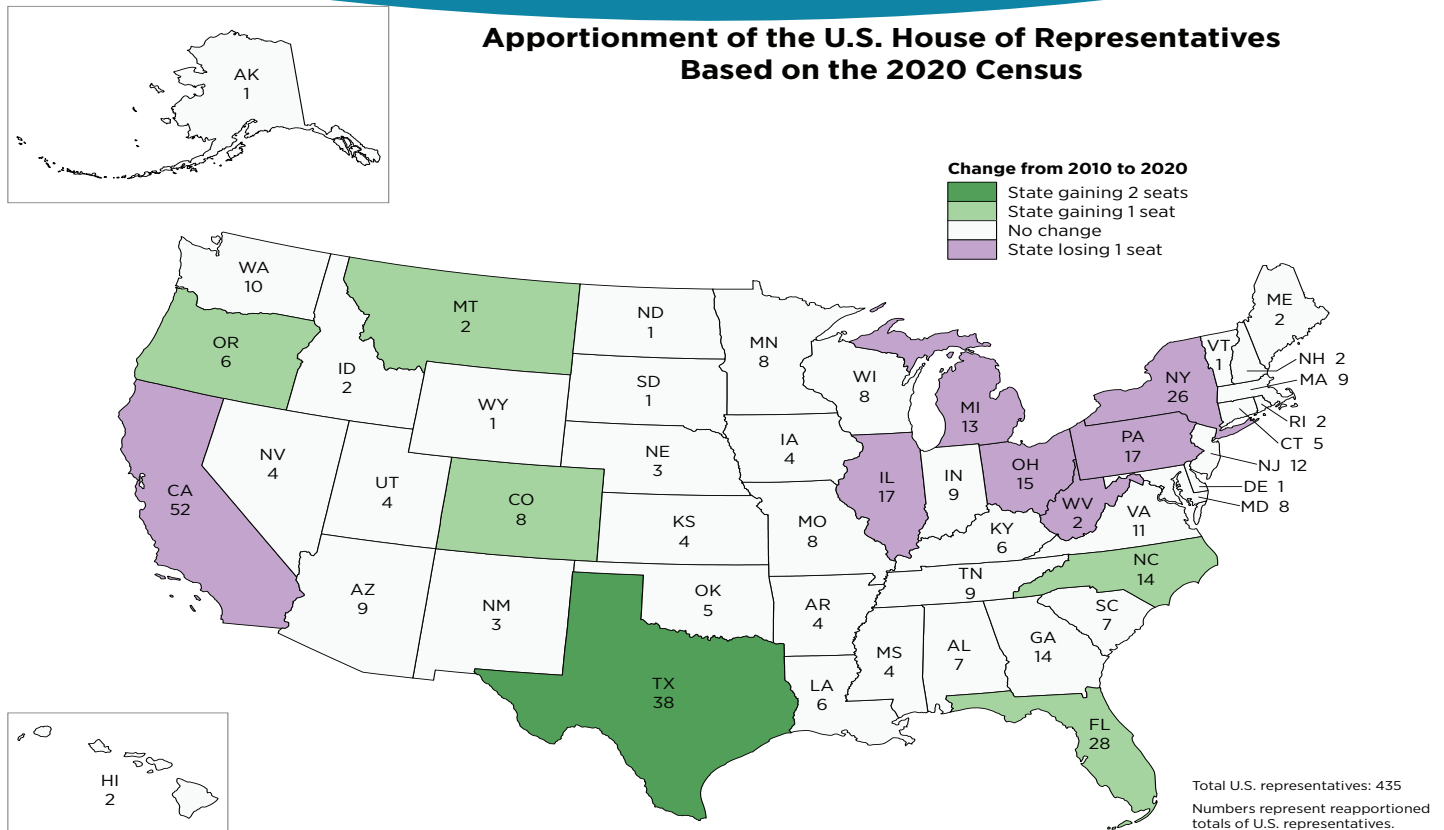


# Western Organizing Review

A publication of the Western Organization of Resource Councils



## WORC Region Gains Congressional Seats and Political Power

No matter our color, background, or zip code, most of us believe that voters pick our leaders, our leaders should not pick their voters. To determine how we will be represented and how funds for schools, hospitals, and other essential services will be allocated, we come together every decade to draw new district lines that give each of our votes equal weight, each of our voices equal stature, and each of our communities equal resources.

Or at least, that is what's supposed to happen. But today, a handful of politicians in states across the country are trying to carve up our communities, divide our neighborhoods, and silence certain voices to serve their political interests instead of our communities' needs. They have succeeded in advancing their aims not by proving persuasive but by removing community districting from the public domain, rendering it an obscure and technocratic process while conducting it behind closed doors.

We need to come together with relentless energy to reclaim this process for our communities. This opportunity only comes around once every ten years and the districts we draw this year will shape our lives for the next decade. The way the lines are drawn can change who wins an election, who controls the legislature, and which laws are passed. We must mobilize massive public engagement to pressure local lawmakers and redistricting commissions to draw fair maps.

The WORC region has a particular stake in community districting because the new census data showed that almost all of our states' population grew ahead of the national average, with the exception of Wyoming. Nationally, last decade saw the second-lowest population growth in US history with only a 7.4% growth. For perspective, we saw only a slightly lower growth rate of 7.3% in the 1940's Census which was in the aftermath of the Great Depression, and on the contrary, the 1990's Census showed a growth rate

*(Continued on page 6)*

WORC is a regional network of grassroots community organizations, which includes 19,949 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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For my second column as your WORC Board chair, I would like to build on a couple of ideas raised in my first column: the recognition that we are still in the midst of a uniquely challenging time and what that means for our organization and organizational leadership.

