

WESTERN ORGANIZING REVIEW

Summer 2025

WINNING A DAVID AND GOLIATH FIGHT

Dakota Rural Action's campaign against carbon pipelines shows how people power can beat big moneyed interests.

PAGE 4

Table of Contents

Winning a David and Goliath Fight

Dakota Rural Action's campaign against carbon pipelines shows how people power can beat big moneyed interests.

Page 04

Features

Winning a David and Goliath Fight	4
Organizing for Transformation in Nebraska	7

Departments

The View from WORC	2
Bending the Arc	3
Around the Region	11
Campaigns Update	14

WORC is a regional network of grassroots community organizations, which includes 22,750 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
North Dakota Native Vote
Northern Plains Resource Council
Oregon Rural Action
Powder River Basin Resource Council
Western Colorado Alliance
Western Native Voice

WORC's Board of Directors

Barbara Vasquez, Chair
Roxa Reller, Vice-Chair
April Fairfield, Treasurer
Paula Antoine
Norm Cimon
Nancy Hartenhoff-Crooks
Jody Delong
Rick Godina
Natasha Gourd
Dena Hoff
Lynne Huskinson
Bob LeResche
Kekek Stark
Marielena Vega
Linda Weiss
Montana Wilson
Mitch Wolgamott

The View from WORC

We're All Organizers Now

By Dr. Barbara Vasquez, WORC Board Chair

My home is in beautiful Jackson County, Colorado, the headwaters of the North Platte River. As I write this, there's still snow on the peaks, and the sea of sage brush is greening up after its winter sleep. Hummingbirds and bumble bees dart among the early wildflowers. Every spring, the pasque flower, with its strength to push up through the snow, reminds me to be strong in protecting our amazing biodiversity.

Moose and elk wander past the house. The first bears are coming out of hibernation while the deer and pronghorn are on the move towards their summer habitats in this river basin. Living in a landscape that I am privileged to share intimately with the other species that call it home is why I chose to live here after retiring from careers that required living in cities.

In contrast, Jackson County also contains hundreds of inactive and abandoned wells in an oil field first drilled in the 1920s. Like the estimated 2.6 million unplugged wells across the U.S., the wells near my home most likely leak methane, benzene, and other toxic chemicals into the environment. Many other landscapes and communities are impacted by the unplugged well crisis, suffering from the legacy of unchecked resource extraction with polluted air, contaminated soil and water, and illnesses connected to this pollution.


The number of unplugged and abandoned wells has multiplied over the years because old Bureau of Land Management rules actually incentivized oil and gas companies to walk away after they pocketed the juicy profits from pumping the oil or gas. The bond amounts required before drilling hadn't been updated in decades, so the bond amounts to be forfeited were much lower than the cost incurred by the company to plug their wells and clean up their toxic messes. Together, WORC members took on the system that created this failed system and we won. Our country got a commonsense bonding

standard that helps ensure that oil and gas companies, not the taxpayers and local communities, shoulder the cost of this reasonable cost of doing business.

Now, the Trump administration and leaders in Congress are working to

reverse this rule and many others that will put rural families in jeopardy. The all-out assault on our public lands and minerals follows a strict ideology of generating short-term profits for corporate polluters at the expense of rural communities and western values such as conservation and fairness.

Living in Jackson County, which has a population density of less than one person per square mile, it can feel like I'm alone out here, trying to protect my home, community, and ecosystems. Through Western Colorado Alliance and the WORC network, I'm connected to thousands of people throughout the West who care deeply for the threatened ecosystems and communities they call home. This is what makes WORC such a special organization. It brings my voice together, in solidarity, with so many others to shout, "this is not normal; this is not ok."

The current administration has been busy dismantling many critical rules and laws, well beyond the oil and gas bonding rule, that have been established to protect our ecosystems and communities. We will not stand by as our rights are trampled, extractive industries (timber, mining and oil/gas) are given first priority on our public lands, public lands are offered up for sale, and livelihoods are threatened. It's time to double down on bringing our friends, families, and neighbors into this resistance. We're all organizers now. We are thousands of voices, but one movement, stronger together than alone. And history has shown that when we stand together to demand change, we get it. Fight like you live here! 



Bending the Arc

The Moment Calls for What We Do Best

By Deb Love, WORC Executive Director

Many organizers, those at WORC included, are talking a lot these days about “meeting the moment.” No doubt, the moment is unlike any of us have ever experienced. The current administration and its allies in Congress are racing to gut and dismantle institutions, services, programs, policies, and laws that sustain rural communities and protect our air and water. To one degree or another, the livelihoods of all rural residents are at risk – as victims of the federal government’s recklessness or, in the case of immigrant workers, as direct targets for abduction and deportation.

