

WESTERN ORGANIZING REVIEW

A photograph of an elderly woman with short grey hair, smiling and looking upwards. She is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and holding a green mug. The background shows a clear blue sky, a wooden structure (possibly a porch or balcony) with a red hummingbird feeder hanging from it, and a mountain range in the distance. A hummingbird is captured in flight near the feeder.

Fall / Winter 2024

FROM WILDLIFE TO WELLS

Barbara Vasquez' decades-long effort to strengthen protections for communities and wildlife.

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From wildlife to wells

Barbara Vasquez' decades-long effort to strengthen protections for communities and wildlife.

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The view from WORC

By Paula Wopila Win
Antoine, WORC Board Chair

Repeatedly across our region and our movement, we have seen our members win significant change by working together to educate and engage their neighbors; share their experiences and stories; leverage their lived experience, deepening understanding, and strength in numbers; and form powerful coalitions to pressure public officials successfully.

In June, the Bureau of Land Management surprised many of us by ending coal leasing in the Powder River Basin. The Basin, which extends through eastern Wyoming and Montana and into western North Dakota, is the largest coal reserve in the United States. The decision to end leasing took into account the harms of strip-mining enormous swaths of productive grasslands as well as the disastrous climate impact of burning its six billion tons of coal.

This isn't the only big win to celebrate this year. The BLM also finalized a long-overdue rule requiring oil and gas companies to set aside bonds big enough to cover plugging and reclamation if they choose to walk away from their cleanup obligations. And at the USDA, WORC pressure helped close the USDA's "Product of the U.S.A. loophole" which allowed transnational meatpackers to import cheap beef and market it as a Product of the U.S.A. This loophole undercut American producers and allowed meatpackers to profit from a lie. Now it's time for Congress to pass mandatory Country of Origin Labeling. You can read more about WORC's wins throughout this issue.



These huge wins will shape the West in profound ways making our communities safer while protecting land and water. WORC's roots are planted firmly in the soil of community organizing. In my home state of South Dakota, we recently had historic wins fighting carbon pipelines by getting neighbors out to county commission meetings and convincing decision-makers that letting a corporation force people to give up their land and safety through eminent domain is both unsafe and unjust.

It all comes back to land, communities and voices. Whose land is valued? Which communities are safe? Whose voices are being heard? Every one of our members are working hard toward protecting land and water and ensuring that their communities are safe. WORC is making sure their voices are being heard.

One of the fundamental ways to ensure voices are being heard is through the ballot box. Native voices like mine have long been excluded, and our vote impacts have not been

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Bending the Arc

By **Deb Love**

WORC Executive Director

Greetings, WORC members and friends! It's been a wild and wonderful first six months as Executive Director of WORC. I've been on an extended listening tour, meeting with WORC staff and board members; member group Executive Directors; member group staff and boards; funders; landowners and allies. Across the board, I have heard optimism and excitement for the work ahead, along with a recognition of the critical role of community organizing in this particularly fateful time for our democracy.

In this issue, we will celebrate recent (and massive) policy wins, the culmination of decades of tireless advocacy and direct community action on the part of landowners, community members, leaders, and staff. Taking the helm of this extraordinary network, I am both inspired and humbled, committed to supporting and uplifting all of you fierce advocates for equity, justice, and social and environmental health. As you read through this Western Organizing Review, please join me in celebrating our wins, then rolling up our sleeves for the work ahead. As Dr. Martin Luther King so beautifully said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." With the strength of this network, let's bend that arc in these eight states we call home. [W](#)

WORC Supporter

WORC is a value packed investment for me. I believe in grassroots organizations and it brings me a lot of happiness to be fortunate enough to contribute to a cause I believe in.