The great poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once wrote, "Into each life some rain must fall, some days must be dark and dreary." While we certainly have no control over how much it rains, we can control how we respond. We can either let ourselves get wet, or we can break out the umbrella. Challenges can push us to become more resilient, adaptable, and appreciative of the important things in life. In fact, research in the field of psychology suggests about 70% of individuals experience positive psychological growth from difficult times, including a deeper sense of self and purpose, a greater appreciation for life and loved ones, and an increased capacity for altruism, empathy, and desire to act for the greater good.

These statements and findings are no less applicable to organizations, which likewise have been impacted by the challenging times. The current situation calls for organizational leaders to have empathy, to acknowledge that these times are hard on all of us. But leaders also need to remind their management, staff, members, and supporters that, as Albert Einstein said, "in the middle of difficulty, lies opportunity." From organizational challenges, come organizational opportunities.

As WORC moves into its 42nd year, we face both challenges and opportunities. Foremost amongst these, of course, is dealing with the ongoing impact of a global pandemic. However, we are also working on developing a new Strategic Plan and a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan as well as undergoing a Board Self-Assessment process. In the middle of all of these challenges, lies the opportunity for us to define who we want to be as an organization going forward, to define who our member groups and communities are calling us to be.

As your Board chair, I am working hard with the Board directors to make the most of this time of transition to demonstrate strong, engaged, supportive, and inclusive leadership—leadership that acts in close collaboration and communication with staff to realize our shared goals of furthering the important work of our network and making WORC the best we can be. Additionally, I would like to thank our members, who partner with us in these efforts. We will be reaching out to you as we move forward with these plans, and I invite and encourage you all to help us define who we want to be as an organization for the next 40 years!



A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda Leeuwrik".



# 250 People Come Together for *Gather* Virtual Film Screening

In April, WORC, Western Native Voice, North Dakota Native Vote, and We Are Montana organized a virtual screening of the critically acclaimed documentary film *Gather*. *Gather* follows the stories of native people on the frontlines of a growing movement to reconnect with spiritual and cultural identities that were devastated by genocide. An Indigenous chef (Nephi Craig) embarks on an ambitious project to reclaim ancient foodways on the Apache reservation; in South Dakota, a gifted Lakota high school student (Elsie DuBray), raised on a buffalo ranch, is proving her tribe’s native wisdom through her passion for science; and a group of young men of the Yurok tribe in Northern California are struggling to keep their culture alive and rehabilitate the habitat of their sacred salmon. All these stories combine to show

how reclaiming and recovering ancient foodways is a way forward for Native Americans to bring back health and vitality to their people.

366 people from 37 states and 4 Canadian provinces registered for the event; 250 joined the live screening. Nicole Donaghy of North Dakota Native Vote facilitated a thoughtful and inspiring Q&A discussion with *Gather*’s Director Sanjay Rawal and two cast members, Nephi Craig and Samuel Gensaw.

We encourage you to check out *Gather* and to explore [www.gather.film/resources](http://www.gather.film/resources) for resources

Contact WORC if you are interested in organizing a screening

*Gather* is now available to stream on iTunes (US/UK/Canada), Amazon (US/UK, and Vimeo-on-Demand (rest of the world).

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# Around the Region

## Dakota Resource Council

Seven DRC members from across the state and invitees representing Badlands Conservation Alliance and ND Wildlife Federation, spent almost an hour and a half with Michael Regan, the Administrator of the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Mark Smith, Director of EPA's Region 8.



Members discussed matters that are directly impacting them, and the Administrator was an interested and engaged participant. Each person told a little bit about themselves, bringing a personal perspective to these areas of concern. Specific suggestions and requests were given to the Administrator, and because they came from directly impacted people, their stories and requests were powerful.

Almost everyone asked that the EPA do a better job as a backstop for state regulations, to hold Gov. Burgum to his goal of ND being carbon neutral by 2030, to ensure stronger, better-enforced regulations to protect North Dakota's air and water, and to not back down when the state government tries to legislate the federal government from doing its job.

## Dakota Rural Action

The Keystone XL Pipeline is officially dead. On Wednesday, June 9th, TC Energy announced it is formally abandoning the project which has been stalled for over a decade by the unflagging efforts of people fighting for the protection of water, land, and communities. DRA



expresses their deep gratitude for the incredible work of tens of thousands of dedicated individuals and groups including

Indigenous people and organizations along with conservationists, farmers, ranchers, and others. However, one looming threat remains for landowners in MT, SD and NE: pipeline easements that cut through private land. (See TC Energy Cancels Keystone XL on page 6). In other news, DRA members and staff are organizing with producers and other organizations to form the SD Local Foods Coalition. At the first convening, DRA members brought up local branding and were successful in getting the group to quickly agree on the adoption and use of the "SoDak Grown" brand and logo that has come out of local Homegrown chapter work. This is huge! And furthermore, the group agreed to also pursue USDA approval for the logo's use on local meat labeling.