Since January, the moment organizers have been trying to meet is really a series of moments, or rather crises, changing at a breakneck speed. When we think we’ve caught up to the crisis at hand, another one is underway.

But no matter the moment, or the crisis at hand, the most effective response in the long run, especially in rural America, remains the same, and it’s what we do best: grassroots community organizing.

If there ever was a moment for expanding grassroots organizing in rural America, now is it. That’s because every existential threat and loss that communities experience as a result of decisions made by this administration, elected officials, and their corporate allies is another opportunity for uniting and organizing people and building the sort of grassroots power that will make our communities safer, healthier, and more prosperous.


But doing the work takes time and patience. Grassroots organizing relies on authentic, face-to-face relationships and trust-building fostered over months and years at doorsteps, coffee shops, churches, community centers, or anywhere else a

community takes shape. From there, building grassroots power takes relentless engagement, constant leadership development, sustained issue education, and everything else that goes into the messy, hard work

of organizing people from the ground up. There will no doubt be some losses and setbacks, but the overall trajectory towards rural prosperity and resilience points forward as long as the organizing continues.

Case in point, as you’ll read about in these pages, is Dakota Rural Action (DRA), which played a pivotal role in getting a law passed in South Dakota that bans the use of eminent domain for building CO2 pipelines. This victory followed on the heels of another from last year, when the group helped defeat, in David-and-Goliath fashion, a ballot referendum stripping local control over zoning for CO2 pipeline projects and handing it over to special interests, which spent millions trying to get the referendum passed.

All grassroots organizations have to start somewhere, so we’re also pleased to share in this issue of WOR a story about the Nebraska Organizing Project (NOP), which recently had its first victory in the town of Norfolk removing language barriers that were preventing the town’s large population of Latiné residents from accessing basic city services. With that experience and win under its belt, NOP has established a base, developed leaders, and is now poised to expand and take on more issues.

It’s a tough time for America, but I remain hopeful and confident that this is the beginning of a new age for grassroots organizing, leading us to a better day. 



An aerial photograph showing a long pipeline under construction in a rural landscape. The pipeline, consisting of large black pipes, is laid out in a straight line across a dirt road and adjacent fields. The surrounding area is green with crops, and there are some trees in the distance. The sky is overcast.

Winning a David and Goliath Fight

By Eric Warren

In 2021, farmer and longtime Dakota Rural Action (DRA) member Ed Fischbach received a letter from Summit Carbon Solutions, a company he'd never heard of. The letter included detailed maps of his property showing where the company planned to build a carbon dioxide pipeline.

"I was shocked," Fischbach said. "It was going to cut diagonally right through my whole farm operation, right through my home quarter, and right across the road from me. It was going to just devastate my livestock operation." Even more alarming than seeing the maps was the fact that the letter laid out the company's threat of eminent domain, the practice of forcing landowners to give up their property for projects deemed to be "in the public's interest."

One of Fischbach's early calls was to Frank James, DRA's then director, who assured Fischbach that DRA was on board to help his community organize around this new threat.

Fischbach was no stranger to organizing. As a teenager, he'd organized against the flooding of South Dakota lands by the Oahe Water Project. Decades later, he attended one of Summit's early public meetings. The meeting hall was packed with concerned farmers and other landowners. Once Summit's

representatives finished their presentation, Fischbach stepped up to the microphone and asked the question that had most likely been on everyone's mind: Will Summit rule out using eminent domain for its project? After some waffling, the Summit representatives said no.

"It was like Summit just took gasoline, doused the crowd, and threw a match," said DRA Lead Organizer Chase Jensen. "That may well be the moment that ignited the movement in South Dakota."

Over the next few years, people from across the political spectrum and a diversity of backgrounds came together to defeat the pipeline at every level of state government, from county commissioners to the governor.

Carbon pipelines—a new kind of threat

The Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline project is part of an expanding push for carbon capture, utilisation, and sequestration (CCUS) infrastructure happening around the country. In this case, carbon dioxide, generated by the processing of ethanol throughout the northern Great Plains, is captured and transported at extremely high pressure through pipelines to North

Dakota for permanent sequestration about a mile underground.

Opponents of the project have always been convinced that the true end goal is to bring the CO₂ to North Dakota's oil fields for what's called "enhanced oil recovery," forcing hard-to-extract oil from fracked shale to the surface. Using CO₂ for enhanced oil recovery ensures that more carbon will be released into the atmosphere through both continued oil production and possible leakage from the wells once the oil is gone. It's a lose-lose for the climate.

