

# Western Organizing Review

A publication of the Western Organization of Resource Councils



## Historic Victory: Dakota Resource Council organizing efforts stop carbon pipeline

After nearly two years of organizing by Dakota Resource Council (DRC), the North Dakota Public Service Commission (NDPSC) voted 3-0 to deny Summit Carbon Solutions' application to construct a carbon dioxide pipeline in August. The pipeline was designed to carry CO<sub>2</sub> captured at ethanol plants throughout the midwest and deliver it to be injected into underground rock formations just north of Bismarck, ND.

"This victory is a testament to the strength of our community and the power of collective action across the political spectrum," said Scott Skokos, DRC's Executive Director.

The Commission's decision reinforces the importance of community engagement and highlights the potential for transformative change when individuals and organizations work collaboratively towards shared goals. It serves as a resounding message that determined efforts to protect the environment and defend the interests of local communities can yield positive outcomes.

DRC was the first group in North Dakota to take a stand against the proposed pipeline in October 2021. DRC organized around opposing an out-of-state pipeline company that would benefit its investors at the expense of North Dakota landowners, communities, and the environment. They held a series of landowner meetings across the 320-mile project footprint and soon they were working with a diverse coalition of stakeholders, including landowners, farmers, ranchers, developers, county commissions, school boards, and residents, united by a common cause to protect our natural resources.

There were setbacks, especially during the legislative session where they failed to obtain eminent domain reform. The session, however, did prove to be a great space to build camaraderie and confidence. Dozens of people submitted written testimony and oral testimony resulting in many hours of legislative hearings. They also built power through county commission resolutions, resulting in hundreds of petition signatures and six unanimous county resolutions against eminent domain for the project.

*(Continued on page 4)*

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.

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## *WORC's Network*

Dakota Resource Council

Dakota Rural Action

Idaho Organization of Resource Councils

North Dakota Native Vote

Northern Plains Resource Council

Oregon Rural Action

Powder River Basin Resource Council

Western Colorado Alliance

Western Native Voice

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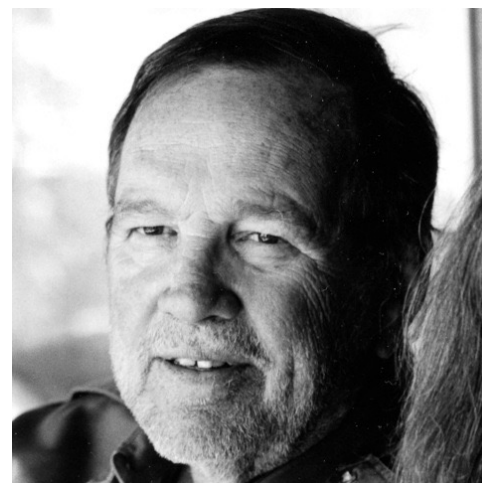
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Our ranch sits in Clear Creek Valley, an agricultural oasis off the east slope of Wyoming's Big Horn Mountains. We've built our ranch cabin, bunkhouse, bath house, greenhouses, high tunnels, organic heirloom produce gardens, et al in the riparian zone along the creek, shaded by magnificent old Cottonwoods and many Box Elders, surrounded by a plethora of nesting songbirds, Turkeys, Whitetail and Mule deer and Antelope. Truly idyllic. Every few years we do get a bit anxious when mountain runoff coincides with rain and Clear Creek gets bank high for a few days, but that passes soon enough.



Recently, though, thoughts of Clear Creek overrunning its banks have grown from passing concern to near angst some years. Record snowfall and persistent spring rains are just a small part of the increasingly erratic weather patterns climate change is producing worldwide. Hundred-year or even 500-year flood events seem to come far too regularly these days, making us wonder if some spring we'll see a torrent big enough to carry away what we've worked 27 years to build.

I'm not alone in my worry, and I certainly do believe the multitude of climate scientists warning the world of the immediate need to limit civilization's spewing of CO2 and other greenhouse gasses into our atmosphere. I've lived my entire long adult life in Alaska and Wyoming – fossil fuel-dependent states – and have accepted coal, oil, and gas production as a beneficial fact of life. But a century of increased global population and burning of fossil fuels has put the world on the razor's edge of disaster. This is hard for many in the West to accept, but it is true.

And this is why so many of us have come together over recent years to work for the common-sense regulation of fossil-fuel developers. WORC has worked long and hard to organize our members to counter their influence, and it actually feels like we're seeing the industry's grip loosen a bit. We've seen energy markets turn away from fossil fuels as prices of wind and solar plummeted. The Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) included tax incentives in that direction. Rural electric co-op members are pressuring their boards to replace coal power with cheaper, cleaner renewables.

Our wins over the last decade show we can make a difference. But let's not get lulled into thinking we've won. We need to keep organizing, standing up, and making our voices heard. Only by holding corporations, agencies, and elected officials accountable will we see a future where our communities, our farms and ranches, and all Westerners prosper.



# WORC Network Summer Conference

For over four decades, members and staff in the WORC network have gathered annually in the summer to celebrate our wins, share what we've learned, and deepen our relationships.

The 2023 Summer Conference was hosted by Western Native Voice and held at the beautiful Kwataqnuk Resort on the shores of Flathead Lake in Polson, MT. The Conference brought in luminaries like Dr. Joseph Robertson who ran a session on Native land cession around the West. We celebrated the anniversaries and accomplishments of so many of our organizations, staff, and leaders from the past year. Network members spent plenty of time connecting or strengthening relationships, including on a dinner boat cruise on Flathead Lake.



While the conference grew to 80 attendees, it retained the close-knit feel that WORC conferences are known for. The depth of relationships allowed for discussions on how to be better allies and what it takes to tighten bonds between groups, even when they work on vastly different issues. The group also reflected on creating a stronger, more inclusive network through building power in low-income and marginalized communities.