## Idaho Organization of Resource Councils

Idaho Organization of Resource Councils has been hard at work across Southern Idaho. Portneuf Resource Council (PRC), IORC's chapter in Pocatello, will soon enter the second year of their radio show Sustainable Idaho. The show is a partnership between PRC and Idaho State University Sustainability Club and discusses issues relating to climate change impacts across Idaho. The weekly show can be heard locally as well as online at <https://www.kisu.org/show/sustainable-idaho>.



Visión 2C Resource Council is IORC's Canyon County chapter and has

been working with a team of eight local organizations, including Idaho Immigrant Resource Alliance, to address farm worker safety issues through the pandemic. When the recent heat wave in the West began sickening farm workers, leading to deaths, we began a rapid response strategy to collect donations of water, cooling devices, shade supplies, and electrolyte drinks to distribute to farm workers in Southwestern Idaho.

The Agriculture and Food Task Force has coordinated with local property owners who have graciously donated portions of their land to be used for food cultivation. One field is in the heart of Meridian in a neighborhood slated for redevelopment. This 1/16 acre plot is now home to Oaxaca Green Corn, sunflowers, and various cover crops. The corn will be distributed to community members once it's harvested. The second field, a three acre plot in Canyon County wine country, has laid bare for years. It is now home to cover crops that are generously watered through the donation of shared water rights by the property owner and a local farm owner who supplied irrigation pipes.

## Northern Plains Resource Council

Nearly 20% of energy consumed in this country is used by commercial buildings. To effectively fight climate change, energy conservation needs to be part of the solution. While energy efficiency and renewable energy upgrades to buildings will conserve energy and save property owners more money than they cost over the long term, the upfront costs pose a barrier for many Montana businesses.

Six years ago, Northern Plains Resource Council set out to overcome this barrier by bringing PACE (Property Assessed Capital Enhancements) to Montana. Northern Plains members in every corner of the



state banded together to pass this law. It took dozens of strategy meetings, hundreds of one-on-one meetings with stakeholders, lobby days, rallies, phone calls, and letters to the editor to get this bill to the Governor's desk. Other Montana organizations thought it impossible to pass such legislation in a year with an especially challenging legislature on conservation issues. Not Northern Plains. They proved that when everyday people come together with a vision for a better future, they can make the impossible possible.

## Oregon Rural Action

In partnership with the Oregon Food Bank, ORA hosted two virtual community conversations centered around local food systems through a program called FEAST; one based in Union County (English) and the other based in Morrow and Umatilla Counties (English and Spanish). These conversations and the community-centered ideas they produced will serve as the basis for community organizing initiatives to address food insecurity and strengthen our rural food systems. ORA continued their rural health equity campaign now focused on increasing access to COVID-19 vaccines among "essential" agricultural workers and Spanish and Mesoamerican Indigenous-language speaking communities in northeastern Oregon.



## Powder River Basin Resource Council

This spring, PRBRC held their 2021 Reclaiming & Growing Wyoming's Future webinar series. This year's series was targeted toward energy workers and their families to provide information on how to navigate these challenges.

The first session, Family Resources for a Changing Wyoming Workforce, featured Robin Cooley, Director of the Wyoming Department of Workforce Services; Katie Hogarty, Director of External Relations for CLIMB Wyoming, and Dr. Kimberly Dale, President of Western Wyoming Community College.

The second event, Tools for Tough Times During Wyoming's Energy Transition, brought together speakers Lynne Huskinson, a former Blackjewel coal miner; Clint Hanes with the Wyoming Department of Family Services, and Dr. Hollis Hackman, who has had a 30+-year career in mental healthcare.



The series wrapped up with Resources & Opportunities of the New Economy, featuring panelists Jay Stender of The WY Ranch, Kelli

Roemer with the Resources and Communities Research Group at Montana State University, and Josh Dorrell and Ron Gullberg from the Wyoming Business Council.

All of the webinars are available on Powder River's

website [www.powderriverbasin.org/what-we-do/coal/](http://www.powderriverbasin.org/what-we-do/coal/) and their YouTube Channel.

## Western Colorado Alliance

WCA has had some big successes during this year's legislative session. Three bills which were high-priority for the Alliance — the so-called "Animal Shares Act," the "Suicide Prevention, Intervention & Postvention Act," and a bill regulating rural electric co-ops — all passed and were signed into law by Governor Jared Polis.

WCA's clean energy program has also seen some major victories recently, including the announcement of a major solar project south of Delta, Colorado, which has come about as a result of the local electric co-op managing to extricate itself from its relationship with Tri-State Generation & Transmission. Holy Cross Energy, a rural electric cooperative serving an area stretching from Battlement Mesa through Parachute and Rifle, to Vail, Carbondale, and Aspen, has adopted a plan to reach 100% renewable supply by 2030. And after years of organizing from our Alliance's Mesa County affiliate, the Mesa County Board of Commissioners recently approved a CPACE (Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy) financing program for Mesa County residents, which will provide local commercial property owners with a powerful financing mechanism for new, clean energy.



## Western Native Voice

Western Native Voice is currently training organizers across the state for the redistricting campaign scheduled to kick off this summer. Also, this summer, WNV is celebrating their 10th Anniversary with a series of membership drive events in each tribal community in Montana, and released a new logo.

For a legislative scorecard breaking down the Montana legislature's actions on voting rights, MMIP legislation, and other important bills, check out their website [www.westernnativevoice.org](http://www.westernnativevoice.org). WNV's Community Spotlight project continues with a feature of Montana's first full-time Native woman lobbyist.