It's also a losing situation for the people whose property the pipelines would cross. Impacted landowners notified about the Summit project had immediate concerns about it, which only increased as they learned more about it. There have been over 8,000 major spills from oil and gas pipelines since 1986, with 578 in 2020 alone. When a CO₂ pipeline ruptures, it can expel an enormous plume of colorless and odorless gas because of the high pressures carbon dioxide is transported under. Due to its heavier-than-oxygen nature, CO₂ replaces the oxygen at ground level creating a massive "dead zone." In 2020, a CO₂ pipeline near Satartia, Mississippi ruptured.

As NPR reported, "More than 200 people evacuated and at least 45 people were hospitalized. Cars stopped working, hobbling emergency response. People lay on the ground, shaking and unable to breathe. First responders didn't know what was going on." Luckily, everyone escaped with their lives, but many residents are still dealing with resulting impacts on their health.

While the safety issues concerned South Dakota residents, it was Summit's contempt for property owners that infuriated residents. "Their whole attitude was that we're going to come through here, whether you guys like it or not," recalled Fischbach. "And you better cooperate or else we'll break you or we'll take you to court and sue you." Under South Dakota's lax state law, the company also had a pathway to use eminent domain to build their project, forcing landowners to give up their livelihoods and safety for a corporate project with little or no public benefit.

Grassroots vs. moneyed interests

When that first meeting with Summit wrapped up, people Fischbach had never met introduced themselves. They gave him their phone numbers and said, "We need to stop this. We need to organize." Soon, Fischbach pulled together a meeting in his hometown of Mellette.

"I had over 70 people show up, which is a large crowd for my little community," Fischbach said. "Everybody was upset. I knew then that this was an issue that was going to resonate, and people were not going to stand for it. That's how our opposition started. That's as grassroots as you can get."



Ed Fischbach speaking at the celebration of the passing of the pipeline bill.

Even as the opposition to the pipelines grew, DRA organizer Chase Jensen knew the battle against a billion-dollar corporation and its pro-industry supporters in South Dakota's government was going to be an up-hill one. Early on, the top priority was convincing local counties to pass zoning ordinances so that the projects couldn't be built right next to

towns, homes, schools, or other gathering places. Through DRA's organizing, concerned residents showed up at those county commission meetings in large numbers. Summit also tried to influence commissioners, often with threats of lawsuits and other intimidation tactics.

"When the high-powered lobbyists and lawyers of the billion dollar company show up to your county commission threatening litigation if they even consider ordinances, it sends a message," Jensen said.



"And then when the commissioners decide to do it anyway, because they've heard from enough members of the community, that's real. That's serious grassroots power."

Key counties began passing zoning ordinances against the will of the company and top political operatives in the state. Within a year, McPherson, Brown, and Spink counties defied Summit's intimidation and put ordinances in place, essentially blocking the pipeline's route north out of South Dakota. "It would have been very easy to crumble and be intimidated and scared," Fischbach said, recalling one of the commission meetings he attended. "Every one of those commissioners, they withstood the lawsuit, they withstood the threats, they held firm, and that's what did it."

DRA and allies built on that momentum, and over the next few years, the campaign to stop carbon pipelines across South Dakota had some

extraordinary wins. Over half a dozen counties passed zoning ordinances for CO2 pipelines. The state Public Utilities Commission denied two separate CO2 pipeline companies' permit applications in 2023. When an unfriendly legislature passed a law to overrule those local ordinances, the citizens of the state gathered over 32,000 signatures in 90 days to refer the law to the ballot box, where 65 of 66 counties voted it down.

With help from Brian Jorde, a lawyer who

defended farmers and ranchers from TC Energy's attempts to seize land for the Keystone XL pipeline, the impacted landowners formed a legal cooperative and took the battle beyond the permit hearings and into the courts, winning a key decision in the South Dakota Supreme Court. After the 2024 elections brought significant changes to the makeup of the legislature—due to the strength of this issue in rural South Dakota—the 2025 legislature passed a bill banning eminent domain for CO2 pipelines. Governor Larry Rhoden signed the bill into law in March.

Summit Carbon Solutions was soon dealt another blow when the Public Utilities Commission threw out their second permit application due to their inability to acquire voluntary easements from vast stretches of their proposed route.