## Organizers and Leaders Come Together for POCO Training

In July, we held our Principles of Community Organizing (POCO) training in Billings. POCO is not only a training and skills-building opportunity, but a chance to gather the network together to share experiences and build upon our shared vision for grassroots organizing in the West. This year was no exception, with thirty-nine attendees, it was one of the largest classes we've ever had.



Pat Sweeney, Teresa Erickson, and Kevin Williams lead the training this year, imparting over 90 years of collective experience organizing in the West.

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It became clear that there was a critical mass ready and willing to enact more meaningful change at the local level. They took their fight to the North Dakota Public Service Commission. On August 4th, 2023, the DNPSC came back with its decision that Summit Pipeline Solutions, “failed to meet its burden of proof to show that the location, construction, operation and maintenance will produce minimal adverse effects on the environment and the citizens of North Dakota.”

“We have shown that when ‘We the People’ stand together, we can make a difference to protect property rights and our environment for future generations,” Skokos said.



## New Bonding Standards on the Horizon

**B**y the mid-20th Century, United States oil and gas operators had over 100 years to hone the craft of mineral resource extraction. These mature operations were experts at leaving their unplugged wells as someone else’s problem. As long as gas was cheap (and it was at 31 cents per gallon), our country was flourishing and the politicians were happy. If a few landowners complained about discarded oil infrastructure and contaminated water, that was just business as usual.

Finally, in 1960, the federal government stepped in with updates to the federal Mineral Leasing Act. Doubtless, there was a crew of roughnecks blasting Jimmy Jones from the radio and completing routine drilling operations when the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released a rule requiring bonding for all wells from 1960 onward. The space age had begun, yet we were still trying to clean up well operations that had been left unprotected since the mid-1800s.

Today, another 60 years later, most of us carry mini computers in our pockets, but we still struggle to hold the oil and gas industry accountable for cleaning up its messes. There are over 4 million orphaned wells in the United States right now. Many of these wells were drilled using new extreme techniques and cutting-edge fracking technology. The bores have gone miles deeper than anyone in 1960 would have believed, yet the government is still using plugging and reclamation estimates from the year that a loaf of bread cost 20 cents.

This year, the BLM is updating the regulations that determine the bond amount for federal leasing. Finally, folks who have been asking for updates in bonding amounts for decades have a chance to have their voices heard in shaping the new rule. The BLM just wrapped its comment period after receiving over 260,000 comments, 99% of which were in support of the improved bonding standards.

Federal bonding updates have been overdue since John Lennon left The Beatles. After 60 years, we finally have our chance to make significant change. But it's not won, yet. Keep your eyes on your inboxes as we send updates and call for your held supporting this new rule. We'll need all hands on deck to help protect our land, air, water, and communities.

### **Take Action**

**[www.worc.org/takeaction](http://www.worc.org/takeaction)**

***Tell your delegation that you want protection from oil and gas interests***

***This summer, over 250,000 people provided comments in support of strengthening oil and gas bonding rules. Colorado Representative Lauren Boebert, however, is advancing proposals that threaten Western communities by allowing the oil and gas industry to drill wells, make money, and then vanish when it's time to clean up the mess. Don't let powerful oil and gas interests weaken the safeguards we all deserve. Act now.***

# Around the Region

## Dakota Resource Council

In a historic victory for the Dakota Resource Council and the people of North Dakota, the state's Public Service Commission has rejected Summit Carbon Solutions' permit application for a regional CO2 pipeline. The unanimous 3-0 vote followed five public hearings held over four months, during which a significant number of people, including landowners and public officials from various counties, expressed their opposition to the \$5.5 billion Midwest Carbon Express project.



The decision was based on Summit Carbon Solutions' failure to demonstrate that the pipeline's location, construction, operation, and maintenance would have minimal adverse effects on the environment and the welfare of North Dakota's citizens.

Dakota Resource Council played a pivotal role in this victory, taking the lead in the fight against the pipeline since October 2021. They rallied with landowners, farmers, ranchers, developers, county commissions, school boards, and citizens, forming a united front in their shared cause.

This triumph serves as a powerful reminder of the impact that collective efforts can have in protecting the environment and safeguarding the well-being of communities.

## Dakota Rural Action

On Early in June, Dakota Rural Action members and allies successfully convinced Minnehaha County (Sioux Falls) to pass a pipeline ordinance, giving landowners and concerned citizens some protection from proposed CO2 pipelines. The ordinance establishes a setback from residences and special-use criteria the pipelines would have to meet in order to pass through the county.



DRA members in the Black Hills have recently completed a push for comments supporting a federal mineral withdrawal for over 20,000 acres of the Pactola-Rapid Creek Watershed. This withdrawal would stop mining in the area for 20 years.

Black Hills members are also opposing a decision by Rapid City to charge Oyate Kin Chante Wastepi \$100 a week for the use of park facilities to feed unhoused relatives. Oyate Kin has been feeding unhoused relatives consistently every Friday, providing needed support.

DRA members in the Black Hills have recently completed a push for comments supporting a federal mineral withdrawal for over

Support which Rapid City should be encouraging rather than blocking.

## Idaho Organization of Resource Councils

The Idaho Organization of Resource Councils is entering its second decade of grassroots community organizing in Idaho. IORC is going through an organizational shift with Irene Ruiz transitioning into the Executive Director role for the organization. Irene started at IORC in 2018 as the Bilingual Community Organizer where she helped in the creation of IORC's newest chapter Visión 2C Resource Council (V2C). She has over twenty years of organizing experience. Irene is so excited to lead IORC into its second decade.