The American Indian Rights Fund and the ACLU of Montana filed the case in the Yellowstone County district court on behalf of the Blackfeet Nation, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, Fort Belknap Indian Community, the Northern Cheyenne Tribe and Western Native Voice. The lawsuit challenges two new laws they say disenfranchise American Indian voters. The case centers on two new laws that end same-day voter registration and prevent people from turning in someone else's absentee ballot if they are paid to do so.





# TC Energy Cancels Keystone XL; Fight to protect communities continues

**TC Energy announced that it has canceled the controversial Keystone XL pipeline project after a thirteen-year effort.**

**O**n June 9th, TC Energy announced that it canceled the controversial Keystone XL pipeline project after a thirteen-year effort that encountered fierce local organizing in Montana, South Dakota, Nebraska, and beyond.

For over a decade, our members, staff, and so many thousands of others across the country have worked to stop this dirty and dangerous tar-sands pipeline from threatening our land, water, and communities. Dakota Rural Action (DRA), in South Dakota, and Northern Plains Resource Council, in Montana, have worked with members, and Indigenous leaders along the proposed route to ensure local communities have a voice in the decision.

“This victory is a testament to the hard work and tenacity of everyday people standing up to protect our land, water, and climate,” said Dena Hoff, a Glendive, MT farmer and member of Northern Plains Resource Council. “We have worked for over a decade here in Montana, alongside our allies at the Fort Peck Assiniboiné and Sioux tribes and other Tribal nations, to prove that rural prosperity does not result from foreign energy corporations like TC Energy. Our communities thrive when we build our economies and support one another at the local level, protecting our irreplaceable resources. We are proud to have protected three historic rivers important to our economy and culture – the Missouri, Yellowstone,

and Milk – from this ill-advised, unsustainable tar-sands project.”

One looming threat remains for landowners in Montana, South Dakota, and Nebraska: pipeline easements that cut through private land, many of which were obtained by TC Energy under duress and through the use of eminent domain. “It’s overwhelming to think about--having been harassed for thirteen years, and now it’s over,” said DRA Member and KXL easement-affected landowner John Harter. “This was the right decision for the tribes and for affected landowners, but now we need to have our property rights restored.” Dakota Rural Action is continuing its campaign to pressure the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission (PUC) to revoke the state permit for this abandoned project, and for TC Energy to release the easements they have acquired, especially those gained through the use or threat of eminent domain.

Local communities continue to organize against multinational pipeline companies, including the powerful Indigenous-led resistance to Enbridge Line 3 in Northern Minnesota, and the growing pressure to pause the illegally-operating Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) until it can undergo full environmental review. But the announcement that Keystone XL is officially dead is a victory we can all celebrate.

*(Congressional Seats Continued from Page 1)*

of 13.2%, almost double of our current rate. With the increased population in our region, our political power will also increase through the reapportionment of an additional congressional seat for Colorado, Montana, and Oregon.

While the West and the South saw the most growth since 2010, this has been steadily occurring for years. It’s assumed that gains in these areas would benefit Republicans in the Electoral College, but the reality is the politics of these regions have been changing. Donald J. Trump and President Biden each won 4 of the 10 fastest growing states in the country, making fair maps that don’t gerrymander our region’s districts even more crucial. It is also important to note that Republicans will be in charge of drawing new maps in 187 congressional districts this year while Democrats will be in charge of 75. In our region, Republicans have control of drawing the maps in Wyoming, North Dakota, Nebraska, and South Dakota. Democrats control the process in Oregon, there’s bipartisan control in Idaho and Montana, and independent control in Colorado.

The combination of changing political trends and who is in control of the process means that there is a path to fair maps for our region. But our voices are crucial. Nobody knows our communities better than us. We can’t let a

handful of politicians take community districting out of our hands so they can pick and choose who counts, tearing our neighborhoods apart for the next ten years. By joining together to speak out for fair districting, we can make our communities whole and deliver what our schools and families need for a decade to come.



## Proposed Coal Export Terminals Officially Defeated

**In communities already affected by poor air quality from train exhaust and industrial air pollution, the additional pollution from these 16 trains per day would have been a major cause for concern.**

**T**he coal industry has been fighting to build coal export terminals in the Pacific Northwest for over a decade. Now, with the US Supreme Court's dismissal of the final appeal to obtain water quality permits for Millennium Bulk Terminals, the last remaining terminal proposal in Washington State, the fight is officially over.

"Hopefully our elected leaders will take the message and start investing in a durable economy that works for land, people and the climate instead of chasing international pipe dreams. Real prosperity comes from a diversified local economy. Coal exports were never going to be the answer," said Northern Plains Resource Council board member Steve Charter.

Had the Millennium Bulk Terminals been developed, an estimated 44 million metric tons of coal would have been shipped from the Powder River and Uinta Basins. The Lummi Nation, located in Puget Sound, was deeply concerned that this coal transport would cross treaty-protected fishing grounds and degrade the surrounding environment.

Up to 16 coal trains a day were expected to pass between the Powder River Basin and Longview, Washington. This would have impacted how fast rail communities throughout the High Plains and Pacific Northwest would be able to respond to public safety issues.

"I breathed an enormous sigh of joy and gratitude when the Department of Ecology denied Millennium Bulk Terminals the right to build in our backyard," said Rev. Kathleen Patton, a citizen of Longview.