"I've lost track of how many times people told

Continued on page 10

Organizing for Transformation in Nebraska

The Nebraska Organizing Project harnessed the power of grassroots organizing to bring language access—and profound change—to a rural community

By Jess Plance

The room was buzzing as over fifty community members sat in the Norfolk City Council chamber, awaiting a decision that had been months in the making. They had shared their stories, knocked on doors, built relationships, and stood together to push for a simple yet fundamental right: language access. As city officials prepared to cast their votes, the weight of the moment was clear. This was more than just a policy decision; it was a test of the power of grassroots organizing.

Language access ensures that non-English speakers can access emergency and other essential services, participate in their local government, and communicate effectively with officials. It improves public safety, strengthens civic engagement, and fosters inclusivity. Even English-speaking residents benefit from a more informed and engaged community, as language access helps create stronger connections between neighbors, businesses, and local institutions.

"Everyone who's in it with us recognizes that their well-being is tied up in the well-being of their neighbors," explained Anneka Rameriz, Norfolk resident and director of the Nebraska Organizing Project (NOP). "If my neighbor is not safe, I am not safe."

Moreover, providing language access is not just good policy—it's a legal requirement under Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on national origin, including policies or practices that create barriers for individuals with limited English proficiency. Language access aligns with federal law and reflects a commitment to equity, ensuring that every resident, regardless of their background, has a much greater opportunity to thrive.

An organization is born

NOP was born from the belief that real change happens when communities come together to build power. With support from WORC and the Great Plains Conference of the United Methodist Church, NOP took root in Norfolk, a rural town with a growing, diverse population.

To get NOP started, Kevin Williams, a WORC senior advisor, did an assessment of Nebraska. He had conversations with some 75 people in the state to get a lay of the land and find out, among other things, what challenges they were facing and what the political landscape was like.

Based on these conversations, WORC decided it would help build a state-based organization, starting with a local community. Two WORC organizers, Hannah Bohacek and Alina Lopez, had 50 more conversations with community members to continue to gather a local perspective on the issues. The first of these one-on-one conversations was with Norfolk resident Mo Bailey.

Bailey had already been active in the community with a background in faith-based organizing and a deep belief in the power of relationship-building. She became one of NOP's community leaders and helped



Anneka Rameriz, executive director of NOP

lay the foundation for the organization's approach—centering people's stories and equipping community members with the tools to advocate for themselves.

"The heart of organizing is listening. People want to be heard, but they also want to know they have the power to make change," Bailey said.

She climbed the leadership ladder. After serving as a community leader, she became an organizer and

"People shared their stories—what it felt like to be unheard, unseen. That's what made the city council listen."

-Mo Bailey

later NOP's director. She worked closely with local residents to continue to build power, ensuring they felt prepared to step into leadership roles. She demystified the political process and emphasized the strength found in collective action. Bailey eventually harnessed her experience as NOP's director to become the leadership and capacity organizer at WORC, with Ramirez stepping in as the new director of NOP.

Identifying the need

After forming, NOP conducted 150 more one-on-one conversations in Norfolk. One issue kept surfacing: language barriers, which were preventing many people from accessing basic city services.

"We had people in our community who couldn't even call 911 and get help in their own language," Ramirez said. "We have children in our community who are interpreting for their families in crisis situations. That's unacceptable."

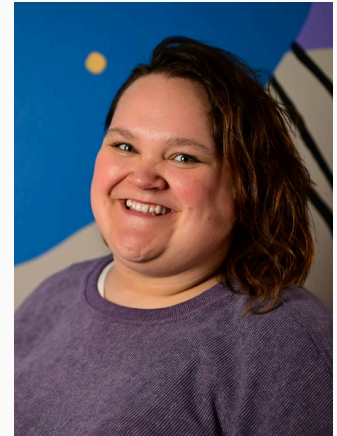
From these conversations, the group realized that advocating for a citywide language access plan would have a profoundly positive impact. Armed with training from WORC, the organizers learned how to turn community concerns into strategic action. They mapped out key decision-makers, built alliances, and prepared to make their case before the city council.

Building a movement

The Norfolk chapter of NOP started small—just

a handful of passionate community members determined to create change. They understood that personal stories held power, so they made storytelling a central part of their organizing.

Community organizing gives people a path forward. A pastor's wife, who once believed she wasn't political and had nothing to contribute, became an incredibly effective recruiter, bringing in more community members than anyone else at NOP. A young Latina woman, who had resigned herself to the way things were because she saw no clear path to change, emerged as the leader of the Norfolk chapter. She stood before the city council and spoke in the language of her heart, finally feeling heard and seen in her own community.



