

the Montana Sierran

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Columbia River Gorge,
Oregon from Crown Point

The Columbia River Team Advocates for a New Era of the Columbia River Treaty

BY **STACEY HELLEKSON**, Montana Chapter

The Montana Chapter has been connected with the regional grassroots Columbia River Team for the past few years, as you may have read about in previous newsletters. This year, Stacey Hellekson, one of our chapter board members from the Bozeman area, joined the team as the official Montana representative. The team works with Indigenous leaders and tribes in the region to restore salmon and bring an inspiring vision of ecosystem-based function to a new treaty.

Once among the world's richest salmon rivers, today the Columbia is the most dammed river system in the world and is managed as an "organic machine." The capstone of the dam-building era was the Columbia River Treaty, negotiated in the 1950's without input from tribes and First Nations or local communities. Now, the U.S. and Canada are back at the negotiating table with a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to change how both

countries jointly manage the Columbia River watershed.

The Treaty was originally formulated like a narrow business contract. Among other provisions, the U.S. paid Canada to build dams (flooding forested and fertile valleys, displacing thousands of people and devastating wildlife) to control cross-border river flows to maximize American hydropower generation and prevent downstream flooding — primarily in the Portland/Vancouver metropolitan area. The Treaty also authorized the U.S. to build Libby Dam, in Montana, and create the Koocanusa Reservoir, which backs up into Canada. To this day, the Treaty has only two purposes: hydropower generation and flood risk management. For other important issues like salmon restoration, water quality and mining pollution, ecosystem health, and community involvement, the Treaty remains silent.

Since 2018, the U.S. and Canada have been negotiating changes for the

Treaty's future. For those of us who support healthy ecosystems, Indigenous rights, an educated public, and transparent government, this is an important opportunity to work towards a better future for the Columbia River Watershed.

Treaty negotiations continue, with the most recent occurring in June 2020 where the U.S. State Department represented the United States. The details of this meeting are confidential, but the U.S. State Department has not shown much effort to engage with the public beyond minimal press releases. The Canadians, however, are taking public involvement seriously and six groups — Wildsight, Sierra Club of British Columbia, Yellowstone to Yukon Conservation Initiative, BC Nature, Friends of Kootenay Lake Stewardship Society, and the North Columbia Environmental Society- have formed the Upper Columbia Basin Environmental Collaborative (UCBEC) to participate in the public engagement.

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A NOTE FROM THE CHAPTER DIRECTOR

What a year it has been. While the Covid-19 pandemic raged on, the Trump administration and corporations seeking to profit off the crisis moved full speed ahead on controversial projects and attempts to roll back environmental and health protections. Even while Montana had its shelter in place order, and the Keystone XL pipeline faced uncertainty due to economic and permitting issues, TC Energy began construction of the border crossing segment in March, with hundreds of workers from out of state congregating in rural communities already facing shortages of protective equipment, Covid-19 testing capacity, and other supplies and services that would be necessary to respond to an outbreak should it occur (cases did later turn up in those counties and in the worker camp).



During this pandemic time and racial justice uprisings, our work shifted focus to respond to immediate community needs, the challenges (and opportunities) of working and organizing remotely, and finding opportunities to work in solidarity with communities most impacted by the pandemic and all the backwards environmental decisions of the administration. And, our focus remained the same. It has always been part of the struggle for justice and a healthy planet, to address the disparate impacts of environmental destruction and to work towards a vision of clean air, water, and climate, and wild places for all people. This year has brought increased awareness and urgency to the need to dismantle the systems of white supremacy and racism, and all other systems of oppression that together threaten the welfare of our whole world and the staying power of each of our environmental wins. This is part of our charge as environmentalists, to recreate what it means to be an environmentalist and how we go about protecting all the beauty and biodiversity of the earth for generations to come.

At times I felt our efforts - my efforts - were inadequate in the face of the immense challenges of 2020, as we adjusted to remote work and saw dedicated volunteers have to step back in order to tend to their pressing daily needs and ever-shifting realities. Yet as I reflect on the year, I am heartened by the incredible progress we were able to make, together with so many community and organizational partners, and how we are poised to meet the challenges of the coming year.

We've been able to host, show up to, and otherwise rally people – mostly virtually, though some in person in the early months of the year – through it all. From a Keystone XL rally and court win, to a Ready for 100 clean electricity resolution in Helena, to advocating for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' efforts to regain the lands and management of the National Bison Range, to launching events to introduce the vision of protecting 30% of nature by 2030, and fundraising in solidarity with frontline organizations during the Covid-19 outbreak in Montana, it's been a year full of meaningful action, progress, and reflection.

Despite the legislative and other electoral setbacks in Montana, we are committed to and optimistic about local organizing and relationship-building, and the opportunities we have for powerful work, together, in 2021. There are many ways to engage in the vision for a just, equitable, sustainable Montana, and we welcome you to join with us in making change.

Summer Nelson,

MONTANA CHAPTER DIRECTOR

*The Columbia River Team,
continued from page 1*

Our goals to increase habitat and ecological function are to:

- Provide passage for fish now blocked by dams, focusing first at Grand Coulee Dam and Chief Joseph Dam;
- Reconnect rivers with floodplains;
- Improve dam system management to improve river flows that benefit fish, wildlife, and environmental quality;
- Stabilize reservoir levels to avoid wide fluctuations to better protect fish, wildlife, tribal culture and burial sites.

