Winter 2022 Volume XXXIV Issue No. III

Western Organizing Review

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We're on the precipice of strong methane rules

2021 was a year of devastating wildfires across the West. The fires were personal for WORC member Barbara Vasquez. She knew what it was like to evacuate from her Colorado home not knowing if it would be spared by the flames or consumed. "I felt a mix of emotions: fear for my loved ones, concern for my property and livelihood, and resolve to continue speaking for the protection of my rural neighbors," she said. It was easy for her to see that climate change was a major factor in the intensifying wildfire seasons. And one of the biggest drivers of climate change came from within her state, methane leaking from oil and gas production and infrastructure.

While WORC members like Vasquez, Lisa DeVille, and many others living near oil and gas extraction went through an emotional roller coaster, winning air pollution rules during the final days of the Obama administration only to have the rules rolled back by Trump, they never stopped speaking out for their communities and the climate. Now, their hard work may be paying off. The EPA recently proposed new nationwide air pollution rules that go a step further than the Obama regulations by limiting methane from both new and existing oil and gas wells. Methane is responsible for 30% of current climate warming, according to an April report from the United Nations' climate science body. The oil and gas industry is one of the nation's largest sources of methane pollution. Because it is 86 times more climate-forcing than CO2 over a 20-year time frame, experts say strong methane protections could, in the short term, buy the world valuable time to make the structural economic changes needed to avoid the worst climate impacts.

Methane regulations will also reduce health complications for communities near oil and gas facilities. Reducing methane leaks also reduces the leaking of associated gasses that are also dangerous to humans including volatile organic compounds (VOCs). In 2017, members of Fort Berthold Protectors of Water & Earth Rights (POWER) and Earthworks conducted an infrared imaging study of flaring and emissions at well sites.

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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

WORC's Board of Directors

Linda Leeuwrik, Chair Bob LeResche, Vice-Chair Steve Allerton, Treasurer Nancy Hartenhoff-Crooks, Secretary Norm Cimon

> Lisa DeVille Dena Hoff Andreya Krieves Stephanie Peterson Stephanie Rael Roxa Reller Keke Stark Linda Weiss

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Mitch Wolgamott

The ViewFrom WORC

It's no secret that WORC is in the middle of some big transitions, not to mention dealing with the ongoing pandemic. We're engaged in strategic planning and implementing many of the diversity, equity, and inclusion recommendations from our recent equity assessment. While John Smillie's retirement gave us another transition to navigate, it also presents some new opportunities, as we move forward with making WORC a stronger, more inclusive, and more resilient network.

Convinced an interim executive director would open these transition processes to more expansive thinking, we appointed Sara Kendall, WORC's



Program Director, as Interim Executive Director, beginning in January 2022. Sara brings 27 years of experience to the role and we are grateful to have talented senior staff to guide us through the transitions. Sara will serve in this capacity until we hire WORC's next executive director, still planned for June 2022.

Heading into this year, WORC is on a sound financial footing, with a solid fundraising plan. We have strong board leadership and a great staff and team of staff directors, all of whom have the will and the skills to build powerful organizations that win change to better the lives of everyone in our communities. Although John will have a new vantage point, he shares our excitement over the transformative work this organization is undertaking. John will be available to help Sara, the staff, and me with advice and information during the interim period.

To quote Roman emperor and Stoic Marcus Aurelius: "The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way." While how we respond to obstacles in our path does indeed define us, even more important than how to dismantle or get past the obstacles, is how to turn each one into an advantage–how to seize the opportunity in every challenge. As Aurelius suggests, we should thrive not just despite what happens, but because of it. Difficulty is a chance for enhancement. To our WORC family, I ask you to join me in the challenge to better ourselves and our organization through how we choose to face obstacles and by always finding the opportunity in them.

Change can be daunting, especially for an organization that has been an institution of grassroots power in the West for over four decades. We are committed to meeting the challenges ahead with clear thinking, open hearts, and a great deal of listening. As the West evolves, presenting new issues and opportunities, so shall WORC. We look forward to celebrating many wins and to growing power for WORC and our groups in 2022.

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(Continued from front page)

They confirmed that there are over 16 gasses, including known carcinogens like benzene, leaking from well sites on the reservation near homes.

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"A couple years ago my husband and I got sick with lung infections," said DeVille, a WORC and Fort Berthold POWER leader who has been speaking out for years on the need for stronger air pollution rules to protect her family and community. "The doctor said we had symptoms similar to the workers on the oil fields next to our home, and I worried that the air pollution from oil and gas production nearby would continue to impact my family's health."

With the coming EPA rule, she and her family may have the chance to take a breath without worrying what's in it, whether it's methane, VOCs, or the smoke from wildfires.

Learn more about the fight for strong air pollution rules: https://www.worc.org/search/methane

John Smillie stepping down as Executive Director

ORC's Executive Director John Smillie retired as of December 31, 2021.