In communities already affected by poor air quality from train exhaust and industrial air pollution, the additional pollution from these 16 trains per day would have been a major cause for concern.

"From cancers to asthma and strokes, our community cannot bear more of these burdens," said Longview oncology and hematology doctor Stephen Chandler. "If this project had been built, the increase in cancer rates expected would mean more lives unnecessarily cut short."

The massive influx of coal would have come at a time when many of the world's major coal users are turning away from coal-power in favor of alternative energy. Lighthouse Resources, the developer of the Millennium Bulk Terminals project, filed for bankruptcy in December of 2020. The company's collapse is a testament to this worldwide energy transition.

The Supreme Court's dismissal of the appeal is a step in the right direction toward a greener future. According to EcoJustice, approximately seven million tons of carbon dioxide would have entered the atmosphere annually from burning the coal exported through Millennium Bulk Terminals. Thanks to efforts from community members, Tribal nations, and grassroots organizations, a project that would have worsened an already dire climate situation was stopped.

"This decision proves that anything is possible, even defeating the powerful fossil fuel industry," said Michael Lang, Conservation Director for Friends of the Columbia Gorge. "The Columbia River Gorge, communities along the rail line, and the climate are all better off now that this massive coal terminal proposal is finally defeated."





# WORC Comms Team Supports the Stop Line 3 Movement

**The march was part of a gathering of thousands of Indigenous leaders and nonindigenous allies coming together from around the U.S. to stand up against the building of the Line 3 tar-sands pipeline.**

On June 7th, 2021, Water Protectors marched from a campground at the headwaters of the Mississippi River to a bridge that crosses the sacred waters where it's less than ten feet wide. The march was part of the Treaty People Gathering, a gathering of thousands of indigenous leaders and nonindigenous allies coming together from around the U.S. to stand up against the building of the Line 3 tar-sands pipeline. The pipeline, if completed, will cross the Mississippi River twice as well as run through or under hundreds of other rivers, streams, and fragile wetlands. The project violates treaties and endangers the clean water, fish, and wild rice that the Anishinaabe depend on. It also threatens the largest watershed in North America.

Songs, prayers, and drumming rose up to join the dragonflies soaring overhead. Once the march reached the bridge, Protectors created a chalk mural calling for Enbridge Energy, a Canadian multinational energy corporation, and the Biden Administration to #StopLine3 and honor the treaty rights that have been in place since 1855. A group of Tribal elders and supporters made their way through the wetlands to Enbridge's drilling platform to perform ceremonies and build an occupying camp. Meanwhile, other nonviolent actions took place at other sites along the construction route, drawing aggressive actions by the Hubbard County Sheriff's Department, including weaponizing a Department of Justice helicopter to blow debris into the eyes of demonstrators.

WORC's communications team was on the ground, supporting Indigenous allies. The team provided media support, wrote an article for Esperanza Project featuring Indigenous leaders, and shared the images (on next page) and video collected with organizations like Honor the Earth, Indigenous Environmental Network, Rise Coalition, and others to get the word out during the Gathering.

The Treaty People Gathering marked the start of a "summer of action" against Line 3 that has continued through this writing. The Hubbard County Sheriff's Department's violent crackdown against Water Protectors is also ongoing.

## **Learn more about the Stop Line 3 Movement at:**

The Esperanza Project:

*Treaty People Gathering boosts pressure on disputed oil pipeline*

The New York Times:

*Biden Administration Backs Oil Sands Pipeline Project*





*Indigenous leaders and nonindigenous allies march toward one of two locations where Enbridge Energy wants to cross the Mississippi River with its Line 3 tar-sands pipeline, endangering the largest watershed in North America.*

*Thousands of Water Protectors showed up to stand up for the Anishinaabe treaty rights that require that Minnesota's water be kept pristine for healthy fish populations and wild rice crops that the Anishinaabe rely on as their foodways.*



*The bridge crossing the Mississippi was turned into a beautiful chalk mural demanding the Biden administration revoke the Line 3 pipeline permit.*

*As the Water Protectors occupied the bridge, Tribal elders made their way to the water's edge praying, singing, and making offerings to the sacred water. Many of these elders then set up Firelight Camp to occupy the drill pad on the banks of the river. Their presence ensured Enbridge couldn't drill under the river.*



*Water Protectors from all over the U.S. and Canada added their drumming, singing, and prayers to the whole, creating a peaceful movement as they occupied the drilling platform where Enbridge planned to use fracking technology to drill under the Mississippi. Since this photo was taken, one of Enbridge's drill-sites elsewhere blew out, dumping dangerous chemicals into the water.*

# Organizers Connect Virtually at CEO

**T**wenty-nine organizers from across the WORC network came together in early June for WORC's first ever virtual Continuing Education for Organizers (CEO) training. CEO is typically held in-person but this year was over Zoom. This annual training is designed for organizers in the WORC network who have been on the job less than five years. CEO combines training and skills development with peer-based and applied learning.

"I left with more than I had hoped!," it "felt like we were in community," and,

"Loved this. This session totally surprised me, and felt REALLY tangible and applicable," were just some reflections from the participants.

CEO topics vary from year-to-year but always provide opportunities for organizers to build relationships with each other, tell and hear organizing stories, and share lessons learned. Learning to establish a self-care practice, organizing to shift power in this political moment, and cultivating effective leadership were highlights this year.

