get permits that limit pollution into protected water bodies. After two U.S. Supreme Court decisions in 2001 and 2006, federal and state agencies have had to determine on a case-by-case basis whether the Clean Water Act applies to many small streams and wetlands before requiring permits and taking enforcement action—a costly and time-intensive process that has resulted, at times, in agencies not being able to enforce the Clean Water Act.

The goal of the new rule is to provide clear and understandable guidance that protects the nation's waters, supported by science and consistent with the law.

In drafting the proposed rule, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Army Corps of Engineers sought input from farmers, ranchers and agricultural organizations because of previous concerns that a new rule would mean new regulations for agriculture. Since the release of the proposed rule, EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy has reached out to farmers and ranchers to assure them that the new rule will protect the clean water that is the lifeblood of agriculture without imposing expensive and unneeded regulations.

“Some in the agricultural community might think that this rule will broaden the reach of EPA regulations—but that’s simply not the case,” McCarthy wrote in a guest editorial published in AgWeb. “Our proposed rule will not add to or expand the scope of waters historically protected under the Clean Water Act. ... The rule keeps intact existing Clean Water Act exemptions for agricultural activities that farmers count on.”

—Sara Kendall

WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE CLEAN WATER RULE

Why is a new rule needed?

Over the last decade, lawsuits muddied the waters over which streams and wetlands the Clean Water Act covers. At times, this lack of clarity has resulted in agencies not being able to enforce the Clean Water Act to protect waters that had been protected under the act since its passage in 1972.

Does the new rule expand the scope of the Clean Water Act?

No. It lists the types of waters that science shows should always be covered under the Clean Water Act and makes a small subset of waters covered on a case-by-case basis. It does not include waters that were never covered under the Clean Water Act to begin with.

How many waters were covered by the Clean Water Act on a case-by-case basis and are now definitely covered?

The rule restores clear protections for more than two million miles of streams, millions of acres of wetlands and the drinking water for 117 million Americans.

What does the new rule mean for farmers and ranchers?

The new rule will help protect the clean surface water that many farmers and ranchers rely on. It will not require new permits for any normal farming activity (plowing, seeding, cultivating, minor drainage and harvesting) that does not discharge pollutants into protected waters. It will not regulate farm or stock ponds, groundwater or tile drainage systems, or increase regulation of irrigation or drainage ditches. Farmers will not need a permit for cows walking across a stream or wetland.

Does my opinion matter?

Yes! The Environmental Protection Agency and Army Corps of Engineers are requesting public comments on their proposal until October 20. Your input will help shape the final rule. WORC will send an action alert to our alert list this summer with suggested comments. If you don't already receive our action alerts, go to www.worc.org to sign up. Or, go to www.epa.gov/uswaters for more information on the proposed rule.

EPA proposes to lower carbon from existing coal plants

A much anticipated standard to reduce carbon emissions from coal-fired power plants was unveiled in early June. It is an important step in the transition from an electric power system dependent on coal, with its heavy load of carbon emissions, to a cleaner and more resilient electric energy portfolio that does not leave a legacy of catastrophic climate change for future generations.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposal is an executive branch response to the inability of Congress to address the growing climate crisis. EPA's authority to regulate carbon dioxide (CO₂) has been upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court under the Clean Air Act. Congress spent the last 20 years either avoiding the question or unable to find majority consensus around a solution to the mounting crisis.

Power plants account for roughly one-third of all domestic greenhouse gas emissions, mostly from coal. The new standard would cut carbon pollution from power plants by 25% by 2020, and 30% by 2030, using 2005 emissions levels as a starting point.

EPA's proposed Clean Power Plan is notable for its unique approach giving states' the flexibility to meet the standard by using a combination of tools—such as energy efficiency and clean, renewable energy such as solar and wind. The proposed standard also recognizes and incorporates the fact that some states and cities have already taken steps to cut carbon, thereby not penalizing those early adapters who have embraced clean, low carbon energy alternatives.

“This region is no stranger to costly climate-related catastrophes as seen in the decimation of South Dakota's cattle-herd last October during a freakish early season blizzard, or the millions of acres of bark-beetle killed forests,” said Bob LeResche of Sheridan, Wyo., and Chair of the WORC's Coal Team. “It's time to fully account for coal's pollution costs and to continue the progress in producing our energy more cleanly from non-polluting sources, like the wind and the sun. This commonsense standard helps more accurately account for coal's pollution costs in the marketplace.”

