

## **Campaigns & Issues**

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What an exciting spring! With the Biden Administration well into its fourth year, a number of the rulemakings and actions that we've worked hard to advance have worked their way through the process, and are now being finalized and going into effect, including some major victories! While there are several more rules that are still in the process, our focus is now shifting to defense, as a number of our recent wins are being challenged in the courts and in Congress through Congressional Review Act disapproval resolutions and appropriations riders.

### ***BLM Ends Coal Leasing in the Powder River Basin!***

In a historic action, the federal Bureau of Land Management released plans to end the leasing of taxpayer-owned coal in the Powder River Basin on May 16. BLM's decision will result in six billion tons of coal being kept in the ground, including 386 million short tons across 1.7 million acres that the agency anticipated would otherwise be mined in the next 20 years. This action was set in motion in 2022 when, in response to a challenge from WORC, Northern Plains, Powder River and allied conservation groups, a federal judge found that the two resource management plans failed to address the public health consequences of developing massive amounts of coal.

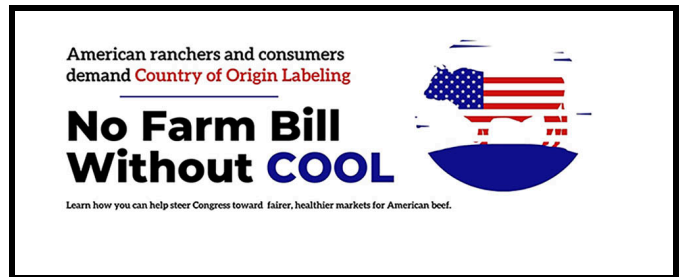
BLM's action was the culmination of a multi-decade campaign by WORC and our member groups and allies, including the Northern Cheyenne Tribe. After their earlier legal challenge to the federal coal leasing program was ruled to be moot, Northern Cheyenne Tribal Administrator William Walksalong said, "[W]e will fight tirelessly to protect our reservation and its air and waters and the Cheyenne way of life. Now that the court has ruled that the Trump administration decision to restart coal leasing was revoked, we need the Biden administration to step up and live up to its promises to protect our climate, conduct a long overdue review of the federal coal leasing program, and make thoughtful plans for the future of public lands."

After the Biden Administration did just that, this quote from WORC board chair, Paula Antoine, led much of the press coverage: "Coal has powered our nation for many decades, but technology, economics and markets are changing radically. BLM's announcement recognizes that coal's era is ending, and it's time to focus on supporting our communities through the transition away from coal, investing in workers, and moving to heal our lands, waters and climate as we enter a bright clean energy future."

### ***Agriculture & Food***

- The Farm Bill is often considered one of few bipartisan bills left, but that is not the case this year. House and Senate Ag Committee chairs have released partisan plans. Neither

version would reinstate mandatory Country of Origin Labeling for beef and pork — one of WORC's top priorities. The member groups are organizing supporters to push back. You can join us by picking up one of WORC's COOL stickers at the June conference.



- The Department of Agriculture's long-awaited proposed Packers and Stockyards Act rules to address unfair practices and undue preferences are now expected to be released in July. We're expecting a 60-day public comment period, and are working with the member groups to build up our lists of ranchers who will stand with us to urge USDA to finalize strong rules that will stop price fixing and restore competition in cattle markets.

### ***Carbon Management***

- WORC's new Carbon Capture and Management Issue Team has met twice to discuss how the groups can collaborate in the growing carbon capture and sequestration space. We will track federal policies, share local and state information, and work together on a shared message and position. Six of the member groups have joined the team: Dakota Resource Council, Dakota Rural Action, Northern Plains Resource Council, Oregon Rural Action, Powder River Basin Resource Council, and Western Colorado Alliance.
- Over the past six months, Northern Plains Resource Council has been organizing in Carter County, MT against rubber stamping the proposed Snowy River Carbon Sequestration project, with support from WORC. In that time, over 40 local ranchers and community members have signed up to be Northern Plains members, two Northern Plains leaders traveled to DC to meeting with BLM Director Stone-Manning on the project, NP organized a meeting with MT BLM State Director Germann, a [Washington Post](#) article on the project was released, and BLM agreed with our ask to extend the comment period for an additional 60 days.

### ***Clean Renewable Energy & Electric Co-ops***

- As part of the Clean Renewable Energy operating plan, we included a goal to monitor and engage in federal funding opportunities, including those in the Inflation Reduction Act. WORC has secured a two-year grant from Mosaic Momentum to support this work in MT, ND, SD and WY. We will be meeting with Staff Directors and lead organizers at the Summer Conference to map out the current and potential work our network would like to do to be taking advantage of federal clean energy funding. We hope to launch a broader initiative and bring in additional resources for more groups. Engaging tribal communities requires a specific approach designed and led by Indigenous organizers and leaders. We are committed to developing and strengthening the partnerships needed to do this work, and are beginning conversations with Indigenous leaders within WORC's network to assess their interest.

- One of those federal funding opportunities, the [Solar for All](#) awards, were recently announced by the Department of Energy. We expect our member groups in ND, SD, and WY to engage with the awardees to facilitate low-income households accessing solar benefits. ID, MT, and OR will also receive funding.
- WORC [published two guides](#) on the US Treasury's Direct Pay program, which allows non-profits entities and electric cooperatives to take advantage of tax credits for renewable energy and storage.
- WORC continues to hold [monthly meetings with rural electric cooperative organizers](#) from member groups to share campaign updates and tactics. Additionally, a new nationwide, peer-learning group focused on co-op election campaigns kicked off in March with a conference run by RECET (Rural Electric Cooperative Election Toolkit) in Austin. WORC and member-groups attended and continue to meet on a monthly basis.
- WORC has organized an initial meeting with member group directors on May 22 to [discuss options to focus our co-op organizing work on Basin Electric](#). Kevin Williams created [a detailed memo](#) outlining opportunities and strategies, with extensive input from Niklas, Briana and Sara. The group agreed to several next steps to continue to explore and develop these options to focus our organizing work and identify goals for a possible campaign to win reforms from Basin Electric.

### **Coal**

- The EPA finalized [four major coal-related rules](#) this spring, including rules to regulate legacy ash ponds at coal-fired power plants that put water resources at risk, and rules that require existing coal-fired power plants and new natural gas plants to reduce carbon emissions by 90% by January 1, 2032. These rules will have major impacts for power plants and coal mines in our region.
- In early April, the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) [released a finalized Ten Day Notice](#) rule that will restore agency procedures for responding to citizen complaints alerting the agency to potential violations at coal mines. Called the Ten Day Notice rule because that is the period of time that OSMRE gives a state agency to decide whether to carry out an investigation and enforcement action in response to a complaint, the finalized rule is designed to reduce burdens for citizens to file a complaint, as well as clarify procedures for OSMRE to address alleged violations. WORC submitted comments when the proposed rule was released last summer.

### **Oil & Gas**

- After decades of organizing in the WORC Network, [BLM finalized its Onshore Leasing Rule](#) in April, which will ensure that oil and gas operators are paying their fair share in bonds, which will incentivize them to plug and reclaim the land they utilized during drilling. The federal bonding program was not updated in over 60 years leading to an orphaned well crisis throughout the United States. This puts the financial burden where it belongs, on the oil and gas companies, and not on the communities and taxpayers.
- BLM and EPA also finalized rules designed to reduce venting, flaring and leaks of natural gas — another long-time priority for WORC, Dakota Resource Council, Northern Plains, Powder River and Western Colorado Alliance.