In the session on self-care, organizers were invited to read "This Is What 'Self-Care' REALLY Means..." by Brianna West. Brianna writes "True self-care is not salt baths and chocolate cake, it is making the choice to build a life you don't need to regularly escape from." With this theme in mind, organizers went through an exercise to establish their own self-care practice. They were invited to choose one area from their life (for example, family and relationships, personal well being, work, culture, finances) and spend some time reflecting on what needs attention. Participants were encouraged to listen to their inner wisdom to make a self care plan that is realistic, simple, and helps them show up powerfully to their work.

The session titled, Organizing to Shift Power in this Political Moment was led by Kate Bitz, an Organizer

and Trainer with the Western States Center. Organizers and members have experienced an increase in political violence and anti-democratic measures in our states, particularly in the past year. Not only are our members and neighbors threatened, but community organizing is increasingly difficult in the face of these measures that seek to diminish people-power. The Western States Center has been tracking and organizing against the white nationalist groups who are behind many of the incidents of violence and anti-democratic measures in our states. Our organizers were able to work through real life scenarios from the past year and build our capacity to respond and organize against these movements.

The Cultivating Effective Leadership session included a panel of organizers who shared stories about the successes and challenges of developing good leaders. Organizers spent time in small groups coming up with and sharing tips for identifying and cultivating effective leadership. Tips included:

- Ensure you are seeking out the people directly affected by the issue you are working on for potential involvement and leadership.
- Create concrete pathways for new leaders to engage in training or leadership opportunities, like a year-long rotating youth board member position on your board.
- Create small opportunities to build leadership consistently (like helping host house meetings, bringing food, etc). Just starting to make those baby steps to leadership asks of people.

WORC is excited about future opportunities to connect organizers and to find more ways to make us the best we can be.

## WISH YOU HAD A MATCH?

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<http://www.worc.org/support-worc-2/>





# 10 YEARS

NATIVES LEADING NATIONS



## WORC Member Group Hits 10-year Milestone

Western Native Voice, a Native-led organization focused on creating change to address issues in Tribal communities is celebrating it's 10 year anniversary in 2021. Launched in 2011 in Montana, WNV expanded their efforts into North Dakota in 2018, into Idaho in 2020, and has plans to explore expansion into South Dakota, Wyoming, Oregon, Washington, Kansas, and Nebraska, states with Native-dense populations. WNV envisions themselves as a powerful regional organization that has state-based groups building power and creating change locally.

In recent years, through the dedicated work of Western Native Voice, Native leaders, and other social justice organizations, Native Americans have begun to increase and expand their civic presence in Montana. WNV efforts have led to the largest state legislative caucus and the most Native Americans serving in a state legislature, twenty-five and eleven respectively. The Native caucus lends an influential voice in creating effective and culturally reflective change. In 2018, Montana also elected its first two Native American women to an urban legislative district in Montana. The electoral influence of the Native vote has established valuable allies among Montana's elected officials, both Native and non-Native, who are committed to working toward effective policy change for Native Americans.

More recently, WNV has trained over 1000 leaders in the last three years, has regular email contact with 3493 of our 11,237 members, identified 7945 of our members in the Voter Activation Network (online voter database) and engages with 12,416 Facebook followers. As a result of this direct engagement in communities in 2018 and 2020, 2,463 more Natives expressed commitment to their work and joined Western Native Voice.

### LOOKING TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Western Native Voice has outgrown their current office space, and are looking for a new location for their expanding staff and programs. WNV's goal comes after ten years of serving the rural and urban Native American communities in Montana rather than merely resolving immediate needs. Western Native Voice is working towards a more permanent office structure to build or renovate in the Billings, MT area.

To give to their building fund, visit their website at <https://westernnativevoice.org/looking-forward-to-the-next-10-years-and-beyond/>.

WORC is busy creating *Orphaned by Design*, a mapping project that shows where orphaned oil and gas wells are located throughout the West. Orphaned wells are drilling projects that have been left behind by their operator and not reclaimed. Inadequate regulations have allowed companies to conduct drilling operations without needing to prove they can pay for cleanup at the end, which has created the orphaned wells crisis we face today.

*Orphaned by Design* will give people the ability to see the orphaned wells that are close to their communities. With this information, people can then urge their policymakers to keep the oil and gas industry accountable for the messes they've made, including requiring bonding amounts for future projects that reflect the true cost of well cleanup.





# WORC's Federal Priorities Tied to Infrastructure, Climate Debate

BOLD  
FARMER

The next few weeks could determine whether several of WORC's legislative priorities for 2021 will be passed into law. Funding for orphaned wells and abandoned mine cleanup could see movement soon as part of the effort to pass a bipartisan infrastructure bill that is gathering momentum on Capitol Hill.

Additional reclamation funding may also be included in a broader infrastructure, climate, tax, and social policy bill. Renewable energy incentives; funding for rural electric cooperatives to close expensive, outdated coal-fired power plants and reinvest in local communities; stronger reclamation bonding rules; and more may also be included. The centerpiece of the sweeping bill would be a national clean energy standard that ratchets up the amount of electricity generated from wind, solar, and other sources until carbon dioxide emissions are phased out completely. This legislation is not expected to gain Republican support and will be passed instead using the budget reconciliation process, which is exempt from the Senate filibuster.