Mo Bailey, WORC's leadership and capacity organizer

Their transformation proves that power lies in the hands of those who least expect it, and when people organize together, they can reshape their communities in ways they never thought. "There have been times when we thought progress had been made because a policy had changed and as easily as it has changed, it has changed back," Bailey said. "What I believe I have seen in Norfolk is people's lives being *transformed*. I have seen some of our members who aren't going back to the way that they used to see the world."

Residents, both English and Spanish-speaking, prioritized language access as the top issue due to its widespread and immediate impact. Interviews with city officials, including the fire chief, police chief, and director of administrative services revealed that current translation practices—such as relying on Google Translate or untrained volunteers—were inadequate, placing both residents and city staff at risk.

Further research uncovered critical gaps: essential documents were not translated, emergency services were strained, and residents with limited English proficiency faced significant barriers to accessing city services. Furthermore, the city's practices were found

to be in noncompliance with Title VI of the Civil Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination based on national origin. Cities not in compliance risk losing federal funding.

With nearly 10% of Norfolk's population speaking Spanish and over 5% reporting limited English proficiency, the research brief NOP completed outlined a series of targeted solutions, including adopting a comprehensive language access plan, hiring a dedicated language navigator, providing consistent staff training, and ensuring the use of certified translators.

Those months of organizing revealed that Norfolk was in need of a language access plan to ensure all residents could fully participate in their community. Leading up to the city council vote members felt confident that they proved a strong case and that the vote would pass. What they didn't know was just how supportive the councilors would be.

The final vote

The night of the city council vote was a defining moment for NOP. Organizers and community members filled the chamber, prepared to present their case one last time. As resident after resident shared testimony, city officials could no longer ignore the urgent need for change. When the vote finally passed in favor of adopting the language access plan, the vote was unanimous. The room erupted in celebration.

"That moment, when the council said yes, we knew we weren't just individuals anymore—we were a force."

-Anneka Rameriz

"I had the honor of introducing the [Language Access Plan] in Spanish—the language of my heart," said NOP member Tania Garcia. "It was my first time at a city council meeting, and sharing our work

in Spanish filled me with deep pride. The unanimous approval of the LAP was a victory for our community, proving that Spanish, and all languages, belong in decision-making space."

"I never [before] in my life have been to meetings where I learn something, do something, and walk away feeling so proud of what we just accomplished," said Julie DeFor, another NOP member.


In addition to the new policy, one of the most significant outcomes of the language access victory in Norfolk was the creation of a new city staff position dedicated to language navigation. What was originally an HR generalist role was amended to focus specifically on helping non-English-speaking residents access city services.

To ensure the role would be impactful, NOP formed an advisory group that worked closely with the city's human resources department. This group advocated for a qualified, bilingual candidate to fill the position and helped shape the hiring process. After the language navigator was brought on, the advisory group continued to play a key role by supporting the new staff member's orientation and integration into the community. Their continued engagement shows how grassroots organizing doesn't end with a policy win—it ensures that victories are implemented in meaningful, lasting ways.

Expanding the movement

NOP success in Norfolk demonstrated a powerful model for organizing in rural communities. By investing in leadership development and deep relationship-building, NOP aims to create a network of grassroots leaders who could drive change across Nebraska.

With their first major victory secured, the NOP immediately set their sights on expanding the work to South Sioux City, where a group of dedicated organizing committee members are currently working with staff to create a local chapter. Plans are also underway to establish a statewide organizing committee to provide leadership and long-term sustainability.

"We're not just solving problems—we're building power that lasts," Bailey said. 

David and Goliath continued from page 6

me, when I first started organizing, that we sympathize with you, but you can't beat these people," Fischbach said. "They're too powerful. There's too much money. You just can't win. Thankfully, we didn't listen to that. You can defeat money if you get the people on your side."

For Jensen, DRA's organizing philosophy played a key role in winning at all levels.

"The reason I think we were successful in what we did was our belief that there are leaders out there, regular people who can be brought into public life and who can advocate on their own behalf," Jensen said. "That's really at the center of community organizing. It's not to go organize existing parties, existing donors, existing activists. It's to find new people that aren't part of it and bring them to the table."

Deep roots in community


Jensen believes DRA's deep ties to South Dakota communities allowed the organization to respond quickly when Fischbach received that first letter. DRA has almost 40 years of experience in South Dakota, and a reputation of fearlessly taking on controversial issues and helping people stand up for

themselves and their communities against powerful corporations.

"Every single fight has been like David versus Goliath," Jensen said. "To have victories like this in the midst of some of the deepest unsettling moments in our national political scene, what a time to deeply learn the lesson of how powerful community organizing can be."