Representation in Montana is especially important, as it shares a boundary with Canada and is home to two of the Basin's major storage reservoirs (Libby/Koocanusa and Hungry Horse). Montana is also dealing with transboundary pollution from Canadian mines in the Kootenai and Flathead drainages.

Learn more and find upcoming events on our website (sierraclub.org/montana) and the Columbia River Team page at <https://content.sierraclub.org/grassrootsnetwork/teams/columbia-river-team>. Also to learn more or get involved, contact Stacey Hellekson at shpe@gallatinwest.com. ▲

COVER PHOTO CREDIT:
BONNIE MORELAND, FLICKR.COM



Interested in learning more about the connections between environmental advocacy and racial and social justice, and helping us center it in our work? Join us on our journey of self-transformation and organizational transformation and growth, and in our effort to build a broader, more inclusive movement that gets at the roots of all the injustices that collectively threaten our planet and human communities. If you want to engage more on these topics, contact Caitlin Piserchia at caitlin.piserchia@sierraclub.org.

Here are a few resources we recommend to get you started:

<https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/racism-killing-planet>;

<https://www.sierraclub.org/sierra/how-build-diverse-coalitions>;

<https://www.yournec.org/intersectional-environmentalism-justice-for-people-and-the-planet/>



Round One for Montana Chapter's Political Committee

BY **ELIOT THOMPSON** AND **KATHRYN EKLUND**

Centuries ago in the distant pre-apocalyptic, pre-pandemic era of October 2019, the Montana Chapter invited a trio of National Sierra Club staff to Montana to coach us on creating a political committee to help elect climate and environmental justice champions in Montana, and build political power. We liked the idea, and by February we had a skeleton crew of four: Greg Findley and Eliot Thompson as the main volunteers and invaluable staff support from Summer Nelson and Caitlin Piserchia. We started drilling down which races we wanted to work on while pouring over campaign laws and guidelines. By the end of March, we'd drawn up a rough timeline for engaging in the primaries with a pretty good idea of which races we wanted to work on. And then COVID-19 came.

Like everyone else, our in-person meetings ended, and focusing on the election took a backseat to adjusting our schedules, taking care of children, and not getting sick. By the time we managed to come back together, the primary season was starting to wrap up, so we hunkered down in the Zoom-verse and rethought our plans.

There's a lot that goes into managing an active and effective political committee. There's candidate research, creating questionnaires to send out to candidates, contacting candidates (and getting them to respond), setting up and conducting interviews, making endorsements, and learning what we're allowed to do (under both the law and Sierra Club guidelines). And that's before we even get to the actual phone-banking, text-banking, and other volunteer opportunities. It's a lot of work to build this all from scratch, and many political committees for Sierra Club Groups and Chapters across the country start their first election cycles with limited goals, like just making a couple endorsements.

Well given the importance of 2020, we decided to be a little more ambitious than that. We decided to quickly recruit some new members to get involved during this election cycle, endorse in several races, and mobilize Sierra Club members to vote for pro-environment candidates. By the end of the summer, Kathryn Eklund and Lowell Chandler joined the political committee, providing some much-needed elbow grease, morale, and brain power.

And after being advised to focus on maybe two races, we whittled down our list of races to U.S. Senate and House, Montana Governor, and Public Service Commission Districts 3 and 4. By August, we had created our questionnaires and sent those out. Granted, it was a bit late in the election season, but after a flurry of emails and phone calls, we managed to interview Tom Woods for Public Service Commission District 3 and



Chapter organizer, Caitlin Piserchia, presenting at a member meeting

Monica Tranel for Public Service Commission District 4, both of whom are thoughtful, passionate individuals who believe in combating climate change and putting people and planet before corporate profits. Although no candidates sought our public endorsement this cycle, we ultimately settled on supporting Tom Woods, Monica Tranel, Mike Cooney for Governor, and Steve Bullock for Senate.

Without public endorsements or a political action committee (PAC) in Montana, we focused on speaking to Montana Sierra Club members. We posted voting information on our social media, and we emailed, texted, and phonebanked. Over the course of four phone banks, we reached out to 490 of our Montana members who hadn't yet voted. We're excited to report that 99.99% of our over 3,000 members in the state voted this election, up 17% from 2016!!

Although none of the candidates we supported won this time around, we learned a lot in an extremely short amount of time, and we built the foundations for future elections. In the near future, we are working to merge our Political and Legislative Committees into one volunteer body, and we plan to lobby during the 2021 legislative session, and then we plan to work on electing more pro-environment champions for the 2022 midterms. In the meantime, we hosted sessions to write letters to Georgia voters to see what we could do for the run-off Senate election on January 5.