Irene Ruiz and IORC member Alejandra Hernandez were chosen to participate in HEAL Food Alliance's School of Political Leadership where they had the opportunity to work on the V2C's Farmworker Justice Campaign with a diverse and inclusive lens. They attended training from February until June. The first week of June, Irene and Alejandra traveled to Washington D.C. to lobby and met with Idaho's Senators, Mike Crapo and Jim Risch to advocate for the inclusion of farmworker health and safety in 2024's Farm Bill as well as talk about the Farmworker Justice Campaign.

Portneuf Resource Council (PRC) scored a major win with written and public testimony on the City of Pocatello's 2040 Comprehensive Plan. The Protection and Enhancement of Water Resources in the Portneuf River Valley was the #5 Environmental Resiliency Goal in the draft version of the 2040 Comp Plan. PRC advocated to elevate the priority of the water quality goal and to include pursuit of a sensitive aquifer designation.

## Northern Plains Resource Council

Recently, Montana's second largest utility provider, Montana Dakota Utilities' (MDU), proposed a predatory rate hike seeking to increase rates by 19.2% for eastern Montana's residential electricity customers.



This is after the corporation raised rates by 15% only three years ago.

Immediately after the announcement, Northern Plains Resource Council members raised alarm

# Around the Region

bells and organized MDU ratepayers to push back. After public outcry, the monopoly utility crafted a settlement that cuts that rate more than half, down to 9.1%. This was a preemptive move by rattled corporate executives who offered a huge concession before any public listening sessions or hearings. These executives simply weren't accustomed to being the target of strong rural organizing, and members were feeling their power after seeing immediate, tangible results.

This concession by MDU has only doubled members' resolve to stop the entire rate hike altogether, illustrating how strategic victories during a longer campaign have a snowball effect, building increased confidence and powerful momentum.

## North Dakota Native Vote

NDNV partnered with League of Women Voters of ND to do educational webinars. NDNV's Field Organizers are also conducting Community Engagement presentations at Sitting Bull College in Fort Yates.

North Dakota Native Vote finished writing their 5-year Strategic Plan and began their 2023 Legislative Campaign focusing on Voting Rights, Corporate Farming, Indian Education, Oil and Gas, Gaming, Tribal Sovereignty, Victims' Rights, Juvenile Justice, Renewable Energy, Family and Child Wellbeing, Election Reform and Environmental Issues. NDNV is actively working to increase representation of Native American people in all levels of government. They also launched the Rural Electric Cooperatives Campaign which will be implemented to inspire tribal citizens to be involved in their energy landscape.

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Engagement presentations at Sitting Bull College in Fort Yates.

North Dakota Native Vote teamed up with Western Native Voice on national issues including having meetings with legislative staff of Representative Sharice Davids and Senator Brian Schatz about the Native American Voting Rights Act, Indian Child Welfare Act, Farm Bill's Farm to school program, and Savanna's Act. NDNV also traveled to DC to meet directly with ND Congressman Kelly Armstrong's staff about NAVRA, ICWA, Farm-to-school, and SNAP.

## Oregon Rural Action

Oregon Rural Action's safe drinking water campaign, "Safe Rural Water Community," "Agua Secura En La Comunidad Rural," has made significant progress, building multicultural leadership that has begun to shift power and secure decision makers' commitment to addressing 3-decades of contaminated groundwater in Umatilla and Morrow Counties. This includes an in-person meeting on May 3rd with Governor Tina Kotek and a tour of the area to see how this contamination affects the communities living there. The Governor committed to prioritizing the issue to meet short and long-term needs. Community leaders have met with the EPA, U.S. Senators, state agencies, and state legislatures. Their voices have been amplified in 48 local and statewide media articles. They continue to work diligently to build a rural movement in Eastern Oregon for the betterment of their community. Everyone should have access to clean and safe drinking water.



## Powder River Basin Resource Council

Federal mineral programs have been a hotbed of activity over the last several months. In June, Powder River Basin Resource Council, along with Northern Plains Resource Council, WORC, and Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) submitted comments to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Department of the Interior (DOI) regarding the agencies' plans to analyze the impacts of continuing the coal leasing moratorium that was put in place in 2016. The organizations have long supported a coal leasing moratorium, but also





# Around the Region

asked that the program be reformed before any future leasing or lease renewals in order to address current shortfalls in the program.

The organizations called on the BLM and DOI to revise the lease payment framework in order to avoid taxpayer subsidization of coal leasing and mining and provide a fair return on this publicly owned resource. As well, bonding requirements must be sufficient to fully reclaim disturbed areas, and companies without the adequate resources to take on these obligations should be not allowed leases. Lastly, the agencies must implement a framework for fully calculating greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from coal leasing and mining in order to better constrain future emissions.

Since last fall, Powder River and WORC, along with several allies, have been pushing DOI and BLM to fix the broken oil and gas bonding program. This spring, groups met with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to present comments on the forthcoming rule.

## Western Colorado Alliance



The Western Colorado Alliance is in the middle of a very busy quarter! After celebrating their new offices in an Open House on June 1, which saw 70 visitors (including a lot of first-timers) check out their new location on 1st Street in Grand Junction, they've been busy on many fronts: Their Mesa County affiliate, the aptly named Western Colorado Alliance of Mesa County, is about to launch its first housing campaign.

In their clean & renewable energy work, WCA has been working on the upcoming Rural Electrical Co-op (REC) elections and a string of well-attended clean energy events. Their grassroots democracy youth group, West Slope Youth Voice, has been active in the controversial effort to include a healthcare facility in the new Grand Junction High School. Such a healthcare facility already exists in at least one other local school and has had great healthcare outcomes for students. But the plan to put one in the new school was undermined by conservatives on the local school board. After the school board voted to kill the facility, students thought their efforts had been for naught; but the students won a major victory when a new vote was held by the local school board on June 20 following testimony from them and other local residents, and the health care center was unanimously approved!