John has provided steady leadership to WORC for the past six years and has been an incredibly supportive and stable presence over the past two years as WORC and our network navigated the onset of a global pandemic. John has cultivated an environment of shared leadership on the WORC staff, and is leaving the organization in a strong financial position, both of which have well positioned the organization to successfully navigate this exciting transition.



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For 42 years, John has been an integral part of the WORC network. He was an organizer and research coordinator with the Northern Plains Resource Council from 1979 to 1986 and has been with WORC ever since. He was WORC's Campaign Director from 1986-2014 when he took the helm from founding Director, Pat Sweeney, on January 1, 2015.

John's hard work, commitment, dedication, and love of the WORC organization will always be valued and remembered. We look forward to celebrating John's legacy and his many contributions to WORC and the network in the near future.

When asked what he's looking forward to in retirement, John said "traveling with Margie, reading, cooking, and walks and hikes with Jackie O, our Cockapoo. And most of all I'm looking forward to our first grandchild, a girl, our daughter Siri is expecting in April."

Sara Kendall, WORC's Program Director, is taking over as Interim Executive Director until the next executive director is hired, which is planned for June of 2022.

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Around the Region

Dakota Resource Council

The announcement in late June that Coal Creek Station in Underwood would likely be sold to Rainbow Energy raised many questions about whether the sale will be viable in the



long term. The original owner of Coal Creek Station, Great River Energy, disclosed that in 2019 it lost \$170 million in energy sales from Coal Creek Station alone, which is what prompted the company to make plans to decommission or sell the plant. DRC has been skeptical of the sale from day one because the proposed buyer of the plant, Rainbow Energy, has no experience in the power generation industry, and second is tying the financial success of their purchase to being able to successfully retrofit the plant with unproven carbon capture technology. Despite all of this, North Dakota elected officials have cheered on the sale, while DRC has expressed a hefty dose of skepticism.

DRC and its members will continue to question the viability of the power plant, especially with the current trajectory of the coal industry internationally. It is the view of DRC and their members that it would be more fruitful for elected officials to work with coal communities towards a transition that includes job retraining, economic diversification of coal country, and a focus on reclamation in the short term to heal the land after decades of mining. Ultimately, it will be the farmers and ranchers who were there prior to coal that will live with the consequences of decisions made today.

Dakota Rural Action

On October 6th, the South Dakota Water Management Board (WMB) heard oral arguments on a motion by Powertech USA to re-start the permitting process for their proposed In Situ Leach (ISL) uranium mine in the southwestern part of the state. At the end of a long day of



testimony and public comment, the Board unanimously denied Powertech's motion.

The permit proceedings were

put on hold in 2013 at Powertech's request as they sought to obtain federal permits. Powertech received some of those permits in the waning days of the Trump Administration, but they are all under appeal or review.

About a dozen intervenors and organizational attorneys from the 2013 case as well as dozens of public commenters testified in opposition to the re-start. Both groups also

indicated a desire to open up the case for new intervenors, citing the loss of many over the past eight years, as well as new residents of the affected area who are eager to step in.

There will be a status hearing before the WMB in six months to a year to determine if federal permit issues have been resolved to the WMB's satisfaction.

Idaho Organization of Resource Councils

The Idaho Organization of Resource Councils is sprinting into 2022 with the start of the Idaho Legislative session. The IORC Grassroots Action Team will be monitoring proposed legislation as it moves through the

legislature and responding to bills as necessary. Visión 2C Resource Council. IORC's Southwestern Idaho chapter, is hard at work preparing



to launch a farmworker safety campaign and partnering with allied organizations to respond to heat, smoke, and COVID-19 concerns. Portneuf Resource Council in Eastern Idaho will continue their work to advocate for renewable energy and clean water in their community. The year ahead will be full of reflection and analysis as IORC dives into the strategic planning process; as well as assessing needs in the Magic Valley, and member interest in both the Climate & Energy and Agriculture & Food teams.

Northern Plains Resource Council

In November, Northern Plains Resource Council convened its 50th annual meeting. The meeting opened what would be a year celebrating a half century of organizing Montanans around protecting water quality, family farms and ranches, and Montana's unique quality of life. See page 8 for more on NPRC's 50th Anniversary celebration.

Northern Plains Resource Council Chair and Birney rancher, Jeanie Alderson, testified in front of the House Natural Resources Committee in late October as the committee explores reforms to the federal coal leasing program. Jeanie described the impacts that coal production has on our land, water, climate, and agricultural communities. She urged the Bureau of Land Management to craft coal policies that address climate change in the midst



of changing energy markets while creating a just transition for workers and coal-dependent communities.

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"In my community, we are already seeing the impacts of global climate change, and I hope that the government adopts policies that will help us avoid worsening effects," Jeanie said in her closing remarks...