Seven of the top ten warmest years on record have occurred since 1998. In 2012, climate and weather disasters cost the American economy over \$100 billion, according to the EPA.

The Clean Power Plan allows states flexibility to choose from a variety of measures that would lessen carbon pollution. These options include clean renewable energy and energy efficiency as well as efficiency enhancements to reduce the amount carbon from existing coal generators.

EPA's standard would lead to climate and health benefits, worth an estimated \$55 billion to \$93 billion in 2030, including avoiding 2,600 – 6,000 premature deaths and 140,000 – 150,000 asthma attacks in children.

“EPA's plan should be thought of as just the beginning,” LeResche said, noting that some of the tool kit solutions – such as increasing use of natural gas and extending the life of older nuclear plants – could pose additional problems.

- EPA's reduction targets should be more ambitious.
- EPA's proposal should not encourage subsidies to polluting energy sources like nuclear power.
- EPA needs to adopt standards to reduce climate-changing methane emissions from the oil and gas industry—or the promise of lower greenhouse gas emissions by increasing the capacity of natural gas electric generators would be negligible or nonexistent.

“But the Clean Power Plan is a good start to cutting carbon pollution and promoting clean, renewable energy and energy efficiency,” LeResche said.

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Oregon Rural Action prescribes health care reform

Farming is a dangerous and risky business. The work becomes a whole lot less attractive when a farmer knows that he or she is one fall from the hayloft away from losing their land. Health and disability insurance are essential elements in protecting family farms. Lack of access to affordable, dependable healthcare is a major barrier to recruiting young people to farming.

The most important health care policy issue to farmers, ranchers and rural residents is cost. Farmers and ranchers—like other small business owners—have been forced to pay a lot more for health insurance coverage than big businesses.

“Family farms like many other small family businesses tend to return marginal profits,” Susan Boyd, farmer and co-chair of ORA’s Health Care Reform Action Team. “In order to reverse the ever-widening gap between rich and poor in our country, and return hard-working people to the middle class, we must eliminate the burden inflicted on hard working people by our cost inflated health care system.”

Extending health care insurance to the uninsured, the challenges of delivering rural healthcare, physician attraction and retention, and access to hospital services are other important issues.

Access to affordable, high quality health care is essential to everyone. All of us need good health to be able to work and provide for the needs of our families. Health care is critical to our quality of life and literally a life-and-death issue for farmers, ranchers and rural residents.

Working for health care reform is a key part of ORA’s mission of promoting social justice. In March 2012 the ORA Board of Directors voted to join Health Care for All Oregon (HCAO)—a new statewide coalition now numbering 94 member organizations. As a member of HCAO, ORA supports universal, publicly funded healthcare for Oregon and eventually the United States.

HCAO plans to have single payer health care on the Oregon ballot through legislative referral or citizen initiative in 2015. We plan to implement single payer coverage in Oregon in 2017 when the Affordable Care Act permits states to implement programs that are at least as good as Obama Care.

Oregon’s program would cover more people and provide comprehensive, high quality health, mental health, pharmaceutical, dental and vision care. By including all persons who live and work in Oregon in a single risk pool, we would eliminate the excessive overhead cost of multiple health insurance corporations and by having a single purchaser for prescription drugs, the Oregon Plan will have much lower costs. It would eliminate insurance premiums, deductibles and co-pays, replacing these with a progressive tax based on ability to pay. We project that average individuals will see annual total health care expenditures reduced by at least \$770.

During the past two years through our Health Care Reform Action Team

ORA has become one of HCAO’s most active member organizations. We produce educational and organizing materials used statewide. One of our members co-chairs the state Mobilization Committee. Another serves as treasurer of HCAO and the HCAO Educational Fund.

The ORA HCR Action team includes a dozen persons who attend monthly planning meetings, 45 members who participate in activities other than meetings, 85 members who elect to receive our email updates and more than 650 eastern Oregonians who have signed statements of support or participated in photo petitions. We have four trained teams of two speakers, each ready to provide content for house parties and public presentations. We have published 45 letters to the editor or guest columns in local newspapers. We table at community events, participate in parades, sponsor films and have great fun together promoting health care reform.

In April we raised \$1,200 for health care reform organizing through a benefit concert.

In May our two lectures on single payer health care financing by Dr. Gerald Friedman, University of Massachusetts, Amherst economist, attracted more than 130 persons.