While DRA and members like Fischbach have rallied people to big wins against CO2 pipelines in South Dakota, the fight is far from over. Lawmakers in Washington D.C. are testing the waters on legislation that would allow the federal government to preempt state and local pipeline permitting. Such a provision was included in an early draft of the 2025 budget reconciliation bill, but was removed before the House passed the bill.

Recent people-powered wins against long odds give Fischbach hope that the same principles will win at the national level as well.

"That's the lesson I've tried to instill in people," Fischbach said. "Don't get discouraged by all these little setbacks. Keep fighting. Believe in what you're doing, take a position, fight for what you've got, and you can prevail. Sometimes the little guy wins." 

CURIOUS

about running for public office?

Now, more than ever, we need people like you to consider running for office to champion policies that benefit our rural, Indigenous, and urban communities in the West.

Interested?
Connect with WORC's
Grassroots Democracy
team at [WORC.org](https://worc.org) or
scan the QR code.



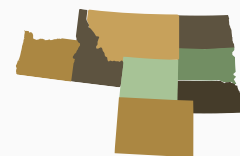
Train for change with Principles of Community Organizing Training

October 21st, 22nd, and 23rd, 2025, in Billings, MT

"Learn the lost art of leveraging your effectiveness by mobilizing others. Plus, a first-class focus on strategy, assessment, and tools for success."

Principles of Community Organizing teaches you the skills to build powerful organizations and launch winning issue campaigns. Learn more at worc.org

Around the Region



Dakota Resource Council led a broad coalition urging Governor Armstrong to veto a bill giving pesticide companies legal immunity—even if their products cause harm. Despite opposition from across the political spectrum, including the Dem-NPL, Libertarian Party of ND, and public health advocates, the Governor signed it into law.

North Dakota is now the first state to shield chemical makers from certain lawsuits. DRC and our allies are exploring a referendum to repeal it—because voters deserve a say.

Dakota Rural Action celebrated our longtime Executive Director Frank James, who retired in early May. As one of the longest serving staff members in the WORC network, Frank led the organization through several phases of its development. Also in recent months, three groups of members have travelled to Washington D.C. to meet with South Dakota's congressional staff. Our members and staff have also engaged with communities on everything from passing new county pipeline ordinances to helping a local group organize against a planned concentrated animal feeding operation. We'll soon conduct a new chapter organizing assessment in Rapid City and another one evaluating local energy issues in the Northern Black Hills.

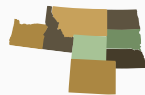


Idaho Organization of Resource Councils recently partnered with WORC to develop a new three-year strategic plan. To better reflect our state-wide campaigns and initiatives, we also recently updated our mission, vision, and theory of change, as well as overhauled our website and debuted a new logo. At our November annual meeting, we welcomed our newly elected all-Latiné board, a historic moment for IORC. Our new board is composed of leaders with lived experiences that align with our new mission, furthering our commitment to inclusivity and community representation. Currently, our focus is on organizing Farmworker Appreciation Week, continuing our Farmworker Justice Campaign, and gearing up for our 5th Annual JJ Saldaña Heat and Smoke Fund, which supports Idaho's farmworkers with necessary supplies, education, and safety practices.

Earlier this year, North Dakota Native Vote was extremely busy following over 80 bills during the state legislative session. Our state policy coordinator, Erika Red Tomahawk, tracked the bills and provided our members with weekly updates. We also reviewed and updated our annual strategic plan and received training on how to implement our new operational plan. In April, our team attended the America Votes States Summit in Washington D.C., and two of our staff members attended WORC's Principles of Community Organizing training in Rapid City, SD. We're pleased to announce that Kendyl Harrison has been promoted as our rural climate and energy organizer. We're also excited to welcome to the team a new part time office administrator, Oliver Miner. We'll soon hire a new full-time field organizer.



Around the Region



In April, Western Native Voice worked on major initiatives across Montana and beyond. We attended the America Votes Summit and supported our youth program as they took a small group of students to Washington, D.C. for a Capitol Experience. We also hosted Native Risings: A Capitol Experience in Helena, giving members the opportunity to visit the Montana State Capitol and experience the legislative session firsthand. We launched our member conferences, offering hands-on workshops focused on advocacy and leadership skills. We presented at the Fort Peck, Fort Belknap, and Rocky Boy reservations and in Great Falls, Missoula, and Billings. We also celebrated the passage and signing of a bill creating Indigenous Peoples Day in Montana, a victory years in the making.