While moderates of both parties are pushing for movement on the bipartisan infrastructure bill now, at least a dozen Democratic Senators have pledged "no climate, no deal," recognizing that this may be their only chance to pass climate change legislation because the Republicans have the chance to win back control of the House and Senate in the 2022 mid-term elections.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) has pledged not to pass an infrastructure package that doesn't "reduce carbon pollution at the scale commensurate with the climate crisis," but Congressional leaders have not yet brokered an agreement that can pass. With Democrats holding razor-thin majorities in both the House and Senate, there is no margin for error. The major decisions about what will be included in the larger bill as well as the overall spending and revenue levels will be made in the coming weeks, and set the stage for momentous votes this fall.

To get the latest updates from WORC and alerts that will help you weigh in with key decision-makers as Congress considers new climate and renewable energy policy, sign up for our monthly electronic newsletter at <https://www.worc.org/newsletter-signup/>.

## NEWS



### WORC SUPPORTS REPRESENTATIVE DEBRA HAALAND FOR SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR

DECEMBER 17, 2020  
Above: "Representative Debra Haaland (NM-01)" by Morris Clean Air Force  
BY: NC 58 3.0 Representative Haaland's leadership as Interior Secretary is a transformative step towards repairing relationships with Indigenous communities and correcting the course. ... Continued



### WESTERN NATIVE VOICE COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT: LAMPLANT

MARCH 2, 2021  
Stepping Up Through Volunteering We are excited to share with you Community Spotlight designed to highlight grassroots organizing and change from across Indian Country. This month we would like to introduce Blackfeet tribal member, volunteer, ... Continued



### FIVE THINGS VILSACK MUST DO TO REVIVE PEOPLE'S DEPARTMENT

FEBRUARY 26, 2021  
Tom Vilsack was once again confirmed as Secretary of the United States Department of Agriculture by the Senate, 92-7. Vilsack served as Secretary of the Obama Administration and is likely to become the longest serving Secretary of the Department of Agriculture.



### HOW GOOD STATE POLICY HELPS WYOMING THRIVE

FEBRUARY 18, 2021  
These stories are part of WORC's Homegrown Stories Narrative Project. Powder River Basin Resource Council, These Two Homegrown producers show how good policy helped bolster a local food system. ... Continued

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# 2021 Legislative Wrap Up

The 2021 Legislative Session saw some big wins and disappointing losses for our member groups.

## Colorado

Western Colorado Alliance secured two major victories during this legislative session. The first, HB 21-1131, will require that electric generating companies that distribute power to Colorado cooperatives follow strict transparency guidelines and ensure consumers are being fairly represented. HB 21-1119 will integrate the concept of “postvention” into the care of those affected by suicide. This means that people who have attempted suicide will be included in the conversation of how to address suicide rates in communities. This bill is the first of its kind to be adopted in the United States.



owners to secure 100% upfront financing for energy efficiency and conservation upgrades on commercial properties. Another victory was the tabling of SB 379 thanks to efforts by Northern Plains members. SB 379 would have forced Northwestern Energy customers to pay for the \$1.9 billion of business costs associated with the aging Colstrip power plant.



## North Dakota

Two bills supported by Dakota Resource Council about corporate accountability for oil wells at risk of abandonment and oil and gas bonding failed to pass (HB 1054 and SB 2064). On a brighter note, North Dakota Native Vote helped secure an enormous win when SB 2304, authored by Representative Ruth Buffalo, passed the State Senate and House. SB 2304 requires Native American history curriculum to be taught to students K-12. This is the first time a bill of this kind has passed in North Dakota.



## Wyoming

Two harmful bills that passed Wyoming’s legislative session were HB 166 and SF 136, both of which added steps to the coal plant retirement process making it more difficult to transition to sustainable energy. A big win for Powder River Basin Resource Council was the defeat of SF 16, which would have gotten rid of the current statutes that allow for net-metering for backyard wind and rooftop solar energy production. Had this bill passed, renewable energy customers would not be able to receive credit for the power they generate.



## Idaho

The Idaho Organization of Resource Councils opposed multiple bills relating to voter laws that passed in either the State House or House and Senate, including HB 344, HB 223, and SB 1110. Respectively, these bills will limit people’s ability to register to vote, submit their ballots, and pass ballot initiatives. An IORC-supported bill that did pass was HB 126, which allows the growth, transport, manufacture, and research of industrial hemp with no more than 0.3% THC. This does not allow for the selling of THC hemp products.



## Montana

The American Indian Voting Rights Act, HB 613, which was supported by Western Native Voice and would have improved voting rights for Native Americans in Montana, was defeated in the State Senate. WNV also fought for the continuation of programs and resources that address the MMIP crisis through the passage of HB 35, HB 36, HB 98, and SB 4. C-PACE was authorized through the passage of SB 127, which will allow property



# Urban Food Forests Provide Space for Community Connection, Education and Nourishment

The Sheridan Food Forest sits alongside Big Goose Creek, tucked into what was once a BMX Park in the community of Sheridan, Wyoming. The once weedy, hard packed lot is now filled with plants and trees native to Wyoming, and supplemented with fruit trees and common vegetables. The food forest seeks to provide food to anyone in the community who is willing to forage for it. Carol LeResche found inspiration for this community-run project after visiting the Beacon Hill Food Forest in Seattle which has sparked 70 other Food Forests across the United States as of 2018. “I saw what they were doing at Beacon Hill and thought that could work really well here in Sheridan. So I gathered a group of people together, most of them are Powder River members and started a committee,” explained Carol. Powder River Basin Resource Council is also a fiscal sponsor of the Sheridan Food Forest.