The Alliance hosted a summer series of six tours of locally owned farms, highlighting new trends in regenerative

soil health, micro-farming, and more. Their oil & gas committee is gearing up to bring commenters to upcoming air quality hearings. And WCA recently welcomed a new oil & gas regional organizer, Laura Bloom, and a new office administrator, Shanna Shepherd.

## Western Native Voice

Western Native Voice was super excited to host several youth from around the state at the first-ever Youth Capitol Experience in Helena. Students learned about the legislative session, honed their public speaking skills, heard about job opportunities, and listened to motivational speakers. On the last day, they were treated to a tour of the Capitol, had a meet and greet with Governor Gianforte and sat in on a hearing and saw first-hand just how important their voices are.



WNV, sponsors, and co-hosts, Northern Plains Resource Council held a special screening of "Murder in Big Horn" which recently premiered on Showtime. The screening took place at the historic Babcock Theatre in Billings and was free to the community. Several sponsors gathered together to bring the MMIW/P crisis to the big screen to gain support for important legislation being passed in this session.

To stay up to date  
on what's happening  
in our network,  
sign up for the  
WORC Express at  
<https://bit.ly/48R67hE>

# Navigator CO2 Pipeline Permit Denied

In a surprising victory for Dakota Rural Action (DRA) and rural South Dakotans fighting against a billion-dollar company, South Dakota Public Utilities Commission voted unanimously in September to uphold county ordinances related to hazardous carbon dioxide pipelines and to deny Navigator CO2 Ventures' CO2 pipeline permit application. The decision was based upon the Texas-based company's attempts to preempt local ordinances and its failure to convincingly meet the burdens of proof set forth in the permitting requirements.

According to the PUC, the rejected pipeline application lacked comprehensive details and thorough documentation for critical details including, but not limited to, accurate and timely plume modeling and emergency response plans. The commissioners also identified the negative impacts on the health and wellbeing on the residents crossed by and in close proximity to the pipeline route, and ruled that Navigator failed to prove a willingness or ability to comply with all local, state, and federal regulations as evidenced by their dismissal of local ordinances which were passed in Moody and Minnehaha Counties.

"Thank you to the South Dakota PUC for denying the Navigator CO2 pipeline permit," said DRA member Rick Bonander, whose land in Minnehaha County is crossed by Navigator's proposed route. "Both Navigator and Summit are pipelines to nowhere."

Dakota Rural Action has been engaged in a multi-year campaign to ensure that the potential safety, environmental, and economic consequences of CO2 pipeline projects crossing South Dakota are thoroughly vetted and that the voices of impacted citizens are at the forefront of the issue. DRA made sure that residents of South Dakota saw through the greenwashing pushed by the pipeline companies as well as understood the dangers CO2 pipelines present to the public. CO2 is pumped through these pipelines at 2,000psi, and when pipelines burst the CO2 quickly spreads like a choking cloud over the landscape. Forty-nine people were hospitalized in Sattartia, Mississippi when a CO2 pipeline burst in 2020. Many of them are still dealing with health complications from the poisoning.

Fear of having their land condemned under eminent domain was one of the biggest issues for South Dakota landowners. DRA organized landowners and other worried residents to attend meetings and county hearings across the state to voice their concerns. "We are grateful to DRA for organizing and supporting citizens and landowners in the CO2 pipeline battle," said Bev Nelson, an impacted landowner near Valley Springs and member of DRA. "Their help was instrumental in this latest victory!"

To make the victory even sweeter, Summit Carbon Solutions withdrew their motion to preempt county ordinances after finding out that the PUC staff filed a motion to deny their pipeline permit, since Summit's proposed route was not in compliance with the local laws and ordinances, either. The decision ending two dangerous CO2 pipelines is a testament to the power and efficacy of local residents organizing to protect their communities and lands, and to the value and importance of local control in government processes.

**NO EASEMENT**



**NO EMINENT DOMAIN**



# No Coal Ash Left Behind

From the use of Agent Orange throughout the Vietnam War, even after we learned it was sickening troops, to continuing to transport drinking water in lead pipes—the United States has learned lessons about environmental contamination the hard way. Or, have we learned nothing at all?

In 2015, EPA released the Coal Combustion and Residual (CCR) Rule, also known as the “Coal Ash Rule”, which sought to address the growing crisis of coal ash in this country. Coal ash is the byproduct of burning coal in a coal plant and is known to cause severe health problems from hazardous contaminants like arsenic, radium, and lead. Unfortunately, due to pressure from the coal industry, that initial rule was severely weakened, leading to the exclusion of legacy ponds and inactive landfills that had retired prior to the rule release in 2015. Due to the exclusion of



legacy ponds and landfills in the 2015 rule, Earthjustice, a national environmental nonprofit, uncovered and estimated that at least half a billion tons of coal ash has been exempt from the rule. And just to be clear, even if a coal plant retired decades ago, the impacts of coal ash on soil, groundwater, and frontline communities would still remain toxic and dire.

After pressure from Earthjustice and other organizations including WORC, this egregious loophole is finally being addressed. In April of 2023, the EPA released the Legacy CCR Surface Impoundments Rule (“Legacy CCR Rule”). Under this new proposed rule, most of the loopholes that had been left open from the initial rule, are finally being closed. Although this is a huge step in the right direction, EPA continues to allow for a long list of exceptions—including one provision that allows for legacy ponds to be exempted if they did not contain coal ash and liquid as of October of 2015. Since 91% of coal plants – 265 out of 292 – are contaminating groundwater with coal ash pollutants above federal safety standards, even just a handful of coal plants exempted will contaminate groundwater that nearby communities rely on.