Heidi Anderson

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

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From Wildlife to Wells

Dr. Barbara Vasquez' Decades-Long Effort alongside WCA and WORC to Strengthen Protections for Communities and Wildlife

By Jessica Plance

In the remote, wildlife-rich expanse of Jackson County, Colorado, Dr. Barbara Vasquez has emerged as a dedicated advocate for stricter oil and gas regulations. Since retiring to this picturesque region in 2005, Barbara has devoted herself to environmental issues, particularly those related to the impacts of oil and gas development on public lands. "I chose to make Jackson County, Colorado my forever home, a rural county covering approx. 1600 sq miles, approx 65% of which is public, and with fewer than 1 person per square mile. The county is bounded by a ring of mountains and wilderness areas and forms the headwaters of the North Platte River," said Barbara. Her devotion to the land has fueled her efforts that have been instrumental in the ongoing reform of oil and gas regulations at both the state and federal levels.

Barbara's journey into environmental advocacy began with her service on the Bureau of Land

Management (BLM) Resource Advisory Council for Northwest Colorado. Disillusioned with the lack of meaningful progress, however, she sought out more effective avenues for change, leading her to the Western Colorado Alliance (WCA) and the Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC). Through these organizations, Barbara has been at the forefront of efforts to strengthen regulations governing oil and gas operations.

One of the most significant victories in Barbara's advocacy career came in 2019, with the reformation of Colorado's oil and gas regulatory authority. "The legislation that passed in 2019 required a professional five-person commission as well as a change in rules to move from fostering oil and gas development to managing oil and gas development," Barbara explains. This shift allowed for the creation of rules that are more protective of human health, wildlife, and the environment.

Despite these advancements, challenges

remain. Barbara highlights the issue of methane venting and flaring from shale oil operations, which had been a significant source of pollution in Jackson County. "Every single molecule of that methane was vented or flared since the beginning of the field until we were successful, with a lot of work from WCA and other organizations, here in the rulemaking in Colorado in 2019, that eliminated routine venting and flaring," she recounts. However, the absence of pipelines to transport the gas has led operators to resort to using field gas generators for Bitcoin mining, causing unintended environmental consequences.

Barbara's advocacy extends to the federal level, where she has been involved in supporting the reform of onshore oil and gas rules. She urged both the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and BLM to strengthen protections against the leaking, venting, and flaring of methane, a greenhouse gas significantly more potent than carbon dioxide. She's also been a leader on leasing reform at the federal level, specifically around bonding. "The bonding rules for oil and gas wells on public land have not been increased in 60 years," Barbara notes.

For decades, the minimum bond for all wells on a single lease was a mere \$10,000, and \$25,000 for all wells on public lands. BLM's actual reclamation cost for a low-cost well was \$20,000, and \$145,000 for a high-cost well. These low bonding rates meant that unscrupulous operators would walk away from their wells when they stopped producing, leading to the legacy of idle and abandoned wells that plague Jackson County and much of the West.

Over the last year and a half, her work has been paying off. First, EPA issued strong new limits on methane released from oil and gas wells. These new limits will protect downwind communities from exposure to methane and other toxic chemicals and the climate. Then, this April, the BLM finalized a groundbreaking update to its oil and gas leasing standards with the Onshore Leasing Rule. This marked a decades-overdue overhaul of the federal oil and gas program that included critical changes to royalty rates, fees for nominating parcels for leasing and most importantly for rural communities, updated bonding requirements.

For decades, inadequate bonding



requirements allowed oil and gas companies to shirk their cleanup responsibilities, leaving behind a toxic legacy of orphaned wells in Jackson County and much of the West. These wells continue to leak methane and other hazardous substances and impose severe costs on taxpayers and local communities. The old rules required low minimum bonds. The average bond collected per well was only \$2,122, while the actual cleanup costs ranged from \$35,000 to \$200,000. With so little on the line, companies walked away from wells, leaving the public to bear the burden of cleanup. The new bonding amounts, \$150,000 to \$500,000, reflect the true costs of reclamation and represent a major

victory for oilfield communities and taxpayers.