Oregon Rural Action

Oregon Rural Action organizers are continuing their work to increase vaccination rates in the region by talking with community members about the

facts around receiving the vaccine, and continuing to build a network of leaders OREGON**rural** to get the word out in their community. They are hosting a series of vaccine events in Boardman and Irrigon and



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sharing information via Facebook in Spanish and Nahuatl to ensure the community can access information, vaccines and booster shots.

Powder River Basin Resource Council

The first Laramie Solar Tour took place in October. Over 50 members of the public attended the tour, whether via the in-person bike tour, self-guided driving tour, or live streaming online to visit a variety of residential, university, commercial, and municipal solar installations. Speakers from Rocky Mountain Power, the University of Wyoming, the City of Laramie, and local solar installer, Creative Energies, joined the tour attendees to talk about the benefits of these solar setups. The Laramie Solar Tour was a partnership between Powder River and their affiliate, Alliance for Renewable Energy; Sierra Club Wyoming, and the American Solar Energy Society's National Solar Tour.

In coal news, public documents from the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality show that no coal



mines in Wyoming are using self-bonding to Resource Council costs. This is a big change from the \$2 billion in reclamation costs that were covered

only with self-bonds only a few years ago. Through coal bankruptcy proceedings, Powder River's advocacy work, and legal work from the Department of the Interior, all resulted in the replacement of self-bonds for the biggest coal mines. Other operators have now voluntarily replaced their self-bonds, and Wyoming's coal mines are self-bond free.

Western Colorado Alliance

The Grand Mesa, Uncompanyere, & Gunnison (GMUG) National Forest plan is seeking comments currently, and WCA is activating members to ensure the U.S. Forest Service protects the grand public lands which make our area so amazing. They've hosted several public hikes in the areas affected by the GMUG Plan and conducted multiple online commenting webinars. This is an effort WCA has been involved with for more than 20 years. Meanwhile, they're also conducting a series of events highlighting the current Electric Resource Plan offered by Tri-State, the energy company which provides power for several local rural co-ops. WCA has been very active in the efforts to get Tri-State to move to greener technologies and offer more independence for local coops including helping pass a first-in-the-nation bill which mandates several transparency reforms for Tri-State.

And in Montrose the Uncompany Valley Alliance (UVA), has continued to see dividends from their efforts to bring attention and study to the subject of "childcare deserts" in Western Colorado. Most recently, the Montrose

City Manager asked for support from the City Council to move forward exploring some American Rescue Plan (ARP) funding projects related



to childcare. This move comes on the heels of UVA's Childcare Needs Assessment Survey, which showed the dramatic need for more childcare options in the Montrose area.

Western Native Voice

Western Native Voice held seven virtual redistricting events on their Facebook page called Tipi Talks and also testified at the redistricting hearings. They also held a virtual celebration for their 10th anniversary on October 11. The celebration included music and a special message from voting activist, Stacey Abrams.

In response to the 2021 legislative session same-day voter registration elimination, WNV is taking action by installing online voter registration (OVR) portals around the state to increase voter registration. Last year, the Montana Legislature passed a bill to end same day voter

registration. WNV is working with tribal communities both rural and urban across the state. They hope to get voter registration kiosks in tribal offices, clinics, colleges, stores, or anywhere people would normally frequent.



WNV staff traveled to Mesa, AZ in November to present "Awakening the Warrior" youth program to youth groups in the metro area, as well as, presenting to local tribal nations.

They have moved their office to a new location at 1215 24th St W, #115B in Billings. The new space is more easily accessible and has more parking for visitors. Local staff are currently rotating hours in the office while most staff are still working from home, due to the pandemic.

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Farm Aid concert is back with solidarity and great music Farm Aid

celebrated its 36th year this September with a return to

their live festival

arm Aid, best known for their annual concert in support of independent farmers, celebrated its 36th year this September with a return to their live festival. Like most years, WORC sent some staff to join network leaders and allies in support of family farmers and ranchers. While best known for its day-long concert featuring the organization's founders like Willie Nelson, John Mellencamp, and Dave Matthews, there's so much more going



on during the festival than great music.

Walking through the Homegrown Village, a swirling concourse of interactive displays from various organizations

supporting the cause of independent farmers, the full purpose of the Farm Aid's festival becomes clear. Farm Aid was started during the farm crisis in the '80s that led to the loss of thousands of family farms across the country. The current state of independent farming in the U.S. has many parallels to that of the 1980's. While grocery store prices are increasing, the portion of that profit going to the small scale farmer is falling. The toll anti-competitive practices are taking on farmers can be measured by the white boards filled with hand-written pledges to support the mental health of farmers in a variety of ways. The Homegrown Village also had signs of hope including soil health demonstrations, agricultural solutions to climate change, and ways to fight the dominant narrative.