EPA must ensure that all coal ash is fully accounted for, which is why it is crucial for communities throughout the West to voice their concerns. The EPA Legacy Coal Ash Comment Period closed on July 17th, 2023, but there is still time to raise your voice. EPA will not publish the finalized rule until, most likely, 2024. Which means that you can still post on social media, write a Letter to the Editor, or join a meeting with the EPA to voice your concerns. Stay tuned for more ways for you to get involved in the coming months.

## **Interested in getting more involved?**

Reach out to your local WORC affiliate or  
Sarah Hunkins at [shunkins@worc.org](mailto:shunkins@worc.org)  
to learn how you can participate!

# Grassroots is Where the Change Happens

When storms on the Pine Ridge reservation, home of the Oglala Nation, in South Dakota begin to build, they can be seen from miles away. Above rolling hills, clouds turn into waves and bring the rain. Strong gusts of wind stir up the smell of dirt and sage brush. Wildlife begins to move along the badlands long before the weather hits ground and radio broadcasts from KILI radio station warn the community of what's to come. Evidence of the storm comes slowly at first, setting the scene and then it hits all at once.

In the same way storms build power, slowly and intentionally, there's something else gaining momentum on Pine Ridge. People that have been too long at the mercy of colonialism and industrialization have begun to gather, organize, and build the foundation for a more prosperous tomorrow. Red Cloud Renewable has been a landmark for sustainability on Pine Ridge, but there was a crucial piece missing in order for the efforts being made in renewable energy to work: housing. Solar panels on poorly insulated, mold-infested homes cannot solve the energy crisis on the reservation.

In 2015, Pine Ridge was hit with several severe storms which prompted FEMA to send 50 FEMA trailers to aid people during the flooding. This temporary housing is still being used today. It is estimated that 89% of people living on the Pine Ridge reservation are in need of housing. According to the American Indian Humanitarian Foundation, at least 60% of the homes on Pine Ridge are without water, electricity, adequate insulation, or sewage systems. Summers can reach a blistering 110 degrees and higher while winters can drop to -50F. It is not uncommon for monthly heating bills to reach \$500 during the winter months. With the average per capita salary of \$7,000-\$9,000 per year, an energy alternative is not just a means of cutting costs, it's survival.



Henry Red Cloud poses for a portrait in front of a solar panel array at Red Cloud Renewables, October 2022.

Solar energy goes a step further than just being a more cost-effective form of energy, it also connects the old way of life for the Lakota people to this new way of living. It has the power to give Indigenous people back autonomy by giving people the option to be off the grid. For Henry Red Cloud, it started with a calling. After spending many years working in construction and building with every industrial material, Henry felt a calling back home, to the land, to Pine Ridge. For a year, he lived out of a tipi, and he educated himself on sustainable building. "We honor the Sun, we coexist here on the Earth, our language, our song, our dance, our ceremony, our way of life is all based around the sun. So I wanted to take this new way of living and honor the old way, by becoming sustainable," said Henry.

After spending six years traveling and learning about solar and all of its applications, Henry returned to Pine Ridge to put what he had learned to work. In 2002, he began doing research on thermal solar heating panels which led him to turning an old freezer door into a solar heater. Using reclaimed materials from a landfill, some metal and an exhaust tube connected to his car battery, Henry built a heater fueled by the sun. Not long after that, he found himself volunteering to do some solar heating installations with a nonprofit which would lead him to opening Lakota Solar Enterprises, creating jobs for two employees, and himself.



Jason Mackie and Leo Bear apply a self leveling flooring in a model home.



By 2003 they had started manufacturing heating panels. After meeting with the Secretary of the Interior, Stewart Udall, Henry secured funding to continue building what he started. With the mission of creating economic opportunities and lessening the tribes' "moccasin print", he began working with other tribes. Red Cloud Renewable became a certified training program and created over 500 jobs across those tribes. This allowed Henry to hire 12 more employees to his own operation as well. These partnerships began to grow and build on each other. "That partnership beginning from 1997, I firmed up and did everything that I could to train myself around solar electric grid-tied battery based systems, standalone systems and then brought a training facility, the first ever of its kind in Indian Country," explained Henry. Since then, Red Cloud Renewable has added programs in food sovereignty, natural-home builds and reforestation. No one of these programs functions fully on its own. Without economic and job security, a community has fewer resources to focus on food sovereignty. Without well-insulated and energy-efficient housing, renewable energy cannot function at its full potential. That housing also needs to be affordable for the community that it intends to serve. Red Cloud Renewable has dabbled in various sustainable-housing projects and methods but more recently has partnered with a nonprofit, InOurHands.



Founded by Jason Mackie and Aaron Resnick, InOurHands, is working with the Oglala Sioux Tribes and others to address the need for proper housing on the reservation. "There's a need here for about 20,000 homes," explained Jason, who has been working with Red Cloud since 2018. "And it's been common in my five years out here. Regular In fact, every year, somebody that we know, a family member of theirs, has died of exposure, during the night, in their own home, because maybe they thought they'd wait it out, wait another night, and then it got a little bit too cold," said Jason. Using a material known as cellular concrete, Red Cloud and InOurHands have developed a version of a tiny home that would range in cost from \$7,500 to \$9,000 dollars. The dome shaped homes are naturally insulated, take only a few days to assemble, are fireproof, and can be heated with a small solar panel. "It's important to me that we can give something to someone that will sustain them for a really long time and allow them to cultivate some hope and participate in their community and help heal other wounds," said Aaron.

