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PRESS RELEASE

Westerners Travel to Denver to Speak in Opposition to Fundamental Changes to NEPA, Nation's Bedrock Environmental Law

Denver, CO – Community leaders from across the Western U.S. traveled to Denver, Colorado today to testify at a hearing held by the Council on Environmental Quality (CEQ), the division of the White House charged with implementing the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). In the public hearing, farmers, ranchers, tribal members, environmental experts and others from across the West turned out in force to tell CEQ that NEPA's public comment process promotes public participation in government decision-making, and should be strengthened, not weakened. Those testifying told CEQ that NEPA fosters better government decisions and prevents harm to the environment and public health.

Mark Fix, rancher and Northern Plains Resource Council leader from Miles City, Montana, spoke about how he and other ranchers mobilized during a NEPA review to oppose a coal railroad that jeopardized their private property rights and ranching operations. "Thanks to NEPA, landowners and irrigators who live along the Tongue River are safe from having the railroad condemn their property. However, if NEPA is changed, the railroads and coal companies could literally force their way across our property and our public lands and develop a railroad and a coal mine that are not needed. We must protect the land and water for future generations. Without NEPA there will be little hope that citizens can protect the land and water that we need to survive."

"NEPA's public participation requirements are especially important for landowners and others who are directly impacted by decisions related to oil and gas development, power line construction, pipeline right of ways, and other federal actions that are proposed by private corporations," said Liza Millett of Laramie, Wyoming, a member of the Powder River Basin Resource Council. "NEPA is the process by which those of us impacted by these kinds of decisions get to submit comments to the agency. In many cases, public comments result in a better decision. Comments help reduce impacts and often force the agency to look at

alternatives and other options that it would not have considered but for the public involvement in the process.”

“For tribal communities like Fort Berthold, which bear the brunt of health problems such as heart disease and asthma from the poorly planned federal projects, NEPA isn’t just an environmental protection law, it’s a critical tool for ensuring our voice. We cannot afford to lose it.” said Lisa DeVille, a leader with Fort Berthold Protectors of Water and Earth Rights, from Mandaree, North Dakota. “Any law that provides broad opportunities for public participation in government decisions that affect the environment and local communities shouldn’t be rolled back; rather, laws like NEPA should be embraced and strengthened. NEPA is one of the only avenues for tribal members to have any input on federal actions.”

“From personal experience, industry dishonesty and agency fear cause document review delays and excessive paperwork,” said Shannon Ansley, Environmental Hydrogeologist and Idaho Organization of Resource Councils member from Pocatello, Idaho. “If CEQ approves the proposed changes to NEPA, there will be increased litigation on federal actions, effectively slowing, instead of speeding up, the process of reviews and approval.”

Under the proposed rules, government agencies could ignore the landscape-scale or global impacts of a project, such as climate change; public participation would be reduced to the lowest legal amount; and complex environmental reviews would be subject to arbitrary time and page limits. The proposal also explicitly allows a project applicant, such as a company proposing to mine or drill public minerals or on tribal lands, to prepare its own environmental impact statement and removes the prohibition on hiring contractors that have conflicts of interest, such as financial ties to the applicant.

[Image 1](#): Brent Mathieu, member of Idaho Organization of Resource Councils. Image by Angel Amaya of Western Organization of Resource Councils.

[Image 2](#): NEPA Rally and press conference, Denver, Colo. Image by Angel Amaya of Western Organization of Resource Councils.

[Image 3](#): Juan Mancias, Chairman of the Carrizo / Comecrudo Tribe of Texas. Image by Angel Amaya of Western Organization of Resource Councils.

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[The Western Organization of Resource Councils \(WORC\)](#) is a network of grassroots organizations that span seven of the Western states with 15,000 members. Many WORC members live on lands overlying and neighboring federal, tribal, state and privately owned mineral deposits, and experience numerous impacts due to federal mineral production and other

federal projects. Headquartered in Billings, Montana, WORC also has offices in Colorado and Washington, D.C.

Northern Plains is a grassroots conservation and family agriculture group that organizes Montanans to protect our water quality, family farms and ranches, and unique quality of life.

The Powder River Basin Resource Council, founded in 1973, is a family agriculture and conservation organization in Wyoming. Resource Council members are family farmers and ranchers and concerned citizens who are committed to conservation of our unique land, mineral, water, and clean air resources.