A major focus of this year's Farm Aid was highlighting underrepresented farmers and ranchers. Throughout the Homegrown Village, organizations that support young farmers, BIPOC, and other underrepresented farmer groups had displays with volunteers eager to educate attendees. Across from the Homegrown Village, Farm Aid hosted educational panels covering the past and future of black farmers and climate change. Performers sat alongside farmers and spoke about the institutionalised racism in their fields, the role of the farmer in conservation, and how the climate will benefit from a shift away from industrialised agriculture. The panels were both emotional and inspiring. Attendees heard about how 94% of black farmers have lost their farm lands which is three times the rate at which white farmers have lost their land. The panels highlighted the interconnectedness of rural issues and how there is no climate or food justice without racial justice. While giving voice to these struggles, there was still so much hope present. "We have lost a lot of jobs and are continuing to do so, but jobs we can never lose are those centered around providing food," said performer Margo Price, during the final panel.

The music is Farm Aid's main feature and the concert brought its characteristic energy to the event. Despite having taken last year off from being in person, the turn out of attendees and performers was stellar and gave temporary relief from the stress of the last year. In between performances, videos played on the big screens featuring farmers from across the nation telling their stories. The scent of grilled pork drifted through the air from food booths run by small-scale family farms and sporting anti-corporate farming signs. A deep thrum rose from the grassy field in time with the singers on stage as people hummed or sang along in harmony and solidarity.

"The Farm Aid concert is a special time for us--it's a place where we can come together and talk about issues and organizing, and visit with all of our friends and allies that are in this fight together," said Tim Gibbons, Communications Director of Patchwork family farms. "This work isn't transactional, and Farm Aid is the epitome of the relationships, love and action that brings us all together."



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Diversifying the market for producers in Wyoming

hristine Hampshire used to spend her weekends centered around getting her dairy and beef products ready for the weekly farmers market. Each weekend she would be prepping products, loading milk and cream into her truck and driving out to the market, which was her primary source of income. Being a dairy farmer, this also meant waking up extra early to complete her daily chores. It was a lot for Christine to squeeze in milking and feeding cows, before making her hour long commute to the market. While this functioned for a time, she wondered if there was a way to diversify her market and ease her work flow.

Farmers markets have seen an increase in the thousands in the last decade. The first U.S. farmers market was held in Boston in 1634, they have gained in popularity in recent years with people wanting more and more to know where their food is coming from. "There's kind of a sense of community that comes with farmers markets. I think it's a wonderful venue. But it's just hard sometimes for that to be your only sales point, a lot of times people don't realize how much work goes into that one little two or three hour window for producers, like for myself," said Christine. Inspired by Sheridan's indoor farmers market that runs all year long on the weekends, Christine decided to open a market that would host local producers and their products five days a week.

Wyoming has passed laws in recent years that have also enabled farmers to sell a variety of products. The Wyoming Freedom Food Act was passed in 2015 and is what inspired Christine to name her smarket, Cross E Dairy and Freedom Foods. "I think Wyoming is a state that has really great potential for food security, probably more so than some other states, we have a small population. So I think it's an easier thing to envision being able to supply local foods for the population. I think that's exciting that Wyoming just has potential to be really food secure," explained Christine

Cross E Dairy and Freedom Foods opened in August of 2020 in the midst of the global pandemic. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic when people couldn't find what they needed at the local supermarkets they turned to farmers markets and small scale producers to fill their needs. "I think last year caused people to realize that local foods are like a back up generator," said Christine. "But they shouldn't be just a backup option." We are here all the time, local producers are always working hard and customers also have to realize that they play a part in making sure that local food sources stay secure by investing in them."



Many people opt for cheaper, industrialized food sources but Christine urges consumers to ask themselves what the true cost of that food is. "When we saw a break in the availability of that industrial food last year that impacted the entire nation, we saw how really vulnerable it is at times. We have a more secure source of food when we invest in local, ethically sourced foods."

Cross E Dairy and Freedom Foods hosts 28 different local producers. From fresh vegetables and beef to locally made baked goods and much more. Every direction you turn, there is something different to take home, and the Wyoming Food Freedom Act has helped increase the amount and types of products available. Jarred pasta sauces, homemade hummus and Christine's very own raw milk products and cold brew coffee with raw milk cream. "I love the farmers markets and that's where I got my start. So we opened this market with the farmers market theme in mind,"

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n November, Northern Plains Resource Council convened its 50th annual meeting. The meeting opened what would be a year celebrating a half century of organizing Montanans around protecting water quality, family farms and ranches, and Montana's unique quality of life.

Northern Plains formed in 1972, by ranchers trying to protect their homes and grazing ranges from becoming a "sacrifice zone" after the North Central Power Study was released. The study showed enormous coal resources under their land and opened the door to the massive development of coal mines, power plants, slurry lines, and railroads. Northern Plains members racked up some crucial early successes, showing the power of grassroots organizing.