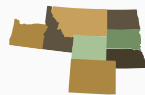
Oregon Rural Action successfully advanced our water campaign by working in the 2025 Oregon state legislative session on the organization's first bill, which would require reporting data to the Department of Agriculture on fertilizer used on farms larger than 200 acres. The data would show which farms are spreading too much fertilizer and contaminating groundwater. ORA and community leaders are also advocating for the reform of the Groundwater Quality Protection Act, through a bill called Fixing Oregon's Groundwater Quality Protection Act. This bill will help ensure that groundwater contamination can be addressed. In April, ORA and community leaders from the Lower Umatilla Basin held a lobby day with partner organizations to raise awareness, share lived experiences, and advocate for the bill. ORA has also been developing an immigration justice campaign that includes developing a new immigration coalition in Northeast Oregon. Composed of community leaders in social services and education, the coalition will help ensure people are informed and supported during these uncertain times of renewed mass deportation efforts. The coalition's efforts include developing a rapid response network, conducting Know Your Rights trainings, and participating in the statewide coalition, Oregon For All.



This past May, Northern Plains Resource Council celebrated the 25th Anniversary of the Good Neighbor Agreement (GNA). The GNA is an innovative legal framework that has protected two pristine watersheds and rural communities outside of Montana's Beartooth Mountains for a quarter century. In May of 2000, this legally-binding contract between Northern Plains, local affiliates Cottonwood Resource Council and Stillwater Protective Association, and the Sibanye-Stillwater Mine was ratified after years of previous contentious and resource-draining lawsuits.

The GNA has endured for a quarter century because of the unwavering commitment and hard work of Northern Plain members. Over the years, Northern Plains members have fostered deep trust and collaboration with the mine to sustain an internationally revered legal agreement.

Around the Region



Powder River Basin Resource Council welcomes a new executive director, Sharon Buccino. Most recently, Sharon led the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, where she helped distribute \$11.2 billion of federal infrastructure funds to coal communities for reclamation and repurposing of abandoned mine lands. She also facilitated federal approval of Wyoming's proposal to include used wind turbine blades as part of coal mine reclamation. Sharon has taught natural resource law, local government, and legislation as an adjunct at the University of Wyoming College of Law and Georgetown Law School. She is currently a fellow with the Wallace Stegner Center at the University of Utah. She also serves on the Planning Commission for the City of Laramie. Sharon is splitting her time between Sheridan and Laramie, where her husband teaches law at the university. Sharon knows lasting change is built from the bottom up and looks forward to finding what unites rather than divides – with old friends and new.

During this year's Colorado Legislative Session, Western Colorado Alliance proudly helped pass the Colorado Voting Rights Act, which makes voting easier, protects voters from discrimination, and codifies key provisions of the federal Voting Rights Act in Colorado – something the state needed in light of recent presidential executive orders threatening elections. This bill was authored by one of the Alliance's first West Slope Youth Voice interns, who is now clerking at the Harvard Law Clinic and helping pass voting rights legislation across the country. We also celebrated the passage of a bill that adds protections for immigrants and strengthens privacy rights in Colorado. During the Congressional April recess, we hosted a forum about the impacts of federal budget and personnel cuts in western Colorado, with five local stakeholders representing rural health care, rural electric co-ops, ranchers, food banks, and public land and water interests. Over 150 people, including local Senate staffers, attended in person and virtually. No staff from Rep. Jeff Hurd's office chose to attend. We are now ramping up in-person visits to his office through the rest of the budget reconciliation process.



The Nebraska Organizing Project (NOP) staff and members continue to gain traction in our relational organizing efforts in rural Nebraska. Member-leaders of our Norfolk Community Chapter are running a listening campaign involving at least 200 people as a first step towards deciding which issue the chapter will address next after convincing Norfolk City to remove language barriers that were preventing the town's large population of Latiné residents from accessing basic city services. South Sioux City Organizing Committee members attended a three-hour training session on power, conflict, and social change. This committee is poised to develop a strong chapter in their community and take action on pressing issues. Six NOP members have joined the Nebraska Organizing Committee, which supports and guides the organization's overall development and planning. The Committee adopted a statement of values which underpins NOP's leadership, decision-making, and organizing efforts.

Campaigns Update

By Sara Kendall, Program Director

Since January, there has been an onslaught of executive orders, administrative actions, and legislation that would roll back decades of federal policies that help protect our water, air, public lands, and the rural communities we live in. The onslaught reached a new extreme in May, when the House passed a sprawling and ruthless budget bill that would, if it became law, slash programs that rural America relies on for the sake of cutting taxes for billionaires.

WORC members have been fighting back, calling out the harm these administrative and congressional actions will have on our communities and demanding that the members of Congress who represent the WORC network's eight states reject them.