As a child, Carol would follow in her father’s footsteps through their family garden, snacking on freshly picked peas along the way. Today, she facilitates the volunteers in the Food Forest and coordinates forest projects for grade school student groups from nearby schools, passing on the knowledge from her father, her own organic gardening background, and her research of Wyoming’s wildscapes. “Kids are really very curious about stuff. They want to taste things and they want to learn about things. And they learn very well by doing,” said Carol.

The difference between a food forest and a community garden is that you won’t see plots in a food forest; no section of the food forest belongs to just one individual. The entire forest is available to anyone in the community, whether they are a volunteer that helped plant the food or a passerby needing some asparagus or garlic, to supplement their dinner that night. Food Forests have the ability to increase biodiversity, offer erosion control, provide food and shelter for pollinators and other wildlife, and serve as a gathering spot for community events as well as having the potential to improve community health.

“I want to fill this up with food, and have pathways through the food instead of having all of this grass,” explained Carol. “I really want it to be full of food for people. And, of course, the things that feed the bees, and have it be healthy, and a haven because we get a lot of birds in here that eat the fruit as well.” In addition to fruits and vegetables for people to forage for, the forest also has a pollinator garden that the volunteers run a census on each year to track what pollinators are visiting the food forest and how the garden can adapt to include different plants that help pollinators thrive.



*Carol LeResche poses for a portrait in a blossoming fruit tree in the Sheridan Food Forest.*

Once Carol got the idea for the Food Forest, her community ties and engagement helped her put a committee and the project into full motion. “Carol is great at motivating people to come together and help out,” remarked one of the Forest volunteers. Calling her contacts to recruit community members to help with various projects over the years is largely how she has established the workforce that keeps the food forest free of invasive weeds and blooming each year. “I think they like working outside. I think they like the idea. Many volunteers were part of the originating committee and they’d like to see it through. It’s nice to come here, even though it’s hard work,” said Carol.



The Food Forest plot of land was an abandoned BMX park right before the Park District and the City of Sheridan allowed the food forest committee to plant bushes, trees and other perennials in that space. The committee asked that a member of the Sheridan Recreation District, Chuck Walters, join the originating committee. The committee then created an informational pamphlet for the Forest. Chuck believed in the ideas and talked with the sport groups involved with adjoining Thorne Rider Park and was an integral part of winning the city's approval of the Food Forest.

Carol initially overheard on the radio station that an old BMX park in Sheridan was needing a new use. The park had been causing erosion into Big Goose Creek and had to be deconstructed. The food forest committee secured a Specialty Crop grant from the Wyoming Agriculture Department. The trees that were bought with that money in 2016 are now bearing apples and pears as the forest continues to grow and the soil begins to improve.

Once the land was made available to the Food Forest, Carol connected with the organization, Rooted in Wyoming for a 50/50 shared grant through the Wyoming State Forestry Division. Located in Sheridan, this organization helps schools develop gardens for kids to learn about gardening. The Food Forest's role for the grant this year was to create a hugelkultur demonstration plot. Hugelkultur is a German word meaning hill culture. It is a horticultural technique where a mound is constructed from decaying wood debris and other compostable biomass plant materials and then covered in soil. This technique mimics how food grows naturally in a forest. As the wood decays, it replenishes the soil and the wood underneath also retains water making for a more sustainable gardening technique. Volunteers came out to learn about the process and then built the hugelkultur mound. Now it's used as an example for others to learn about the method.

The previous year, the Food Forest created an educational plot along a section of fence called the Wyoming Thicket, that includes chokecherries and other native plants that locals see naturally growing in the draws and along roadways. The food forest also mimics how plants and trees grow naturally in the forest where there is little understory. Understory is the base layer of vegetation that grows underneath the main canopy in a forest. Volunteers removed any grass and understory because eventually, these plants will grow so thick that these grasses and small plants won't grow back which is what happens naturally in the forest. "So we do things like that, that people can relate to when they walk through here and they can say 'Oh, yeah, I know what this is. I see it when I go out in the spring all the time,'" explained Carol.



*Students from a near by school learn how to plant asparagus with food Forest volunteers.*

Future projects include installing educational signs with QR codes for visitors to learn about the plants for a walking tour of the forest and a forager hunt project for children which is part of a community event called Picnic on the Pathway. "I think it's an eye-opening experience and I think it brings kids closer to nature to learn about these things," said Carol.

Foraging for food has the power to bring people closer to their food source and to their community. "Pick it, take it home, eat it. Know what you've got here. So you can set a season for your food. It's just kind of fun. I love foraging. I like to go out and look for stuff to eat," said Carol.

Beyond strengthening community ties and our connection to food and nature, Food Forests may have the potential to address food insecurity in communities. However, the Food Forest concept is still very early in its development and there hasn't been a lot of research on whether or not this model can help address lack of access to fresh food and food insecurity but there have been studies that show their potential. One study revealed that 222 acres of food forest plots could provide the entire city of Burlington, VT with the recommended daily fruit intake. "Ours isn't there yet (to address food insecurity), but imagine how many people could care for themselves if there were food forests in all of these little community pockets," said Carol.



*The entrance to the food forest.*



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