Over the decades, Northern Plains has expanded to a wide range of issues that have directly affected members. During the 1980s, Northern Plains helped farmers and ranchers out of forclosure, keep their operations, work the organization continues



through the current farm crisis. They promote local and regional food systems, and fight the consolidated meatpackers' unfair competition on many fronts including working toward reestablishing Country of Origin Labeling (COOL). Northern Plains members have worked tirelessly on regulating the oil and gas industry including winning strong protections from SO2 emissions from refineries that were sickening people in the Billings area. Members have also fought for fair bonding rules for oil wells, protections from methane pollution, and a ban on radioactive oil and gas waste being dumped in Montana landfills. Northern Plains has also protected water from hardrock mining, establishing the groundbreaking Good Neighbor Agreement at the massive Stillwater Mine.

Northern Plains' history project chronicles these wins and more in a variety of formats. A twenty-minute documentary tells the origin of the organization, while shorter videos show their work protecting water and keeping farms and ranches in family hands through the 80s Farm Crisis. There's also Standing Together: Protecting Land, Air, Water, and People, a beautiful hardcover anthology that tells the story of Northern Plains' "half-century of tenacious grassroots organizing" to protect the

people and places across Montana. The history project uncovered a multitude of images from the last 50 years that currently adorns the halls of the Northern Plains office, which is currently closed to the public during the pandemic.

While the history project reflects on the past five decades of protecting Montana's land, water, and communities, the 50th Annual Meeting was a look forward to the next 50 years of grassroots organizing. Check out Northern Plains' website to see what they're planning for 2022, and to watch the videos or order your copy of the anthology. (https://northernplains.org/ historyproject/)



This is what good ground game in rural states looks like A return to field work

made all the difference in local elections in Montana this year.

he difficult losses in the 2020 elections are still fresh in Montana but they haven't deterred our commitment to fighting to elect candidates that will go to bat for our communities and our issues. With the loud national election noise finally quieting down, Montana Rural Voters Action Fund (MRVAF) got back to work engaging voters in municipal elections across the state. City Councils and City Commissions impact our lives as much as or more than any other level of government- from neighborhood development to the roads we drive on, to the conditions in our workplaces, parks, trails, and public safety, and more. Local governments are foundations of community power. Through zoning, business decisions, and quality of life issues, they direct the future character and livability of our communities and our neighborhoods.

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Montana Rural Voters canvasser knocks doors in Billings City Council Ward 3

If the 2020 election taught us anything, it's that we need to start building from the ground up in order to rebuild progressive power. Every statewide path to power for conservation, family agriculture and social justice begins by developing leaders, passing good policies, and building movements and public narratives at the local level. The battle to take Montana back can't just happen in even-numbered years. The fight for local power is a fight for Montana's future.

The absence of face-to-face field work in 2020 confirmed what we already knew: face-to-face conversations are critical to an engaged electorate and our return to field work in 2021 made all the difference in local elections this year. Voter turnout in municipal elections is generally low in comparison to voter turnout in general elections, where there are presidential candidates at the top of the ballot. Face-to-face conversations are a critical way to ensure voters have enough information to feel confident in showing up to vote, especially in low information municipal elections. The Montana Rural Voters Action Fund field team hit the ground running... or knocking, in August and led the program to huge wins in November.

In Billings, MRVAF knocked on 13,552 voters' doors to help elect Ed Gulick, Northern Plains Resource Council leader and former Montana Rural Voters Action Fund Board Chair, and Denise Joy to the Billings City Council. Both Denise's and Ed's opponents worked hard to tie themselves to prominent Republican leaders and focused their campaign efforts on billboards and extremist mailers while our efforts prioritized talking to voters face to face to ensure they had all the information they needed to vote and understood why Ed and Denise were candidates that would support issues to create a vibrant and safe community. All of these doors paid off with Denise winning re-election by a 376 vote margin and Ed by a 464 vote margin. MRVAF focused its field work in Billings because with roughly 1 in 8 Montana voters living in Billings, it has incredible power to shape the state.

Even though building power locally in Billings is critical to success statewide, there was also a lot at stake in rural communities and a lot of opportunities in 2021 leading MRVAF to expand its program into new communities. In Red Lodge, we helped elect Kristen Cogswell, a Northern Plains Resource Council member and the top of their legislative phone tree, as the Mayor of Red Lodge. In Livingston, Karrie Kahle and Torrey Lyons won election to the Livingston City Commission. Both were first time candidates and they both got more votes than the incumbent City Commission Vice Chair! In Lewistown, we worked to elect Katie Spika to the city commission. Katie is a young business owner who is passionate about ensuring Lewistown is a vibrant place to live. Lastly, in Helena both of our candidates, Eric Feaver and Melinda Reed were elected to the Helena City Commission.

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Overall MRVAF was successful in 8 out of 9 races! We are also particularly proud that we were able to execute a safe and effective door canvass program again because we know face-to-face conversations with voters makes all the difference.

Building our organizing leadership

Twenty-four organizers and member leaders from across the country participated in WORC's 2021 Principles of Community Organizing (POCO). Participants joined the eight-session training virtually this fall from Nebraska, Ohio, Montana, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, North Dakota, Washington, Wyoming, Idaho, Missouri, and California. One participant said of the training, "This helped me deepen skills that I use on a daily basis in my work, and energized me about doing some of them better or differently."