The ORA HCR Action Team is glad to share our experience with other WORC groups. For information, contact co-chairs Susan Boyd, boyd@eoni.com, or Jim Kreider, jkreider@campblackdog.org.

—Bill Whitaker, *Oregon Rural Action*

Is Keystone XL pipeline the answer to exploding oil trains?

Oil trains have been exploding lately -- literally blowing up in accidents, and exploding in number. A dramatic fatal crash and fire of a Canadian Pacific oil tanker train that killed 47 and decimated Lac-Mégantic, Quebec, was followed by fiery crashes in Alabama, North Dakota, and Virginia.

All of these trains were hauling crude oil from the Bakken oil fields in North Dakota and Montana. Bakken oil is light and easier to refine, but also more explosive than heavier grades of crude oil. Some backers of the Keystone XL tar sands pipeline have implied these accidents would have been avoided if the Keystone XL pipeline had been built.



Over 20,000 barrels of Bakken oil spilled from the Tesoro Logistics LP pipeline into a wheat field near Tioga, North Dakota, on October 13, 2013.

There has been a huge increase in shipping oil by rail. Oil companies, railroads, and federal and state regulators are scrambling to deal with the serious resulting safety problems. Railroads moved 400,000 carloads of crude in 2013, forty times more than five years earlier. U.S. railroad accidents spilled 1.2 million gallons of crude in 2013, more than the last 38 years combined.

But the Keystone XL pipeline wouldn't reduce the safety problems of shipping oil by rail much, if at all. Here are ten reasons why.

1. The purpose of the Keystone XL pipeline is to get tar sands crude from Alberta to the Gulf Coast, not to move Bakken oil. The company proposed to add an onramp for Bakken oil to make the pipeline more acceptable in Montana and North Dakota. Tar sands crude is corrosive to pipelines and rail cars, but it's not explosive like Bakken crude.
2. Bakken oil couldn't get into the Keystone XL pipeline unless the onramp is built. No company, including TransCanada, has announced plans or applied for permits to build an onramp.
3. If we want to get Bakken oil out by pipeline, building pipelines from the Bakken to the markets for Bakken crude oil makes more sense than an onramp to a tar sands pipeline carrying a different kind of crude to refineries designed to refine tar sands.
4. The Keystone XL pipeline would never carry more than 100,000 barrels per day of Bakken oil, 10% of today's production from the Bakken.
5. Even if all the oil the Keystone XL pipeline could carry, 830,000 barrels per day, went by rail, that would take 4,380 trains per year—about what would be added by the expected growth in Bakken oil production in the next three years. (Keystone XL opponents argue that most of that tar sands crude would not be produced unless the pipeline is built.)
6. Much of the oil leaving the Bakken today by rail is going East or West, not South So even if there was room on the Keystone XL pipeline, Bakken oil producers would still need trains to get to the East and West coasts.
7. Pipelines have accidents, too. A pipeline rupture near Tioga, North Dakota, last fall spilled 20,600 barrels of oil, twice the size of the oil train accident in Casselton, North Dakota, in December. Pipelines leaked and spilled five million barrels in 2013, about four times as much as spilled from railcars.
8. With or without the Keystone XL pipeline, the safety of moving oil by rail must be improved with safer tanker cars, better emergency response plans and equipment, and safer traffic rules in and around towns and cities.
9. Oil pipeline safety must be improved, too, with better leak detection and response systems, better emergency response plans and stronger pipe.
10. Both rail and pipeline safety can be improved by slowing down drilling and production, allowing better construction of safer infrastructure of all kinds.

—John Smillie

“Flaring” continued from cover

cost-effective investments in better oil field equipment. During the meeting, companies talked about CNG In A Box, where the gas is captured and compressed right on the well pad. The gas is then shipped to market and sold, eliminating flaring, venting and waste.

PRBRC in Wyoming and DRC in North Dakota are pressing their state oil and gas commissions not to allow flaring by any companies that don't have a plan to capture methane gas and get it to market. Speakers in Dickinson pushed the BLM to do the same for all of the oil and gas wells producing federal minerals.

PRBRC Board member Bob LeResche, at one-time Alaska's Commissioner of Natural Resources, told the BLM officials that they could do the same simple, but courageous thing, that Alaska's oil and gas commission did in the 1970's — prohibit flaring, except for safety flares. With the gas that would have otherwise been flared in Cook Inlet, Alaskans heated thousands of homes,

produced lots of electricity, and started a fertilizer plant to use the natural gas saved from the flares.