As a concerned resident of an oilfield community and a leader on WORC's oil and gas team, Barbara has been an avid supporter of WORC and the member groups pushing for these crucial reforms. "At last, with the release of the finalized rule, BLM has taken the common-sense step to ensure that oil and gas operators shoulder the fiscal responsibility that was theirs in the first place," said Barbara. "These rules will help solve the orphaned well crisis that has been spiraling out of control for decades."

In addition to raising bond amounts, the new rule aims to prevent speculative leasing, a practice where companies obtain leases without any intention of fulfilling their reclamation duties. The rule introduces stricter criteria for "qualified bidders" and "qualified lessees," ensuring that only responsible operators can obtain new leases.

"At last, with the release of the finalized rule, BLM has taken the common-sense step to ensure that oil and gas operators shoulder the fiscal responsibility that was theirs in the first place,"

Barbara brings her knowledge of the natural world to her advocacy work. Barbara advocates land managers to consider the cumulative impacts when leasing and permitting oil and gas operations. She argues that the BLM's current practice of evaluating environmental impacts on a pad-by-pad basis is insufficient. "You really need to look at the impacts in a holistic way across the landscape," she asserts. This approach is vital for protecting the fragile sagebrush habitat and the numerous species that depend on it, including the greater sage-grouse.

Barbara's dedication to environmental protection is driven by her deep love for the natural world and her desire to leave a positive legacy for future generations. "This is my home. And I want to do whatever I can to protect it not just for me and my family, but for future generations," she says passionately. Her tireless efforts continue to inspire and drive meaningful change in the regulation of oil and gas development, ensuring that the unique and wild landscapes of Jackson County are preserved for years to come. **W**



Grassroots organizing pays off with strong oil and gas bonding standards

On April 12, the Bureau of Land Management released its new Onshore Oil and Gas Leasing Rule. While this rule contained other important changes, WORC members have focused on the bonding program, which hasn't been updated in 60 years. Insufficient bond requirements incentivised oil and gas companies to walk away from their cleanup obligations on our public and Tribal lands and minerals, leaving behind a toxic legacy of orphaned wells. Under the new standards, oil and gas companies will be required to post bonds that cover the costs of plugging federal wells and restoring the affected areas.

BLM's new oil and gas bonding standards will finally help ensure taxpayers and frontline communities no longer have to suffer from the environmental impacts of abandoned wells or pay for well cleanup.

For more information, visit www.worc.org



WORC members help end coal leasing in America's largest coalfield

By Eric Warren

In October 1971, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation released the North Central Power Study (NCPS), a comprehensive resource management plan aimed at “powering America” by promoting coal development in the Powder River Basin, the largest coal deposit in the United States. The Study determined that the solution to America’s energy crisis lay in unearthing the billions of tons of coal lying under the productive grasslands of eastern Wyoming, Montana, and western North Dakota. “It was a blueprint for turning eastern Montana and northern Wyoming into the boiler room of the nation,” recalled Bull Mountains rancher and long-time Northern Plains member Ellen Pfister, in Northern Plains’ history documentary *Standing Together*.

Coal companies quickly flooded the Basin with “land men” trying to pressure farmers and ranchers (often using deceptive or heavy-handed tactics) into leasing their land for strip mines. These

tactics inspired local families to come together with their neighbors to form Northern Plains Resource Council in Montana, Powder River Basin Resource Council in Wyoming, and Dakota Resource Council in North Dakota. This early grassroots organizing led to swift victories. “It was kind of a sweet spot of time,” said Steve Charter, Montana rancher and long-time member of Northern Plains. “It was kind of before coal companies got organized to oppose this stuff.”

WORC is born

By the end of the 1970s, coal companies had gotten organized and were watering down the protections won by Northern Plains members and others and hastily converting the agriculturally and ecologically rich grasslands of the Basin into the “national sacrifice area” that the NCPS had envisioned. Throughout the region, towering drag lines and hulking dump trucks carved out gaping

BLM Ends Coal Leasing in PRB
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pits. Under Montana's Bull Mountains, long-wall mines tunneled under grazing land, creating giant cracks in the landscape that shattered pipes and dried natural springs. Miles of new railroad tracks split ranches and ignited range fires. The rumble of blasting rolled across the prairie.