If you're interested in volunteering with the Political and Legislative Committee or receiving regular updates, please email Eliot Thompson at eliot.thompson@sierraclub.org. ▲



Earth Day 2020 – Virtual, and Powerful

Although the COVID-19 pandemic prevented in-person activities in April, together with The Sunrise Movement Montana, Families for a Livable Climate, Climate Smart Missoula, and other organizations, we were able to create a powerful virtual Earth Day 2020. Together we penned an Op-ed laying out our collective vision for the future and an Earth Day platform, which advocates for building more resilient communities and a healthy planet, and we created the Montana Earth Day pledge, signed by 110 people across the state, to uphold the Earth Day platform and to take part in individual and collective actions in honor of Earth Day. Finally, on Earth Day itself, together we held a powerful youth-led virtual rally where speakers linked the issues of mutual pandemic aid, climate change, food sovereignty, Indigenous sovereignty, failures of capitalism, the Keystone XL Pipeline, mental health, and the Green New Deal.

Above; screenshot of Earth Day speakers

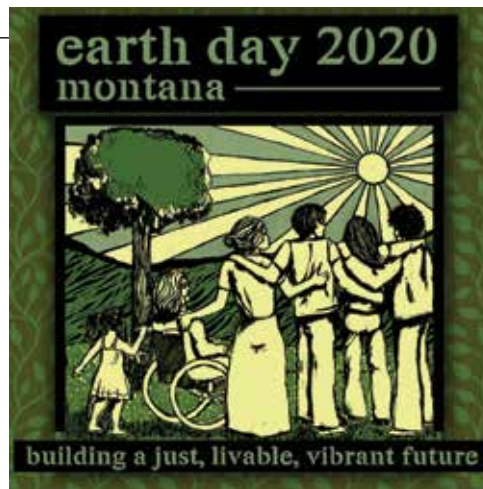
Here are some words [edited for brevity] from some of the amazing Earth Day 2020 speakers:

“This climate change fight is very important to me because ...[it’s] a fight for our relatives, for our people, for your people, for everybody’s well-being. We’re all connected in one way or another... [I]t’s a fight for my identity . . . it’s also a fight for connection with every other person on this earth, because this affects all of us, it affects everything. We see that now.”

~ Millie Bearleggins, University of Montana student, Blackfeet Tribe

“Right now, we’re seeing the Earth gasp for breath, during this pause. We’re also seeing the collapse of the global economy... the pandemic has exposed all the lies that capitalism has put on us. My people have been decimated before by smallpox...I do not want to lose people; I do not believe in profit over people.”

~ Claire Charlo, Civil Advocate at the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes



“As a nurse, I am adhering to the American Nurses Association code of ethics ...: ‘the profession’s advocacy for social justice extends to eco-justice. Environmental degradation, waste, and other environmental assaults disproportionately affect the health of the poor and ultimately affect the health of all humanity. Nursing must also advocate for policies, programs, and practices within the healthcare environment that maintain, sustain, and repair the natural world.”

~Tassia Tkatschenko, Missoula nurse

“With all the political differences that we face, there’s really important things such as how we acquire our food and how we consume our food that span racial divides or ethnic divides. Being able to come to the same table and come up with solutions is something that we should be striving to do.”

~ Patrick Yawakie, Food sovereignty coordinator with Arlee Development Corporation

“Our ancestors fought very hard, and that’s why we’re here today. We’re survivors of genocide. But still today, history is repeating itself... It’s about when [the proposed Keystone XL pipeline is] going to break, and when it does, it will affect the whole NE water rural supply system. We did have a lot of people who passed away from the Murphy oil spill back in the 1960s. Fort Peck... we did learn our lesson the hard way with fracking and oil.”

~ Angeline Cheek, ACLU Indigenous Justice organizer, Keystone XL activist on the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Reservation

“It’s been found that in all social movements across the globe, not one single one has failed when at least 3.5% of the population becomes actively involved in protesting... In our state that is only 35,000 people. If we bring it down to the city level, the numbers become even more manageable, roughly one out of every 28 people. Imagine that number of people lining the streets in your community, once this health crisis is done, singing, chanting, demanding as one, a vibrant, livable future. Imagine yourself being a part of that.”

~ Nick Shepard, Sunrise organizer, UM student

“I think we’re seeing more clearly than ever that in these times, our country and our world and our people need a Green New Deal...[O]ur government never set up the systems that allowed people to prosper in the first place, and [Covid-19] is showing what happens when the means of survival like healthcare, like homes, like breathable air, when those means of survival are privatized and when people don’t have access to them....The decade of the Green New Deal—it doesn’t have to wait for any President or any one person, it can happen now. We can start making it a reality right now, and it can start with us.”

~Ben Finegan, Sunrise Movement trainer and Montana Racial Equity Project organizer ▲

POSTER: LUKE OSBORNE

Ready for 100 Action and Climate Justice Updates from 2020

In February 2020, Helena passed a resolution modeled after Missoula's, committing to transition to 100% clean, renewable electricity by 2030! The team that worked to craft the resolution and build public support for it included Montana Sierra Club staff and volunteers, and many incredible partner organizations also leading the local effort, including the Montana Environmental Information Center, volunteers with Moms' Clean Air Force, and others.