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Community organizing is needed now more than ever in our communities. As Dolores Huerta puts it, "the great social justice changes in our country have happened when people came together, organized, and took direct action. It is this right that sustains and nurtures our democracy today. The civil rights movement, the labor movement, the women's movement, and the equality movement for our LGBT brothers and sisters are all manifestations of these rights." Principles of Community Organizing is one of the premiere trainings in the U.S. designed to help participants build powerful community organizations.



Community organizing is just one approach to building power and making change happen. Building a community organization's power and winning on issues are two basic goals of the work we do. Students not only learned core principles but how they are applied depending on the situation, the place, and the 'music' (what works in one community may not work in another community. The culture, history, relationships, and people are just as important if not more important than any principle or practice). Cookie-cutter approaches to community organizing are discouraged. Another participant learned, "How it's all connected to relationships, and that methods really can help you be effective and efficient with limited resources of time, money and energy."

WORC's training team is very proud of how they've been able to adapt POCO's "community learning" feeling into the virtual environment. One participant said POCO "showed what a good virtual community looks like." Community and connection continues to be some of the most valuable takeaways for participants, even in the virtual

environment. One participant said they were "energized meeting people across the country doing good work."

WORC hopes to have a mix of in person and virtual Principles of Community Organizing training in 2022. Visit the website to learn more and sign up to be informed when dates are set. https://www.worc.org/leadership-development/principles-of-community-organizing/

When asked what participants liked most about the training, here is what some participants said:

"You all totally nailed this in a virtual setting, and I'm so inspired by it. Lots of breakouts but all with clear purpose and thought behind it, setting up expectations (as a group) from the beginning, using a tool to "go around the table" when that is so hard virtually, inviting people to share without judgment if they didn't - the list goes on and on. I learned a lot just from your virtual meeting facilitation skills, not to mention all the strong sessions. And I feel like I met and got to know some amazing organizers and have already leaned on some of them for guidance and feedback."

"Conversations with everyone, small groups, were so meaningful. Appreciated vulnerability and passion, honesty, wisdom from group. We all are engaging in many ways to build power for the people and places we serve. Building power in ourselves and organizations as well."

"Learned from the best, including others in training. Relationships and space to make them were appreciated."

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Whatever Happened to Build Back Better?

s the Build Back Better Act Dead? You may recall in the final months of 2021, Congress was hard at work on two massive Bills. First, the \$1.2 Trillion Bipartisan Infrastructure bill which was signed into law on November 5th, including \$550 billion dedicated to roads, bridges and mass transit, \$65 Billion for expanding broadband internet, and \$10's of billions for water and electric grid infrastructure improvements. But what about the Build Back Better Act put forward under Budget Reconciliation? Is this package dead in the water with the West Virginia swing vote Senator Manchin stating he could not support it? The short answer is, "no" (not yet). So what went wrong for Democrats? And what comes next?

Because the Republican caucus has vowed to oppose the reconciliation bill, passing it will require Democratic leaders to somehow deliver the votes of every Democrat in the Senate and nearly all Democrats in the House. As democrats negotiated, the original \$3.5 trillion price tag dropped to \$1.9 trillion, and the scope of its climate and social provisions were significantly reduced. To ensure that moderates wouldn't abandon the social spending package altogether, Progressives wanted to hold the bipartisan infrastructure bill as collateral. But as noted above, in early November the pressure mounted to move the Infrastructure Bill, and it was passed without the reconciliation package attached.

Reconciliation did eventually pass the House of Representatives. In the Senate BBBA faced the "Byrd Bath" a parliamentary procedure where reconciliation provisions are analyzed to ensure they only adjust existing programs and don't create policy. At the same time, the infamous moderate Senator Manchin was engaged in near constant talks with fellow democrats and President Biden. However, in the end, on Dec 19, Sen. Manchin announced that he would not support the BBBA. Stopping the bill in its tracks just before the holiday recess.

So what now? Senate Democrats have limited options, and confidence wanes daily in the party's ability to keep everyone together. One possibility would be to move the climate provisions as a separate package, Manchin has indicated that that was the part of the bill he could get behind with minimal effort, most likely with the elimination of the methane fee structure. Another option, Democrats could start over, writing an even smaller bill in a manner that Manchin can support, setting back congressional democrats by months. Either way, Sen. Schumer of NY vowed to bring the package to a vote in spite of these setbacks. Schumer remains against all odds optimistic that a deal can be struck before the State of the Union scheduled for March 1st.

WORC will continue to keep a close eye on developments in DC regarding reconciliation and we urge you to keep up the pressure with our delegation across the West. The provisions in the Build Back Better Act would fundamentally transform the federal oil and gas program, dramatically increase access to solar energy, and provide billions of dollars to tribal communities and low-income residents to weatherize, electrify, and increase efficiency in their homes and businesses. Make no mistake, we, our neighbors, and our region need this funding.