The first phase of the partnership was focused on training, building warming shelters, and providing one home per each of the nine districts on the reservation. They are also laying the groundwork so that this project can continue to grow beyond addressing housing insecurity. In the future, they hope to train more Lakota people in building the domes, so that others can start their own businesses. InOurHands was granted \$700,000 from the Turner Foundation, Cargill Foundation and the Minnie Miracle Foundation to continue this work and the organizations will continue to build on a charitable basis for families with the greatest need. In the future, these homes will be built by Lakota own businesses. Families will be able to purchase the homes with a mortgage that the Lakota Federal Credit Union has agreed to underwrite.

Addressing the housing crisis could also lead to an increase in community involvement in government, policies, and voting. Having a permanent address makes the voting process significantly easier, let alone the fact that when you're struggling to find shelter, voting is probably not your first priority. "Once you help folks find hope, they can begin to engage in self-advocacy. And when they can advocate for themselves, they can become stewards of the land," said Aaron.

South Dakota sees 275 sunny days a year, on average—enough to heat and power homes if the proper infrastructure and policies were to be put in place. New policies could change the narrative for those facing housing insecurities not just on the reservation but across the United States. "It's at that point, we need to be coming together. Our native history with a non-native history has been a terrible time," said Henry. "But we're still in that history book. We're just in a new chapter and we know now what we can do and what we should be doing. And then we can close the book, bring it to a better ending."





## New Faces at WORC

Michael Nelson  
*DC Representative*

Although Michael lives in DC, Missoula, Montana, will always be home. Michael received his bachelor of arts in political science from the University of Montana, where he got his start as a community organizer with Forward Montana working with young people to actualize their political goals. Since joining WORC in October 2021, Michael can be found tracking legislation, Zooming with ally groups and members of congress, and connecting our member groups to their leaders in DC.



Sarah Hunkins  
*DC Representative*

Sarah joined the WORC team in October 2022. She is a graduate of Boston College where she studied Sociology and Environmental Studies. Sarah grew up as a military brat and has moved over 12 times, living in Japan, Germany, Canada, Egypt, and throughout the United States. Her obsession with all things outdoors translated into a devotion to protect the planet. She started her career in the Berkshires as an environmental educator, teaching under-resourced public school students about the resilience and beauty of our natural world. From there, Sarah worked as an environmental organizer with Green Corps where she ran campaigns around the country to promote renewable energy, hold corporations accountable, and protect wildlife. She is passionate about invigorating the masses to take action against inequities and upsetting the status quo to enable progress and change in this country. She is excited in her new role at WORC to help pass formative legislation, support member groups, and build powerful campaigns and coalitions.



Elizabeth Bean  
*Campaign Coordinator*

Originally from Kentucky, Elizabeth has always been intrigued by how we interact with our natural environment. She received a B.A. in Environmental and Sustainability Studies at the University of Kentucky. After organizing for several years on environmental campaigns, she took a pivot towards farming where she learned from teachers that were dedicated to providing organic and sustainably produced fruits, vegetables, and grains. Her role at WORC is coordinating regional campaigns and federal policies that focus on food systems that center the planet, producers, and eaters.





Niklas Peters  
*Campaign Coordinator*

Niklas Peters joined WORC in March 2023 as the Campaign Coordinator for Clean, Renewable Energy. Based out of Rapid City, South Dakota, Niklas has a background in community organizing, non-profit program management, and web design. Niklas has a degree in Public and International Affairs from Princeton University. When not working, Niklas loves to garden, make art, and enjoy the outdoors.

Maggie Hansbury  
*Development Coordinator*

Maggie is a 6th generation Montanan, and an endurance (century) cyclist. She is responsible for coordinating and writing private foundation proposals and reports, researching new funding opportunities and supporting the foundation fundraising needs of WORC and our network. She brings her entire self to whatever she does, and cannot wait to see what the future brings.



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# Fort Berthold POWER Gets Air Monitors

A long-time goal for Fort Berthold Protectors Of Water and Earth Rights (FB POWER) has finally been reached, as 8 ambient air monitors were installed across Fort Berthold Reservation. The road to this accomplishment was long and would not have been possible without the work of past and present Dakota Resource Council staff and members.

The Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara (MHA) Tribes, now the MHA Nation, have lived in western North Dakota since time immemorial. The histories and creation stories that are central to each of these nations' worldview are felt deeply by the people and connects them to the earth. Another common truth for the MHA Nation is their complicated, and more often than not, damaging relationship with the United States Government and settler colonial people who have been a part of their history since the 1600s.

There are many aspects to this history that affect the MHA Nation today, but one of the most significant was the construction of the Garrison Dam, built between 1946 and 1953. The project, which dammed the Missouri River, flooded the capital city of Elbowoods along with six other thriving, self-sustaining communities. The flooded heart of the river valley, characterized by fertile farmlands and riparian forest, was home to over 1700 Tribal citizens. Once the dam was completed, the people were flooded out and were forced to build a new capital, aptly named New Town. Having lost their homes, the families were forced to relocate to the arid high prairie, which doesn't offer anywhere near the fertile river delta lands of their former home. Apart from the immeasurable grief that accompanied forced removal, the MHA Nation also lost the land that provided food and economic security. FB POWER arose as thousands of oil wells were drilled on Tribal land threatening clean water and air, and impacting human health.

Collaborating through RE-AMP with The Ecology Center of Detroit, eight air monitors were installed within the boundaries of Fort Berthold Reservation. Oil and gas-impacted community members from Detroit came and met MHA citizens to learn what life in the Bakken is like. In October, members of DRC and FB POWER will visit Detroit to learn about the industrial refinery that impacts the Detroit group in this interstate partnership.