In Missoula, the city and county negotiated a Memorandum of Understanding with NorthWestern Energy (NWE), outlining the broad commitments each would make to work towards achieving Missoula's 100% clean electricity goals. While it was a potentially beneficial step, we had serious concerns about the City and County relying so heavily on the



monopoly utility to meet their goals while not leveraging all of their influence to demand NWE change course in general. With NWE planning to invest heavily in new fracked gas infrastructure and attempting to purchase more of a share in the aging, polluting, expensive Colstrip power plant, and including

Above: Helena Ready for 100 Action team after the City Commission vote

Left: Citizens raise their hands to show support of the Helena 100% clean electricity resolution

Bottom: Great Falls climate justice team Zoom meeting

no new renewable energy in its Resource Procurement Plan, it appears NWE may just get a public relations boost from signing an MOU while not making any meaningful steps towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Montana. We continue to work with the City and County to implement their commitment, while urging local leaders to use all the tools at their disposal to influence the way NWE engages with the public and overcharges us all for dirty electricity.

Meanwhile, Bozeman continued its climate planning process, releasing a Draft Climate Plan late in the year, which was intended to outline a process for the City to achieve its previously stated climate goals. With insightful assessment and input from the recently established Sierra Club Climate Justice Team in Bozeman, we were able to engage members and supporters in the public process for that plan and urge Bozeman not to rely so heavily on NWE and the company's weak climate goals to achieve the city's own goals.

Two climate justice teams were launched in 2020! One in Bozeman (mentioned above), and another in Great Falls. Both are thriving, and we are excited to launch a team in Billings after the first of the new year. ▲

Montana's Climate Solutions Council – A Council Member's Experience

BY **CAITLIN PISERCHIA**, Montana Chapter Climate & Political Organizer

From August 2019 through June 2020, I served on Governor Bullock's Climate Solutions Council, a working group charged with crafting recommendations to reach the goals of his executive order on climate. Last July, through an executive order, Bullock entered the state of Montana into the U.S. Climate Alliance, and established the Council to provide recommendations and strategies for the state to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, prepare for climate impacts, and address other climate needs. A few dozen council members were asked to come up with solutions to achieve net greenhouse gas neutrality in the electrical sector by 2035, reach economy-wide greenhouse gas neutrality by a date range the council later set at 2045-2050, and develop plans to help Montana adapt to climate impacts we can't avoid.

The climate council members included climate scientists, environmental advocates, renewable energy advocates, university representatives, business interests, representatives from Montana's monopoly utility, Montana energy cooperatives, the oil industry, and a couple of representatives from Montana's tribal nations. Most members were volunteers. As one of a few dozen council members, I served on the greenhouse gas mitigation committee. Over the course of the nearly year-long council, we met in person, on conference calls, and on a flurry of Zoom calls in the last couple months, in order to reach consensus on the majority of the recommendations published in the final Montana Climate Solutions Plan. This diverse array of interests unsurprisingly produced a plan that neither fully addresses the concerns of Montana's most vulnerable communities nor, arguably, reflects the scope of action necessary in light of current scientific projections. Nonetheless, it is likely a realistic approximation of what might be currently politically feasible to move forward on

the state level, and it includes a long list of recommendations that would be useful steps forward in combating climate change at the state level.

In recent years, Montana communities and tribal nations have been taking up the banner in the absence of statewide action. In the last couple of years, three cities—Missoula, Bozeman, and Helena—committed to reaching 100% clean electricity by 2030. Even more communities, including Missoula, Helena, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, the Blackfeet Nation, and the Fort Belknap Indian Community, have created climate change mitigation or adaptation plans. The new Climate Solutions Plan can and should be an important step forward for statewide action in Montana, where the word "climate" has been a nonstarter in every legislative session and where outspoken climate deniers like Steve Daines are still in power. Even with full implementation of the Plan, there are gaps that communities and organizers must continue to fill, in the ultimate vision of what kind of state we're trying to work towards.

In the greenhouse gas mitigation committee, the undercurrent of political conflict heavily influenced our discussions. For me, the experience was exciting, nerve-racking, and at times infuriating. I was often caught between my frustration and anger at the difficulty of reaching agreement to pass recommendations that cut at the root of the issue, and a sense of accountability and excitement about the opportunity to influence the direction of the group and to discover points of agreement. I ended up putting far more emotional and mental energy into this effort than I originally intended. In the first meeting, I felt very much like a token youth voice on the committee. As I connected with more council members, it became easier to navigate assumptions and contribute in a meaningful way. I became more acutely aware of who

might be allies, and who I needed to work with in order to move a particular recommendation forward. At the same time, it was often exhausting to realize the extent to which relationships—and being irritatingly persistent, as well as investing tons of time—were key to being taken seriously. At the very first meeting, I learned I had to choose my battles; I made a suggestion about a new sub-topic three different times before one of the co-chairs acknowledged it and considered it. We were encouraged to seek consensus wherever possible and share our ideas for recommendations aimed at emissions reductions, but we never discussed the larger power dynamics at play in tackling the climate crisis, let alone the power dynamics in the room.

It was difficult to have these conversations without truly acknowledging what's at stake, and it was sometimes excruciating to look for consensus with folks who did not seem to share my sense of motivation and urgency. I realized pretty early on that the best role I could play was to move the conversation in a more ambitious direction, to challenge the priorities that were emerging in the group, and to shift what might be considered reasonable by proposing a number of recommendations I believed in but knew would not be accepted to begin with, before working on recommendations with a better chance of passing. My role was to be a youth and activist voice, and to push the tenor of the conversation in a more ambitious direction.