The assaults started on inauguration day, when President Trump signed an executive order declaring that the U.S. was under a "national energy emergency" and directing the government to expedite the development of fossil fuels and minerals (of course, no such emergency exists). He signed another order in early April that directed the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to prioritize coal leasing as the primary land use for public lands with coal reserves (among other things). In response, the BLM quickly announced its plan to reopen federal coal leasing in the Powder River Basin in eastern Montana and Wyoming—the largest coal-producing region in the United States—and overturn the Biden administration's decision to stop leasing coal there, something Northern Plains Resource Council, Powder River Basin Resource Council, and WORC spent decades to make happen.

Later that month, the Department of the Interior announced a plan to implement emergency permitting procedures to expedite the development of oil, gas, coal, and critical minerals projects on public lands and minerals. The plan essentially meant gutting the National Environmental Policy Act by reducing the timelines for environmental assessments for fossil fuel projects from one year to 14 days without requiring a public comment period. The timeline for more complicated environmental impact statements would take 28 days to be completed, rather than two years, and require only a 10-day public comment period. We have already seen this plan set in action with the

approval of the Bull Mountains Mine expansion in Montana.

And then came the budget reconciliation bill in May. As the bill stood in the Senate when we went to press in late June, it would cut, gut, and dismantle services, programs, policies, and laws that rural communities and families depend on for their health and wellbeing. It would eliminate all clean energy tax credits, a move that would kill jobs, drive up the cost of electricity, and pull the rug out from underneath homeowners, businesses, and rural electric co-ops who were counting on those credits to finance energy development and efficiency.

It would also slash how much fossil fuel corporations compensate rural communities for the privilege of making a killing on lands and minerals that belong to all Americans. Allowing companies to pay a fee to expedite environmental review of fossil fuel projects, the bill would also severely curtail Americans' right to have a say on projects that could have direct and disastrous impacts on the quality of our water, air, and lives.

Through media outreach, op-eds, and letters-to-the-editor, WORC members have been speaking out against the onslaught on rural communities in the West and Midwest, especially the budget bill. WORC's Board Chair Barbara Vasquez's penned an op-ed, "Energy Dominance Harms Public Lands," that was picked up for syndication by Writers on the Range and published in well over a dozen news outlets throughout the Mountain West, including the Denver Post, the Billings Gazette, the Las Vegas Sun, and several rural papers throughout Colorado.

WORC also launched an action campaign to generate calls to our Congressional delegations and demand that they vote against the reconciliation bill. We've also provided essential support to our member groups, helping them put public pressure on elected officials in their respective states.

If Congress hasn't already passed the reconciliation bill by the time you read this, give your Senators or Congressperson (depending on if the bill is currently in the Senate or the House) a call at (202) 224-3121 and let them know that you oppose the bill. And be sure to sign up for our email action alerts at worc.org/take-action so you know when and how to take action when action is needed.

Help Us Fight the Ruthless Giveaway to Billionaires

Members of Congress are right now trying to pass one of the most ruthless bills that has ever emerged in our nation's capital, a bill so merciless that it could leave 8.6 million Americans without health care, and take food off the table of millions of hard-working families.

It's no exaggeration to say that the budget reconciliation bill – passed by the House of Representatives in May – cuts, guts, and dismantles services, programs, policies, and rules that rural communities depend on for their health and wellbeing – all so billionaires and corporations can get richer and pay less in taxes. The bill strikes at just about everything WORC and our network have been fighting for in the 46 years we've been around – clean air, clean water, and healthy and prosperous rural communities.

Among dozens of other affronts that was in the bill when we went to press, it would:

- All but eliminate Americans' lawful right to have a say on federal decisions involving fossil fuel development and other projects on public and private lands.
- Give federal agencies the power to rubber-stamp fossil fuel development and pipeline construction projects, allowing companies to pay to expedite environmental review.
- Assure American taxpayers do not receive a fair rate of return on the development of public lands and minerals, depriving state and local governments of funding they rely on for rural schools, roads, and basic infrastructure.
- Eliminate clean energy tax credits, a move that would kill jobs, drive up the cost of electricity, and pull the rug out from underneath homeowners and rural electric co-ops who were counting on those credits.

Give \$500, \$100, \$50, or whatever you can today to help send this bill exactly where it belongs: the grave. Your donation won't just stop bad policy; it will fuel the momentum we need to organize, unite, and build the grassroots power that moves us toward a better, more just future.

Give today at worc.org or use the QR code.



PO Box 31037
Billings, MT 59107

Address Service Requested

PRSRT STD
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit No. 352
Billings, MT
59101