DRC purchased five monitors that report, in real time, measurements of particulate matter (PM), ozone, carbon monoxide and dioxide, and sulfur and nitrogen dioxides; one that yields real time VOC measurements, and also has two canisters attached, one that will draw a sample over a week's time, the other which will sample the air when triggered by particularly bad air. When full, the canisters will be replaced, and the full ones will be sent to CSU to be analyzed for specified (individual) VOC levels. The monitors also include an ozone monitor and two PM monitors.

A public dashboard is in the works, and will provide community members and the general public with the air

monitor readings in real time. The data from the canisters will be analyzed after three months of sampling.

The data will be used to educate people about what is in the air they breathe, how that affects their health and that of the environment, and how they can pressure decision-makers to make stronger rules and regulations that better protect them. There is also a push by residents to get monitors installed on their homes.



*Members of the Dakota Resource Council and Fort Berthold Protectors of Water and Earth Rights (POWER) install an air monitor in New Town. (photo credit KFJR)*





# Co-ops Crucial in Climate Change Fight

**R**ural electric cooperatives (RECs) provide electricity to more than 42 million Americans across 56% of the United States' landmass. Despite serving just over 12% of the U.S. population, RECs account for over 20% of all carbon emissions from electricity generation, including nine of the most carbon-intensive electric utilities in the US energy sector. Two thirds of all electricity sold to member-owners of electric cooperatives is fossil fueled.

The U.S. cannot meet the greenhouse gas targets needed to avoid catastrophic climate change without making major changes to how our electric cooperatives generate and distribute electricity. Thankfully, the federal government, at the urging of WORC and its partners in the Rural Power Coalition, is providing over \$10 billion in funding to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and support other improvements at RECs. However, even with funding available to accelerate retirement of some of the 303 fossil power plants owned by electric cooperatives, many coal-dependent co-ops will continue to resist shuttering plants.

That's why WORC is working with our member groups to run local campaigns that organize community-based leadership in rural areas to harness this transformational investment. We seek to empower rural residents to become the leaders of an equitable, clean-energy transition that builds distributed localized wealth, particularly in persistent poverty areas, rural communities of color, and areas with high coal debt.

Building on our experience organizing REC member-owners in Colorado and Montana, we have launched new campaigns in North and South Dakota. Local energy organizers are currently building relationships with member-owners to generate more support for strong renewable energy and energy-efficiency policies at their local co-ops. They are also identifying and supporting members to run for board positions. We are confident that these campaigns will lead to more resilient, reliable, and cleaner energy systems in the West.

## **New ERA (Empowering Rural America)**

The New ERA program administered by the USDA provides \$9.7 billion for rural electric cooperatives to make new investments that will reduce energy costs for member-owners while cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Proposals that reduce greenhouse gas emissions the most will be prioritized.

## **Powering Affordable Clean Energy (PACE)**

The Powering Affordable Clean Energy program provides \$1 billion in loans for rural electric cooperatives and other entities to make renewable energy investments. Up to 50% of the loan is forgivable based on the recipient meeting certain criteria.

## **Direct Pay Tax Credits**

As nonprofit entities, rural electric cooperatives are minimally taxed, which means that they cannot directly take tax credits. With the Inflation Reduction Act, rural electric cooperatives can now receive a direct payment rather than a tax credit from the federal government. This levels the playing field between investor owned utilities and electric cooperatives and opens the door for new clean energy investments.

# WORC Announces its 2023 Farm Bill Platform

The 2018 Farm Bill expired in September of 2023. This \$428 Billion spending package is separated into twelve individual titles which touch every part of our day-to-day lives in rural communities. The lionshare goes to Title Four (SNAP), while the next 23% goes to crop insurance, commodities, and conservation programs.

Title 1 Commodity Programs

Title 2 Conservation

Title 3 Trade

Title 4 Nutrition

Title 5 Credit

Title 6 Rural Development

Title 7 Research

Title 8 Forestry

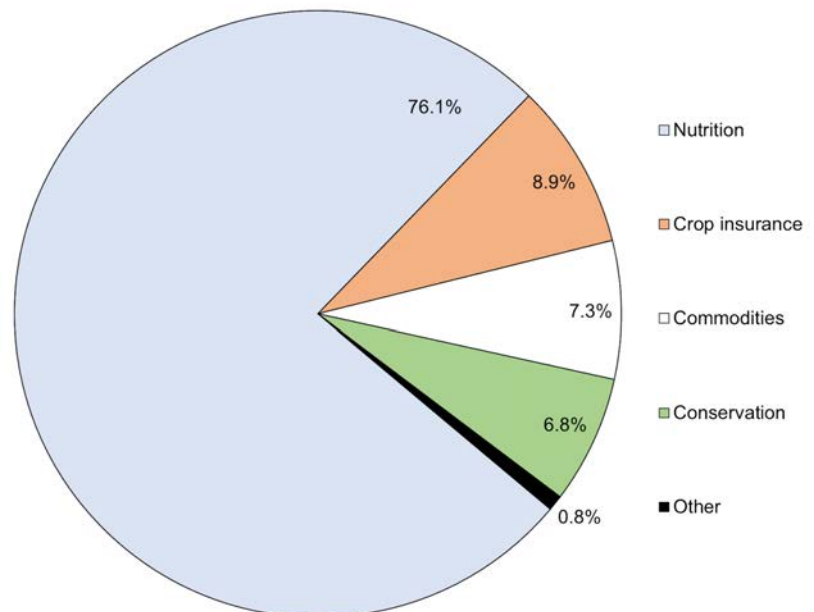
Title 9 Energy

Title 10 Horticulture

Title 11 Crop Insurance

Title 12 Miscellaneous

Projected outlays under the 2018 Farm Act, 2019–23



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service based on Congressional Budget Office, Direct Spending Effects for the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, December 11, 2018.