There are so many ways we could have approached these issues. The conversation within our committee might have been different if we had focused on how best to serve and gather the input of those who will be most severely impacted by climate change, many of whom weren't in the room. It might have shifted if we'd focused primarily on ecosystem and community health. Instead, the greenhouse

gas mitigation committee was encouraged to tackle this as a math problem and see how we could squeeze out emissions reductions in various sectors. Almost all of our suggested solutions come from that perspective, and more pragmatically, from places where we could agree that there's an opportunity, a need, and a somewhat politically viable solution we could advance to cut emissions. In some cases, we also went after structural changes that would ultimately facilitate a cut in emissions. Perhaps because to do so might have broken some tentative alliances, we never directly discussed the values and politics that clearly drove the conversation and the recommendations the group was open to discussing. A recommendation I pushed forward regarding the Keystone XL pipeline was summarily killed, despite the known climate impact of the proposed pipeline and Montana's influence over the construction.

Although there were definitely moments I wanted to give up on the process, I recognize the difficulty of coming up with truly comprehensive climate solutions. While it is tempting to reduce the climate crisis—which feels overwhelming—to a math problem, when you peel back the layers, it is clear that the roots are firmly intertwined with our economic system, our dominant culture, and extractive capitalism (formed by white supremacy, colonization, and perpetuated by a massive wealth gap). Yet so much gets in the way of seeing things clearly. There's the deep terror and grief evoked in many people when they learn about the scale, scope, and danger of the issue. There's the feeling of helplessness at the mismatch between contemporary political efforts to address climate change and the scale of the issue. There's the hardship of having to grieve the effects we're already too late to prevent while fighting back to prevent worst-case scenarios. And there are the very real limits of working in a group comprised primarily of folks who already have access to power in our state, and as such, won't recognize critical aspects of the problem in the absence of meaningful input and engagement from groups most impacted by the issue. In truth, the climate crisis touches all of us, but those

disproportionately impacted by it have the most to teach the rest of us.

We finished this process in the midst of a global pandemic, working at a faster and faster pace at the end. The originally planned stakeholder summit to inform the final plan was canned when the pandemic



took off in full swing. I don't know if it would have been possible to get meaningful input from across Montana in May of 2020. I do know that I struggled to finish out my term on the Council, alternating between that effort on Zoom calls, and grieving the loss of my recently deceased father. What do you do when life gets in the way? How do you maintain the feeling of urgency that is needed on climate in the middle of a public health crisis, and one that contributes to the exclusion of so many people who need to be part of the climate conversation, because as with the climate crisis, those people are disproportionately impacted by Covid?

For better or for worse, we pushed forward. In the end, it is definitely a far from perfect or complete plan, but it is nonetheless a worthy launch point. It's the labor of more than a few dozen people outlining areas they see as opportunities

for change. It's representative of where some agreement lies, among people willing to acknowledge the existence of climate change, representing various industries, interest groups, and organizations. We were all supposedly aligned with the goals of Bullock's executive order, but we spanned a broad spectrum in terms of our sense of concern for reaching them. It was helpful to get a sense of what some groups might have reactions to, where the stuck points are, where there were surprising areas of agreement.

We passed a number of recommendations, almost entirely by consensus, in support of shoring up and incentivizing renewable energy in Montana. We also passed a number of recommendations geared towards the need to address the changes that are already happening while facilitating an energy transition. Along with the help of a team of dedicated volunteers, students, and a number of partners, I helped create, strengthen and advance a number of the mitigation-related recommendations and the cross-cutting recommendations between the mitigation and adaptation committees. We were able to make changes to the overall framing to emphasize the need for urgent climate action and prioritizing equity in climate solutions.

We have a lot more to do to implement these solutions and shift Montana politics to become supportive of the changes we need. This is the critical decade for climate action, and the next few years are crucial to avoiding the most catastrophic impacts of climate change. The climate crisis is already threatening Montana. We need climate to become an issue our political leaders—regardless of party—think about in every policy decision they make. We have to win in the sphere of public opinion to make this happen, to make climate action something that is a political asset, and an absolute requirement for leadership. I believe we're most likely to succeed when we tie climate solutions to changes that help meet the needs of individuals and communities, and when we support and follow the lead of the most impacted individuals and communities in building climate change solutions. ▲

The Seemingly Endless Saga of the Keystone XL Pipeline

BY **SUMMER NELSON**, MONTANA CHAPTER DIRECTOR

For the proposed tar sands pipeline with so many lives we've all lost count, the Keystone XL rose and fell multiple times again this year. Here's a recap of some major moving pieces in 2020, and our local engagement.

In early March, shortly before Covid-19 began to be confirmed in Montana and it was still reasonable to gather in person, we rallied Keystone XL (KXL) resisters and water protectors together in Great Falls on the day the federal court was hearing arguments on the merits of litigation brought by Sierra Club and partners challenging the use of Nationwide Permit 12 for KXL's myriad water crossings. The rally and court hearing brought folks from as far as Nebraska and South Dakota, and from across Montana. We were graced with an appearance by Regina Brave, a Navy veteran and Oglala Sioux member from the Pine Ridge Reservation who was the last person to leave the Oceti Sakowin camp where water protectors had gathered to defend against the Dakota Access Pipeline. Along with Regina Brave, other Indigenous leaders and pipeline resisters shared words with the group of about 40 people gathered outside the federal courthouse. Angeline Cheek, an Indigenous Justice Organizer with the Montana ACLU and a member of the Fort Peck tribal community, and Art Tanderup,

a Nebraska landowner along the proposed KXL route, were among the speakers.