As coal companies changed their tactics, Northern Plains, Powder River, and Dakota



A toxic "orange cloud" rises from blasting a coal mine's overstory.

Resource Council began working together as part of a national coalition to pass the federal Surface Mining Control and Reclamation Act of 1977 (SMCRA). This victory helped the groups realize their collective power, and in 1979, they formed WORC. "The vision of our ranchers and farmers was to build this regional organization," said WORC founder and former director Pat Sweeney. "And to build power based on the fact that all three states coming together would have a bigger impact, especially when we were all working on strip mining."

Since most of the coal was owned and managed by federal agencies under a split-estate system where a landowner may own the surface land but the coal is owned and leased by the Bureau of

Land Management (BLM), decision-makers were less apt to be swayed by residents of a single state. "A lot of the issues we worked on were issues that cross state lines," Sweeney said. "Or if there's a big fight going on in one of the states, then the rest of us pile on to help that organization. We're all going to be part of that fight, because it's in our mutual interest to do that."

Although WORC's members won many of these battles, the BLM intentionally set the

price for coal leases low, which, together with environmental protections that shifted demand to the Basin's low sulfur coal, spurred coal development for decades.

Long-term campaign, longer-term effects

On May 16th, 2024, forty years after the North Central Power Study was released, the Biden administration, responding to pressure from WORC and its allies—

including two court victories—announced that it would end federal coal leasing in the Powder River Basin. Given the substantial money and influence at stake, such a sweeping decision was far from certain, even as coal markets withered over the last decade and the health and climate impacts of burning coal became widely recognized.

"BLM's announcement recognizes that coal's era is ending," said WORC's Board Chair Paula Antoine after the announcement. "Coal has powered our nation for many decades, but technology, economics and markets are changing radically."

The BLM also cited the continuing health consequences of coal mining on Basin

communities. Both active and inactive mines threaten groundwater availability for drinking and livestock. Open pits lead to enormous quantities of dust that often blow into communities causing lung problems. Blasting sometimes causes a chemical reaction resulting in toxic "orange clouds" that can drift on the wind threatening humans and wildlife. By not burning the Basin's six billion tons of remaining coal, the decision's biggest effects may be on the global climate.

"For decades, mining has affected public health, our local land, air, and water, and the global climate," said Lynne Huskinson, a former coal miner and member of Powder River Basin Resource Council. For years, Huskinson has worked to hold coal companies accountable for their impacts to the people of the Basin. "As someone who lives near some of the largest coal mines in the nation, I'm thankful for the leadership from the BLM in finally addressing the long-standing negative impacts that federal coal leasing has had on the Powder River Basin."

Still work to be done


The BLM's decision to end coal leasing won't stop mining any time soon. Mining companies throughout the Basin have decades of coal already under lease. The BLM's decision gives Powder River Basin coalfield communities something that changing coal markets or regulations couldn't: a timeframe for mine closures.

For decades, WORC members have been urging decision-makers to require companies to reclaim the land contemporaneously with mining in order to utilize the massive workforce of miners already trained for the job. Unfortunately, mining companies have a history of putting cleanup of their operations off and then selling their mines to less and less

scrupulous operators. Our members have learned from the experiences of coalfield communities in Appalachia, the Illinois Basin, and on Navajo Nation, where mines have already been abandoned, leaving massive holes in the ground that threaten aquifers and render the land unsuitable for agricultural or recreational use.

The century-old Turnercrest Ranch, about an hour south of Gillette, Wyoming, has experienced the effects of coal mining and the expansion of leases on their operation. "About 100,000 acres in this county have been mined for coal," said Powder River Basin Resource Council member LJ Turner in an interview for Homegrown Stories. His family homesteaded and operated the ranch since 1918. In 2018, the Turner family lost Forest Service grazing leases so coal mines could expand, even as coal markets were contracting. With the end of federal leasing, grazing and other land uses won't be threatened by mines buying up leases in hopes that the coal market could miraculously recover.