From supporting nutrition assistance for low-income families, to incentivizing sustainable grazing techniques, to providing access to energy efficiency and clean energy investments for farmers, the Farm bill has incredible potential to improve the lives of rural people. However, over the decades massive agribusiness interests have co-opted the Farm Bill resulting in legislation that works for them, and no one else.

In response, the WORC Agriculture and Food Campaign Team has announced our 2023 Farm Bill platform and has been advocating on Capitol hill for common-sense changes that would benefit our families and neighbors. The platform states:

“Since the last Farm Bill in 2018, Americans have endured the global Coronavirus pandemic revealing the fragility of our domestic supply chains. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine further exposed the vulnerability of our international food systems, and continued droughts across the west increasingly threaten our rural communities. At this critical juncture, targeted policy shifts are essential to create a more sustainable environment, help family farms, ranches and related businesses thrive, ensure food security at home and abroad, and fight climate change.”

The Platform covers a wide array of titles and topics but the Agriculture and Food Team and Clean and Renewable Energy Team have identified two top priority issues.

## Restoring fair and competitive markets

- Reinstatement of mandatory country of origin labeling for beef and pork.
- Pass comprehensive checkoff reform.

- Require USDA to publish and finalize the Farmer Fair Practices rules under GIPSA and restore the Competitive Injury Rule for farmers and ranchers seeking justice under the Packers and Stockyards Act.

### Investing in truly sustainable energy solutions

- Boost investments in on-farm energy initiatives: increase funding for the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), direct the USDA to study dual-use renewable energy and cropping or livestock systems.
- Protect and expand the \$9.7 Billion allocated to the USDA Rural Utility Service for rural electric co-op energy transition projects.

As of September 30th 2023, the 2018 Farm Bill has expired. Neither chamber has produced draft text but the newly elected Speaker of the House Rep. Mike Johnson and Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwoman Sen. Stabenow have both set a goal to pass an extension before the end of the year when dairy producers begin to feel the effects of this lapse (otherwise known as the Dairy Cliff). But with a slew of other legislative priorities to finish including, appropriations, averting a government shutdown, military aid packages, and approving federal appointments, it remains unclear whether or not Congress will be able to produce an extension on that timeline.

WORC staff will continue to track the farm bill's progress. The Ag and Food team held a Livestock Competition fly in July to advocate for our farm bill platform. Ranchers from MT, ND, SD and WY met with our region's members of congress as well as staff at the White House and USDA. During these conversations these leaders in our network advocated for reinstating COOL, establishing transparency in the Beef Checkoff, and for a strong Packers and Stockyards Act. In 2024 WORC will continue to advocate for these common sense bipartisan policies. If you have yet to reach out to your member of congress, send them an email or call their office to tell them to pass a farm bill that prioritizes healthy market competition, local food systems, clean energy solutions, and safety and dignity for all.

## Growing a New Generation of Soil Nerds

The summer was busy with farm tours! Farm tours, or as some of our member groups are calling them, "Soil Crawls", are a way to connect consumers to local farmers - to ask questions about different growing techniques, and dig deep into the soil to see where our food is grown. In Montana and Colorado, there have been over 150 members and community members that have come out to farms in the region to learn about our local food systems. These are gardeners, farmers, ranchers, and eaters that are able to ask soil scientists and producers detailed questions about how they operate to benefit the community.

Soil health is the foundation of productive sustainable agriculture, nutrient-dense foods. Producers that practice the principles of soil health are able to reduce erosion on their land, retain moisture in their soil, steward more resilient agricultural landscapes and produce quality food for their community. The basic soil health principles are:

- Minimize soil disturbance through "no-till" practices
- Keeping the soil covered with cover crops
- Maximize diversity through multiple plants
- Maximize presence of living roots in the soil
- Integrating livestock to provides fertility to the soil

Our member-producers are exemplifying these principles in various ways, including using "no-till" on their land, planting cover crops, having robust gardens (some with over 100 plants!), and rotating their livestock.

The most exciting part of these tours is often looking at the soil. In Colorado, members were invited to get their shovels out and dig up some soil to look at the organic content. They were able to tell the soil was healthy by the water retention, seeing the living roots and all the worm activity. In Montana, slake soil tests were conducted in front of members. This is a simple way to test the soil structure and how it allows water into its pores. Stable macropores allow better infiltration of water into the soil, reducing water runoff, erosion and surface crusting. We were able to test soils that had been treated with soil health principles and see their ability to hold water and roots.

These opportunities have been incredible ways to identify and engage new members in our organizations, grow a new generation of soil health nerds and build stronger connections in our communities.





# 2023 WORC ACTIONS

by the  
numbers

## 15 MEETINGS WITH CONGRESS OR FEDERAL AGENCY STAFF

WORC flew members to Washington D.C. to meet with their Congressional delegations, and the staff of the USDA, BLM, EPA, and other agencies



## 14 MEMBERS AND STAFF FLEW IN TO DENVER

...to support the BLM's long-awaited oil and gas bonding rule. While they were there, they met with EPA's Region 8 staff about issues they've experienced in their home states



## 21 PARTICIPANTS IN HYBRID CAMPAIGN TEAM MEETING

The Oil and Gas Regional Campaign Team came together in Denver for a successful meeting for the first time since Covid



## 18,811 ACTIONS TAKEN

WORC has had a record-breaking year of supporters taking actions on agriculture, coal, and oil and gas issues!

## 3 FARMERS AND FARMWORKER MEMBERS

...attended the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition's March for Farmworker Justice



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**WORC.org**

# Coloring Sheet







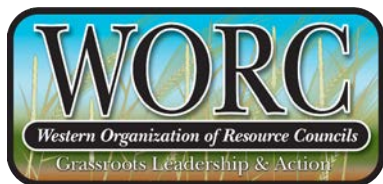
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