On April 15, the federal district court ruled in our favor to invalidate the use of Nationwide Permit 12 (NWP12), the fast track permit the Army Corps of Engineers had attempted to use to permit the nearly 700 water crossings along the route. The court also enjoined the project, effectively ending – for a time – TC Energy and the Trump administration's prospects of pushing the pipeline through this year. At the same time, separate cases were being litigated to address additional issues, including a challenge to the border crossing permit brought by the Ft. Belknap Tribes, the Rosebud Sioux Tribe, and the Indigenous Environmental Network. Unfortunately, TC Energy



Regina Brave, Oglala Sioux member and Navy veteran speaks at the Great Falls rally

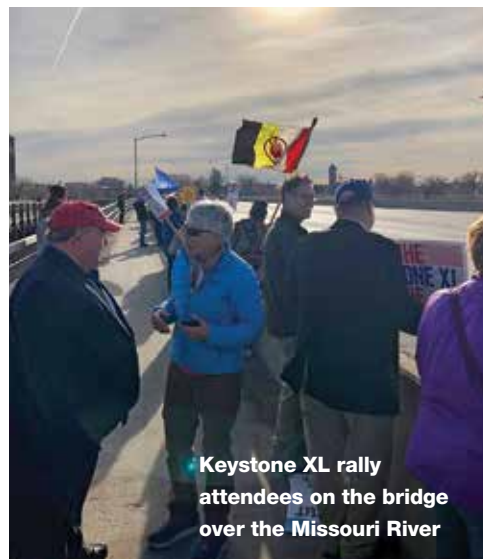
completed the border crossing construction while the litigation was pending.

In response to their NWP12 court loss, TC Energy shifted tactics and applied for an individual 404 permit under the Clean Water Act, which brought the proposed pipeline back to life. We joined forces with other organizations to turn people out for the Army Corps of Engineers' virtual public hearings in the fall, resulting in an incredible showing of opposition to the pipeline and its myriad of anticipated adverse impacts.

In a related process, the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) is reviewing a 401 permit to determine whether the project would comply with water quality protection standards with its over 200 water crossings in Montana. We again saw an inspiring turnout at MDEQ's virtual public hearing, where impassioned people from all corners of the state testified overwhelmingly against KXL. Of 57 people who commented, 56 were opposed and one spoke apologetically in favor! We were also able to generate over



Art Tanderup, Nebraska landowner speaks to the crowd



Keystone XL rally attendees on the bridge over the Missouri River

NorthWestern Energy Coal Expansion Stopped

BY **DAVID MERRILL**, Senior Organizing Representative, Beyond Coal Campaign

260 written comments from members and supporters.

In August, Sierra Club and partners filed another legal challenge against KXL, challenging the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) issuance of a right of way for the pipeline to cross about 45 miles of BLM land in Montana for violations of the Endangered Species Act and National Environmental Policy Act. Briefing in that case is underway.

With Joe Biden and Kamala Harris coming into the White House, there is hope for a final death to the Keystone XL pipeline proposal. But it is not over until it's over, and until then the strong opposition in Montana will continue to be amplified and MDEQ must be expected to make a decision fully informed by the overwhelming public comment and that protects our waters and our communities. ▲

Montana's largest electric utility, NorthWestern Energy, recently held the title of "The Only Electric Utility in the Entire Country Trying to Buy More of a Coal Plant."

No longer. Thanks to Sierra Club and other activists across the Northwest, NorthWestern's purchase has been stopped.

Hell-bent on more than doubling its carbon emissions, NorthWestern Energy asked the Montana Public Service Commission (PSC) to grant pre-approval to purchase an additional share of Colstrip Unit Four from Colstrip co-owner Puget Sound Energy.

Sierra Club members and other climate activists from around the state tuned in to oppose the deal at virtual PSC "Listening Sessions" in October. As this unfolded, the state of Washington utility commission said that the deal was not in the public interest, and it was withdrawn.

Stopping NorthWestern's coal expansion attempt was critical. Yet the utility says it wants to burn coal at the plant until 2042, despite the fact that four out of five of the utility co-owners are planning to exit the facility much sooner, some as early as 2025.

Coal is no longer an economically viable fuel. It is time for NorthWestern Energy to join its Colstrip plant co-owners and prepare for a 2025 shutdown. They should be contributing funds for a just transition for fossil fuel workers and their communities and for clean-up of the plant and surrounding area.

Montana climate activists should celebrate the cancellation of NorthWestern's coal expansion. But then we need to start preparing for an even tougher battle: stopping NorthWestern Energy's drive to build dirty, expensive, climate-destabilizing gas plants. ▲

WAYS TO GIVE

DONATE to the Montana Chapter. Online at sierraclub.org/montana or by mail at PO Box 7201, Missoula, MT 59807. Your contributions to the Chapter stay right here in our state to support our local programs and campaigns.