Now that the end of Powder River Basin coal mining is in sight, coalfield communities can work on transitioning their economies. The region's vast wind and solar resources offer the potential to become a renewable energy powerhouse. This is the vision of many WORC members, and they are already working hard to make it happen. They hope that the BLM's decision will create the conditions to drive this transition.

"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," Antoine said. 

Receive campaign updates right to your inbox. Sign up for our e-newsletter at: <https://bit.ly/WORCexpress>



Global Gardens: Cultivating Diversity, Community, and Resilience

By Jessica Plance



In the heart of Boise, Idaho, there's a nonprofit organization that's sowing the seeds of diversity, sustainability, and community resilience. Global Gardens, founded in 2004 as a modest community garden, has blossomed into a remarkable initiative that's transforming lives and the local food landscape.

Global Gardens began as a community garden, primarily tended by Somali refugees who were growing food to sustain their families. A pivotal moment in the organization's history occurred when ten farmers united to launch a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program. Each farmer contributed their unique crops, and together they delivered vegetable boxes to local residents from a central pickup location. At that time, Global Gardens had only four CSA members.



Global Gardens grows vegetables that are rarely found in mainstream markets, offering not only the refugee community but also Boise residents a taste of the world's diverse cuisines. From the long beans of Asia to sour leaves of Africa, these crops aren't just food; they're a connection to ancestral roots, traditions, and cultural heritage.


During the pandemic, Global Gardens partnered with the Idaho Organization of Resource Council (IORC) to get local, culturally relevant and organic food out to the farmworker communities. IORC signed up for CSA's from Global Gardens to create a mutual relationship in supporting their CSA program while trying to meet a need in the Latine Immigrant community living in food apartheid.

Fast forward to the present, Global Gardens has evolved from a community garden into a thriving community of 16 market gardeners, representing diverse nationalities such as Burma, Somalia, Burundi, Congo Brazzaville, and Ethiopia. Those four CSA members turned into over three hundred customers who support Global Garden growers.





Food is a centerpiece of culture, it connects us to history and tradition in a universal way that only food can achieve. In the West, Idaho has been in the top ten states for accepting refugees, contributing to 6% of the population. Despite its increasing diversity, the food selection had remained limited compared to most urban areas.

Green spaces in urban environments, like Global Gardens' locations, are vital for environmental sustainability. They help cities adapt to environmental challenges such as heatwaves, heavy rainfall, and flooding. For many seniors in the Boise community, the community garden serves as a place for socialization, physical activity, and fills a sense of purpose. 



Celebrate the season of giving
There's still time to make a year-end gift
Give today at www.worc.org



Landowners rally to protect water at Montana coal mine expansion

Members of the Bull Mountain Land Alliance (BMLA) and the Northern Plains Resource Council in Mussellshell County, Montana rallied in July to protest several bills introduced by one of their U.S. Senators that would stop an environmental study of the Bull Mountain Mine's proposed expansion. The mine is owned by Signal Peak Energy, which is currently on federal probation with the Department of Justice following criminal convictions for willful violations of environmental and safety standards.

Two bills introduced by Senator Steve Daines would reinstate an environmental assessment that a federal judge ruled was insufficient, or allow the mine to expand and continue to mine without the thorough environmental impact statement (EIS) that the judge required.

Edward Barta, chair of Northern Plains said, "Ranchers and other landowners above and around the mine have spent decades fighting for a hard look at the mine's impacts. The mine has damaged several water resources that area ranchers depend on, and Signal Peak is poised to begin mining activity under a residential subdivision. The mine


has seen hundreds of permit amendments with no meaningful analysis. Now that this impact review is finally happening, it shouldn't be short-changed."

The EIS could result in new safeguards that protect neighboring landowners, wildlife and water resources.

"[O]ur intentions are to protect our land, our water, and our wildlife," said Tom Baratta, a BMLA member who spoke at the rally. "And we need that information to properly assess the damage that might be caused by mining activity."