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ficole Montclair-Donaghy (Kampeska Cinkila Win) is a Hunkpapa Lakota from the Standing Rock Sioux Nation. She is also a descendant from the Mandan, Hidatsa, Arikara Nations, and the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa. Nicole is Executive Director of North Dakota Native Vote and participated in the 26th annual COP "Conference of the Parties" in Glasgow, Scotland. She was part of a delegation sent by Climate Generation to bring the international climate negotiations to life.

Ho mitakuyepi, hello my relatives! On a rainy day in Glasgow, Scotland I hugged my cohort mates and said see you when we meet again as we parted ways. Our week-two team has begun our journeys home after a long week of discussion, protest, and advocacy for protection of Unci Maka - Grandmother Earth. We were a small number of Indigenous people who traveled to Glasgow to make an unexpected critical connection to sky protectors, land defenders, and water protectors from across the world. And oh yes, to participate in COP26, a global convening of world leaders working to find an answer to the disastrous effects of climate change as we tread toward that 1.5° celsius tipping point.

We collectively brought thousands of years of ancestral knowledge, ceremony, song, tradition, as well as a certainty that our Indigenous way of life is going to save the world. 80 plus percent of the world's biodiversity is protected by Indigenous peoples of the world and that is not an accident. Our teachings tell us that connection with every living being is dependent on the survival of our people. However, being subjugated to lands that were once undervalued and left untouched since time immemorial, it is now known that we were relegated to some of the most pristine lands in the world.

The experience of COP was one like I've never imagined. The songs, drums, and languages of other nations surrounded us as many of us left our home countries with the sole purpose of reversing the effects of climate change. COP was the convening of world parties that negotiated the buildout of a business model that commodifies carbon in order to monetize carbon capture so that the world's filthiest polluters can continue to increase profit margins. From an outside perspective, there was the false illusion that COP was a global kumbaya moment, where nations worked together to come up with a captain planet plan to save our Earth. My sense told me otherwise. Yes, there was an undertone of urgency to bring solutions as we continue to



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Kyle Hill, Nicole Montclair-Donaghy, and Ashley Fairbanks were an all Native delegation that attended COP26 in November.

climb toward the risk of reaching the tipping point of no return. Unfortunately, the negotiations happened behind closed doors (yes understandably to minimize the risk of covid outbreak), but often anything that happens without us is not always for us. We must engage in a dialogue as humans in order to bring the voices of the experts to the table, those same voices that are often left out of decision making processes. Who often bear the burden of the externalized cost of production through institutional racism, environmental racism, devaluation of human life, and capitalistic conquest.

The most enriching part of my journey was the cohort of fellow compatriots who all have a history of working to save Grandmother Earth. Had I not been with these fellow protectors, the polarization of badged or unbadged, world leader or protector, and privileged or underprivileged would have debased my entire experience. We came together bravely and called out the inequities that were overwhelmingly magnified as frontline communities protested outside the gates of the conference while fossil fuel representatives

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had the largest delegation in attendance at COP. Though our voices trembled at times, we never faltered and the prayers of our people carried us.

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Our worldviews as Indigenous people are collective and inter-generational, based on oral traditions and the responsibility of being a good relative to all that lives. This knowledge is timeless; its value cannot be encompassed or reflected in books. It is passed on to the future stewards of the Earth. Our knowledge should be respected and have equal standing with other researchers and scientists. Indigenous voices should always be included in the discourse of climate negotiations. We honor our ancestors both of humanity and the natural world. Our initial instruction to protect earth, air, water, and life is more than a model of sustainability, it would never cross the sacred and commodify that which we have no right to control.

Vine Deloria Jr said that "western civilization, unfortunately, does not link knowledge and morality but rather, it connects knowledge and power and makes them equivalent." It is only when the heads of men connect to their hearts that our rights will be recognized and respected to protect our territories and pass along our traditions to future generations. I am thankful for the ability to be a part of this global conversation. I am thankful for our elders who were at the forefront of the conference encouraging us to stand and continue to fight and include prayer, ceremony, and tradition. The courage of my relatives and the instruction from our elders called my spirit back to a place I had not been in a long time. It called me to the place where I know that I must always stand, in defense of Unci Maka.

Mitakuye oyasin, we are all related.



Graphic artist Stephanie Hackman translated the themes of the discussion into a visual storytelling piece. https://www.stephanieheckman.com/visualpractice

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Northern Plains chair testifies to Congress about federal coal reforms

n October 27th, the U.S. House Natural Resources Committee invited 4th generation Montana rancher and Northern Plains board chair Jeanie Alderson to give testimony on how the national coal program affects western ranchers. The hearing was titled "The Federal Coal Program: A Bad Deal for Taxpayers and a Threat to the Climate."