DONATE A VEHICLE to the Sierra Club Foundation. You can clean up your garage and our air at the same time, while supporting our local charitable campaigns when you donate an old car to the Sierra Club Foundation on our behalf, by selecting the Montana Chapter when you donate. Sierra Club Foundation promotes climate solutions, conservation, and movement building through a powerful combination of strategic philanthropy and



grassroots advocacy. The Foundation is the fiscal sponsor of Sierra Club's charitable environmental programs. Check out how to donate at <http://scfch.careasy.org>, or call 844-6-SIERRA (844-674-3772).

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NorthWestern Energy Plans to Increase Carbon Emissions

Sierra Club and partners prepare to block utility push for increased gas-burning

BY **DAVID MERRILL**, Senior Organizing Representative, Beyond Coal Campaign

As the climate emergency steadily intensifies, wreaking havoc across the world and imperiling Montana's agriculture and outdoor recreation industries, NorthWestern Energy is preparing to pour more fossil fuels on the mayhem.

In its latest resource procurement plan, NorthWestern Energy said it wants to add more gas and burn coal at Colstrip until 2042. The plan called for *exactly zero* new renewable energy.

It's time for Montanans across the board to recognize a bitter truth: our monopoly South Dakota utility, NorthWestern Energy, values corporate profit more than the land and people of Montana. It **does not care** that Montanans want the climate emergency swiftly addressed. It **does not care** that people packed public hearings in 2019 pleading for clean, renewable energy. Corporate profit and lavish pay for the CEO trumps all other values for them.

Consider the following:

- 1. NorthWestern Energy CEO Bob Rowe received compensation of \$63,000 per week in 2019.** The per capita median income in Montana is \$31,000 *per year*.
- The utility wants to add dirty, expensive, climate-destabilizing gas capacity despite a Rocky Mountain Institute study that showed "**clean energy portfolios**" composed of wind, solar, storage and other components can **provide the same electricity, with the same reliability as gas plants, for less money.** Why would the utility do such a thing? Because the more money NorthWestern Energy spends, the more profit they make as the utility forces customers to foot the bill for pricey fossil fuels.
- NorthWestern Energy deliberately undervalues renewable energy in order to bolster the false claim that fossil fuels are cheaper.** In the utility's most recent energy procurement plan, NorthWestern set up their model to choose gas instead of clean energy. When asked to share the numbers they used in the assumptions underlying the model, they refused.
- NorthWestern Energy has been overcharging its electricity customers for over ten years.** Standard utility practice is to put the purchase price of an asset, such as a coal plant, into a utility's rate base so they can recover the purchase costs, plus a guaranteed rate of return, through the electricity rates paid by their customers. In 2007, NorthWestern Energy paid \$187 million dollars to purchase a 30% share of Colstrip Unit Four.

...a recent national poll showed that 82% of U.S. voters think the "primary goal of U.S. energy policy should be achieving 100% clean energy."

Shortly thereafter, the utility asked the Montana Public Service Commission to use what NorthWestern claimed was the market value of their purchase, \$407 million dollars, **rather than the amount they actually paid.** The PSC complied and used that figure in NorthWestern's rate base, allowing the utility to overcharge its customers ever since.

- 5. NorthWestern Energy hides its plans to increase its carbon emissions by talking about "carbon intensity"** instead of what they should be talking about: carbon emissions. It is possible to decrease carbon intensity even while increasing carbon emissions, which is exactly what NorthWestern is doing.

Montanans right, left and center cherish our natural environment.

A 2020 Colorado College conservation poll found that 57% of Montanans want action taken to address climate change. And a recent national poll showed that 82% of U.S. voters think the "primary goal of U.S. energy policy should be achieving 100% clean energy." This presents NorthWestern Energy with a terrible dilemma.

How can our monopoly utility deceive Montanans into thinking their power provider cares about climate change when they are **planning to increase their carbon emissions?**

Already, two U.S. electric utilities plan to have 100% renewable electricity by 2030: Green Mountain Power in Vermont and the Platte River Power Authority in Colorado.

Great River Energy, a Minnesota Electric Co-op with 700,000 customers, will have an energy portfolio that is more than 95% carbon free by—wait for it—2023!

And of course let us not forget that already entire countries have 100% renewable electricity. *If something exists, it must be possible for it to exist.*

Why should Montana, with its huge climate vulnerabilities, accept any less? How long must we suffer with a company that insists on increasing fossil fuel burning in the middle of a climate emergency, while telling us how much they care about us and Montana's environment?

If your answer is 'no longer,' join our anti-gas campaign now.

Get involved:

The Sierra Club will be training activists to oppose NorthWestern Energy's plan to add gas-burning capacity. Contact David Merrill at david.merrill@sierraclub.org for more details. ▲

Montana's Focus Should be on Conflict Prevention and Coexistence with Grizzly Bears

BY SARAH PAWLOWSKI, Organizing Representative, Greater Yellowstone Northern Rockies Campaign

It's fall, and that means hunting season in Montana. It's also the time when, unfortunately, grizzly bear conflicts rise in "surprise encounters" with hunters. These preventable conflicts can result in injury or death to both hunters and bears. Hunting-related conflicts are one of the largest sources of grizzly bear mortality every year, especially in the Yellowstone region.