A third bill would put federal land and coal into a private trust and eliminate the need for an environmental impact statement.

Some protestors are concerned about how the mine expansion would affect wildlife, and that hunters would lose access to public land if it is transferred to private control.

"We don't know what effect it would have," said Mike Mershon, a Montana Wildlife Federation member. "We do know that we would lose access to it. It would make an impact." 



WCA Welcomes the WORC network to Colorado

By Marvel Karch

In June, Western Colorado Alliance hosted this year's Summer Conference in Grand Junction, Colorado, within sight of the towering red rock cliffs of Colorado National Monument and along the banks of the Colorado River. Members and staff from throughout the WORC network gathered to celebrate our wins, share what we've learned, and deepen our relationships.

This year's conference included practical sessions to build organizing skills including trainings on both database and time management plus building power through campaigns.

WCA and WORC also coordinated sessions that deepened participants' understandings about the local community including the Indigenous history of the Western Slope and the important community work of Western Slope Native American Resource Center. Members of WCA's Western Slope Youth Vote also gave an

interactive presentation about the challenges and successes of high school-aged youth building power by organizing within their schools and communities. Directors Ronnie Jo Horse (Western Native Voice) and Nicole Donaghy (North Dakota Native Vote) co-presented on the impact of the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924 on Native communities and the country as a whole. And Indira Guzman and Rosa Guzman-Snyder from the Community Language Cooperative led attendees in a fast-paced and impactful Language Justice Training.

Network members spent plenty of time connecting and deepening relationships, including an evening socializing in a park on the banks of the Colorado River. Next year's Summer Conference will be held in Boise, Idaho. We look forward to seeing everyone there! [W](#)

View from WORC

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recognized even decades after the Indian Citizenship Act of 1924. Western Native Voice and North Dakota Native Vote have been on the front lines defending the Native right to vote and fighting states' efforts to suppress Native votes. And they've been winning. The winning goes beyond our member organizations. Several of our leaders and staff have also won awards including the American Bar Association's Unsung Hero of Democracy Award, Sierra Club 2024 Robert Bullard

Environmental Justice Award, and USA Today's Woman of the year (the second in the WORC family in two years). You can read more about these honors in the "Around the Region" section.

WORC is proud to support these inspirational leaders and the great work their organizations do. They represent the groundswell of community support that will fight for justice and ensure all voices are heard in the decisions that affect our land, water, and communities. [W](#)

Campaign updates

Oil and Gas

WORC continues to defend the BLM's commonsense onshore leasing rule from congressional and court attacks through community action and press strategies.

Ag and Food

WORC hosted a comment writing party via ZOOM for the proposed "Fair and Competitive Livestock and Poultry Markets" rule.

WORC launched its "no Farm Bill without COOL" campaign including an action alert, blog posts, and bumper stickers! Interested in a sticker? We'll send you one for free! Follow this link: <https://bit.ly/3XY7O8r>

Carbon Capture and Sequestration

WORC has voiced its support for carbon tax credit reform through recent sign-on letters with allied organizations. The goal of this work is to ensure that taxpayer dollars aren't wasted on expensive and ineffective carbon capture technologies that benefit industries over communities.

Coal

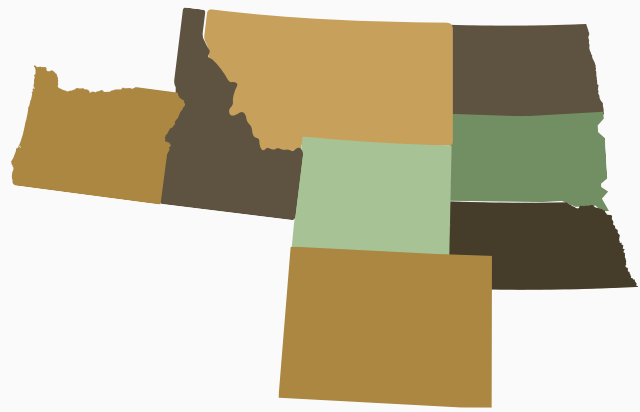
This spring, after four decades of WORC organizing, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) made the landmark decision to end coal leasing in the Powder River Basin, a victory for communities and the environment.