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As a rancher in the Powder River Basin, Jeanie described a threat unique to ranching in coal country, coal seam fires. 77% of the coal resources in the Powder River Basin are owned by the United States government, and 83% of the surface above those coal deposits is owned by private landowners. "By burning pastures, fences, livestock, buildings, and water pipelines, coal seam fires can damage a ranch so that it becomes unusable, threatening our livelihood," she said. "Time and time again, it feels like private landowners are paying for damage to our property from minerals that belong to the federal government."

Like much of the West, summers are getting hotter and drier in southeastern Montana. From 2000 to 2010, the Montana Department of Natural Resources and Conservation recorded 14 coal seam fires in seven counties in southeastern Montana. In the 11 years between 2011 and 2021, coal-seam wildfires jumped 1400% to 200. "In southeastern Montana, ranching requires hard work, skill, and patience as we deal with market forces, drought, storms, fires, and increasingly erratic weather," she said. "All of this is made more difficult by the impacts of the federal coal program—from coal seam fires to the changing global climate brought on by greenhouse gases from coal development."

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the agency that oversees federal coal leasing, is authorized to lease coal on federal lands only as the agency "finds appropriate and in the public interest." Thus far, however, the BLM has refused to incorporate climate change into its leasing calculations. The federal coal program is a huge contributor to the United States' greenhouse gas emissions. Research conducted by the United States Geological Survey shows that burning fossil fuels from federal lands is the single largest source of carbon pollution in the country, and 60% of those emissions come from federal coal. "Yet even as it has continued to approve coal leases to private companies for less than one dollar per ton, the BLM has not considered whether adding millions of tons of carbon pollution to the atmosphere is in the 'public interest,'" Alderson testified.

Jeanie thanked the committee for holding the hearing and said she's encouraged by the Department of the Interior's decision to conduct a review of the costs and the benefits of the current federal coal leasing program. "In my community, we are already seeing the impacts of global climate change," she said. "I hope that the government adopts policies that will help us avoid worsening effects."



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National Coal Council under intense scrutiny

he Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC), Democracy Forward, and the Western Environmental Law Center filed a lawsuit on October 15, 2020 in the U.S. District Court for the District of Montana challenging the National Coal Council (NCC). The NCC is an outside advisory group, which makes recommendations on federal policies related to the production and consumption of American coal. The lawsuit has sought to compel release of the NCC's materials from 2017 to the present and prevent the council from going about its work until it complies with the Federal Advisory Committee Act's (FACA) requirements.

Under President Trump, the NCC worked exclusively to advance the coal industry's economic interests, and it did so behind closed doors. While the NCC is composed of two entities that are functionally identical — the Council charted under FACA and a 501(c)(6) not-for-profit corporate entity called "NCC, Inc." — Trump's Department of Energy refused to grant the public access to NCC, Inc.'s materials and meetings from 2017 to 2020. The Department also refused to grant public access to the NCC's subcommittees, despite the subcommittees drafting all of the NCC's recommendations for the Department and simply presenting them to the NCC for a rubber stamp. Each of the four reports drafted between 2017-2020 advocated for the federal government to use its power to expand the production and/or consumption of coal.

On April 6, 2021, the court denied the defendants' attempt to dismiss the case. The court concluded that WORC had plausibly alleged that "NCC, Inc. operates as a federal advisory committee under FACA," that "DOE does not maintain a passive role in NCC, Inc.'s operation," and that "the development of [the NCC's] reports occurs largely behind closed doors in meetings of Council subcommittees.

In September, WORC released a letter from members detailing the highly inappropriate relationship between the NCC, and its corporate alter ego, National Coal Council, Inc. WORC urged Secretary of Energy, Jennifer Granholm to scrutinize and restructure or terminate the NCC. WORC's letter described how the NCC includes no perspectives from individuals or organizations working to address the negative impacts of coal extraction, and there are no clear lines of separation between NCC and NCC, Inc. The industry association blatantly funds and influences the work of the NCC, resulting in biased information to the Department of Energy on behalf of the coal industry.

In October, WORC pressed ahead with the lawsuit. Records obtained in the course of litigation demonstrated the remarkable extent to which the NCC was merely a vehicle for the coal industry. NCC and NCC Inc. officials repeatedly stated that the Department appointing more NCC members would help to fill NCC Inc.'s coffers.

The NCC charter expires on November 22, 2021. With public and media pressure gaining and renewal date looming, the big question remains...will the NCC still be around come 2022? No matter the outcome, WORC is ready to take action and hold the NCC accountable.

<u>Take Action</u>

www.worc.org/takeaction

- Bring back mandatory Contry-of-orginlabeling: Urge your Senator to cosponsor the American Beef Labeling Act
- Build Back Better: Tell the Senate to pass the Build Back Better Act
- Ensure Fair Oil and Gas Rules: Demand that your member
 of Congress supports common-sense oil and gas reforms

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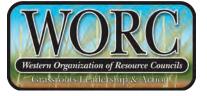
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