Kristi had spoken first, and she came back to be the last speaker at the forum. With over 40 categorical exclusions for federal wells around her home, she implored BLM to move quickly on the new rules and to enforce rules already on the books. Anything less would be a terrible waste and endangering the lives of many Americans living near oil and gas wells.

— John Smillie

Voting rights key concern of Western Native Voice



Rhonda Whiting, Board Chair of Western Native Voice, talks with Montana Senator John Walsh after a roundtable discussion May 24 on Native American voting rights. Sponsored by Western Native Voice, the event enabled discussions between Native leaders and the Senator, who is working on legislation to expand minority voting access.

Coal mine cracks



Standing by a 22-foot fissure on ranch land above the underground Signal Peak Mine in the Bull Mountains north of Billings, rancher and Northern Plains Board Chair Steve Charter shows why landowners are challenging the BLM's coal lease to Signal Peak. Subsidence is a dramatic and damaging surface impact from the deep longwall mining that results when the seam is removed. The agency relied on an out-of-date environmental analysis rather than the actual surface impacts as illustrated by this photo. Northern Plains filed suit in federal district court in May challenging the lease.

The Meat Racket

Member Commentary by Gilles Stockton, Northern Plains Resource Council

Although at first glance, a book about the development of a fully vertically and horizontally integrated cartel controlling the raising, slaughter, and marketing of poultry, pork, and beef may seem dry, *The Meat Racket* author Chris Leonard tells a compelling story. He follows the rise of the Tyson family in the creation of the meat cartel in a balanced and non-inflammatory manner. Leonard concludes that the handful of companies which now control the production and marketing of all meats can set prices at will.

The disappearance of free markets in agriculture mirrors the disappearance of free and open markets in much of the rest of our economic lives. What Leonard chronicles in the rise of the Tyson family is the banality of evil when it aligns itself to our own petty self-interests. Meat is now produced in a system based on exploitation of everything it touches—the animals, the environment, the contract growers, the plant workers, and ultimately the consumers themselves.

My awaking to the growing threat to the competitive markets for beef came in 1987 when Benny Bunting, a disaffected contract poultry grower from North Carolina, addressed the annual meeting of the Northern Plains Resource Council. He concluded with this warning: “Do not allow yourself to become a serf on your own land.”

The Meat Racket is a kind of requiem for the three decades of work and passion that I and many other staff and leaders of WORC have devoted to prevent the “chickenization” of the hog and cattle industries. We organized, we studied the complexity of the issues, and we came to the simple, elegant conclusion—rule—to save the integrity of the hog and cattle markets from what happened to the chicken market: forward delivery contracts for slaughter-ready beef and hogs must be publicly bid.

The rule

It received serious consideration by a number of academics and from U.S. Department of Agriculture leadership. In the end, it was not that the giants were too large and powerful for us to confront but rather that their minions, the “orcs” you might say, were so numerous and pernicious. After a long battle on many fronts, the rule has never been implemented. Instead, the vertically integrated contract meat production system has become even more entrenched.

Leonard ends his book with the dismal assessment that now that the vertical and horizontal integration of the poultry, hog, and cattle feeding industries is complete, it is not possible to restore the ideal of independent farmers selling their livestock in open competitive markets. For us ranchers and farmers this suggests we accept the fact that we will be nothing but the serfs of our corporate overlords. For consumers, it means higher prices, lower quality, and more safety issues will be our new normal.

However, even though meat, as a commodity, is firmly in the hands of the meatpacking “racket,” they still do not control the market for local, natural, or



organic meat. The opportunity for niche producers and for consumers interested in local consumption is viable and growing. The local market network may remain a fraction of the size of the commodity market, but it offers an opportunity for farmers and consumers to collaborate in quality food. That is scant reassurance, however, for most western ranchers because we simply do not have enough local consumers for all of the beef and lamb that we can raise.

But is it all over for us ranchers? It will be if we give up trying to restore free, public, and competitive markets for cattle and sheep. I am not ready to give up and I know many who feel the same as I. If you are interested in food, and concerned about how your food is raised and where it is sourced, you should read *The Meat Racket*. Then you should join us in the fight to restore free, public, and competitive markets for all agricultural commodities.

Gilles Stockton is a rancher from Grass Range, Montana, and member of the WORC's Ag and Food Campaign Team.



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