WORC is actively working with Northern Plains Resource Council to oppose legislation, introduced by Senator Daines, that would initiate a coal swap in the Bull Mountains and would prevent an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) from being completed.

Clean Energy

WORC and our allies' hard work advocating for the USDA's PACE and New ERA programs is finally paying dividends with massive new investments for clean energy projects. Delta Montrose Electric Association was awarded \$72 million for a 20MW solar project in Colorado. Other major electric cooperatives in our region are selected recipients for New ERA, which will provide over \$1 billion for new solar and wind projects, including Basin Electric, Tri-State, Minnkota Power, and Great River Energy.

Around the Region



In July, Fort Berthold POWER, a DRC affiliate, celebrated a landmark \$242 million settlement with Marathon Oil for Clean Air Act violations on the Fort Berthold Reservation. This historic decision, including a record-setting \$64.5 million fine, is a result of the tireless efforts of our members and allies to hold oil companies accountable. We hope this settlement will improve air quality and send a strong message to companies that they cannot get away with polluting our environment.

DRC and the people of North Dakota also celebrated a monumental win in August as the North Dakota Public Service Commission voted 3-0 to deny Summit Carbon Solutions' application to construct a carbon dioxide pipeline in the state. This decision represents a significant milestone in the fight for property rights and community empowerment.

Dakota Rural Action is celebrating a huge win after Riverview Dairy withdrew its application for a 12,500 head dairy near Goodwin, SD. This is the second victory against Riverview, who just months prior withdrew its application from Hazel, SD.

Riverview, a Minnesota based company driving much of the dairy expansion in South Dakota, was proposing a 12,500 cow dairy near the small town of Goodwin in eastern South Dakota. Over 150 people attended a community meeting including county officials. The county officials in attendance felt the pressure from the community.

DRA has long-been assisting these fights, and will continue to strategically work with our leaders to strengthen our counties' protection against harmful operations like these mega-dairies.



IORC's Executive Director, Irene Ruiz, received the 2024 Robert Bullard Environmental Justice Award. This award honors individuals who have done outstanding work in the area of environmental justice, at the local or national level.

The Idaho Organization of Resource Councils welcomed Jacky Vazquez to the staff in June. Jacky is the new office manager and will help support the organization on the administrative side. IORC is excited to have a new face and great additions to its staff.

IORC's group, the Idaho Immigrant Resource Alliance has started its 4th annual JJ Saldaña Heat and Smoke Fund. This fund is to support Idaho's farmworkers with supplies such as water, sunscreen, hats, coolers, masks, and other items while working in the extreme heat and wildfire smoke. IORC is grateful for those volunteers and those who have donated who have made it possible to support the farmworking communities.





The Nebraska Organizing Project has welcomed 65 new members through their Language Access Campaign, strengthening community support and expanding their ability to drive change. This growth underscores their community's commitment to breaking down language barriers for Norfolk's Spanish-speaking residents.

In September the Norfolk Chapter won its first big action, asking the Norfolk City Council to adopt a more robust and comprehensive Language Access Plan. The Plan will serve people who speak a language other than English and will be required by federal law for all state and local agencies that receive federal funds, including the City of Norfolk.

North Dakota Native Vote has been focused on expanding their grassroots organizing, enhancing their organizational identity, expanding their fundraising capacity, and increasing the number of North Dakota polling locations.

To facilitate this growth, hired three full-time staff members including an office administrator, Tribal and State Policy Coordinator, and a Rural Climate and Energy Field Organizer whose primary focus is on Rural Electric Cooperatives and working to build representation and improve infrastructure and policies and four part time temporary field organizers to work on each reservation in North Dakota to assist in our Get Out the Vote Campaign and efforts leading up to the election.

In August, NDNV was honored with the Unsung Hero of Democracy Award from the American Bar Association (ABA). This prestigious award recognized their relentless efforts to uphold and promote the rule of law by advancing our democratic system.



Northern Plains members are making national news for their work to protect Montana's rural communities. In mid-May, The Washington Post published a feature story spotlighting Northern Plains ranching members in Carter County, MT who are organizing to stop ExxonMobil's proposed carbon pollution pipeline, the Snowy River Carbon Dioxide Sequestration project.

The Post's story captures members' experiences and concerns to explore the environmental, safety, and economic problems with carbon capture and sequestration (CCS), creating a strong national narrative as Northern Plains works to prevent this dangerous project from harming water, ranchland, and livelihoods in Carter County.



Oregon Rural Action's water justice campaign Safe Rural Water Communities/Agua Segura En La Comunidades Rurales continues to progress in securing safe water for all. ORA has been working with the rural community members of Eastern Oregon to explore possible solutions for permanent water sources while also pushing state agencies and the Governor for an adequate response. With the support of over 30 organizations across the state, a letter was sent demanding testing goals and a comprehensive state action plan.

ORA has been working with community centers around the region to secure funding for Climate Resilience. Funding and close partnerships with community centers will help create a safe zone, in the case of extreme and dangerous natural disasters occur.

ORA's Equity initiative continues to share culturally relevant information and work to change social service systems to improve access for immigrant communities. This summer, our organizing team is hosting several informative workshops to advocate for Food for All Oregonians in an effort to expand SNAP access.



Powder River's Laramie-based affiliate, the Alliance for Renewable Energy (ARE), successfully organized support for the city's Emission Reduction Plan this spring. After two Environmental Advisory Committee (EAC) meetings, the plan moved to the Laramie City Council, where it was unanimously approved on April 23.



ARE mobilized community members to attend meetings and voice their support, emphasizing the urgency of addressing climate change and highlighting available financial incentives and grants. Despite some EAC members' concerns about costs, the committee ultimately supported the plan in a 6-1 vote.

The city council's unanimous adoption of the plan was met with applause from a packed room of supporters. The plan aims to guide Laramie toward net-zero carbon emissions for municipal operations by 2050, focusing on energy efficiency, renewable energy, and electric vehicles.

Western Colorado Alliance is celebrating a big win in the recent board elections of the Delta-Montrose Electric Association (DMEA), with all three of our chosen candidates — Steve Metheny, Ryan Sedgely, and our Alliance's own Kevin Williams — succeeding in joining the board. We're also proud of our affiliate groups in Montrose and Garfield Counties, the Uncompahgre Valley Alliance (UVA) and Western Colorado Alliance of Garfield County, both of which elected new leadership in the past month. And we're excited that UVA has launched their new public transportation campaign!



Western Native Voice's Executive Director, Ronnie Jo Horse, was one of USA TODAY's 2024 Women of the Year. This award recognizes women who have made a significant impact in their communities and across the country.



Over the past few months, Western Native Voice has been diligently working to empower Native American communities across Montana by conducting membership and voter registration drives, distributing informative materials, and the use of social media influencers for our GOTV efforts. Their community organizers are also using a new app to map and register unregistered Native voters both in rural and urban areas.. We've also hosted community movie events to highlight our work, important issues our members care about and the importance of civic engagement, including hosting a 100 year anniversary parade downtown Billings to commemorate the 100 year Anniversary of the Indian Citizenship Act.

Western Native Voice's Expanding Horizons youth program held a 2 week camp at the Rocky Mountain College campus and had 40 young people from around the state attend.

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The WORC network is always looking for people passionate about creating positive change in rural areas. Whether you're an organizer, development or communications professional, or just starting your grassroots organizing career, check out our careers page.

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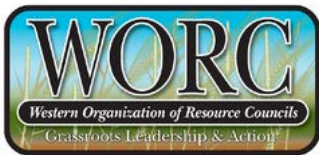
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