Some argue for even more grizzly bear mortality through an intentional trophy hunt, as a misguided method to prevent all types of conflicts with grizzly bears. For now, grizzly bears remain protected under the Endangered Species Act and can't be hunted (*see the related article about our legal win earlier this year that kept grizzlies on the ESA!*). But if those protections are removed, a trophy hunt could be authorized by the state. Right now, Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP) is drafting a statewide grizzly bear management plan and considering whether to allow a trophy hunt in the future. The plan will also guide many other aspects of grizzly bear management.

Recently, the Governor's Grizzly Bear Advisory Council (GBAC) finalized recommendations on grizzly bear management and conservation. Those recommendations will be given strong consideration by FWP in developing its management plan over the next year. FWP should pay attention to the fact that the GBAC acknowledged in their Final Report that *"hunting is not likely to be an effective tool for conflict prevention or reduction."* The GBAC heard from several experts, including grizzly bear managers from Alaska and Canada, that other strategies are more effective in preventing conflicts. FWP itself has acknowledged this, and stated that if a hunt were to occur, it would be so small as not to affect the overall population. Add the enormous opposition by Tribal Nations and the general public to hunting of grizzly bears and the prominent role that grizzlies play in Montana's economy, and there is no justifiable basis for initiating a trophy hunt.

Instead, FWP should focus on GBAC recommendations to increase resources and programs to prevent conflicts and promote coexistence with grizzly bears, such as hiring more grizzly bear specialists to help people live with bears and prevent conflicts before they happen. This is especially important as grizzly bears expand their range which is crucial to achieving connectivity between grizzly populations that are currently isolated from



Grizzly sow and yearling on boardwalk in Upper Geyser Basin.

each other, and to achieving grizzlies' full recovery. Grizzlies are returning to areas where they haven't been for decades, which is a cause for celebration -- but it also means that communities will need help preparing for their arrival.

Coexistence and conflict prevention must also extend to livestock, particularly in the Yellowstone ecosystem, where conflicts result in many grizzly bears being killed by management agencies every year. The GBAC's recommendation to provide dedicated funds to the Livestock Loss Board for non-lethal conflict prevention should be a priority, and strengthened by tying compensation for livestock loss to a producer's efforts to prevent conflicts in the first place, particularly when grazing on public lands.

The recommendation to institute local ordinances to keep garbage and other attractants out of reach of bears is common-sense and critical for coexisting with bears.

Unfortunately, the GBAC did not make any substantive recommendations to prevent hunting-related grizzly bear conflicts. FWP has primary jurisdiction over hunting and should look to the many proactive recommendations of the Interagency Grizzly Bear Study Team specifically to prevent hunting conflicts, in developing its bear management plan.

Montana is key to achieving full recovery of grizzly bears in the lower 48. Grizzly bears are the essence of wildness, and that is something that Montanans value. ▲



Grizzly sow & yearling cub,
Roaring Mountain

NPS / NEAL HERBERT; FLICKR.COM

Yellowstone Grizzlies Remain Protected under 9th Circuit Court of Appeals Decision

BY **LEN BROBERG**, Chapter Vice Chair

IN AUGUST 2017, THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE (USFWS) removed the Yellowstone-region grizzly bear population from the federal endangered and threatened species list, even though the area's grizzly population has suffered high levels of human-caused deaths in recent years.

That fall, for the first time in more than 40 years, the states of Wyoming and Idaho announced grizzly hunts that would have allowed for up to 23 bears to be killed outside of Yellowstone National Park. The Northern Cheyenne Tribe and conservation groups challenged the Fish and Wildlife Service's disregard of bear deaths following the bears' recent shift to a more heavily meat-based diet following the loss of other foods. They filed a lawsuit and temporary restraining order to block the hunt, which a district judge granted. Later the judge ruled on behalf of the tribe and conservation groups, reinstating federal protections. This year, in July 2020, the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals affirmed this decision, keeping the great bear listed under the Endangered Species Act and blocking a trophy hunt.

Earthjustice, representing the Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Sierra Club, Center for Biological Diversity and National Parks Conservation Association, argued for restoring protections to Yellowstone grizzly bears.

"We are thrilled with the court's decision to uphold still-needed Endangered Species protections for Yellowstone's beloved grizzly bears," said Bonnie Rice, Senior Campaign Representative, Greater Yellowstone Northern Rockies Campaign. "Given the

rapid pace of the extinction and climate crises, now is not the time to remove critical safeguards that will ensure Yellowstone's irreplaceable grizzlies stay on the road to recovery."

The court found that the USFWS failed to: 1) examine whether the remaining listed grizzly bears could survive without the Yellowstone population, 2) have a concrete plan for maintaining and restoring genetic diversity in the isolated Yellowstone population, and 3) have a requirement to adjust grizzly bear population estimates using an alternative method of counting to sync with the most recent counts using the USFWS method. It is possible that without a reconciliation of differences in estimates with differing methods, a state could suddenly inflate the number of bears and avoid scrutiny of what might actually be declining bear numbers under their management following delisting.

The ruling poses real challenges for the USFWS attempting to remedy their deficiencies and seek delisting again of the Yellowstone grizzlies. Connectivity with the Northern Continental Divide population centered on the Glacier National Park and Bob Marshall Wilderness Complex or other realistic population supplementation methods must be secured and funded. The states refused to adjust any new population estimation method as a condition of delisting and may continue to do so. It is likely the Yellowstone grizzlies will remain protected until these major issues can be surmounted using the best available science. ▲

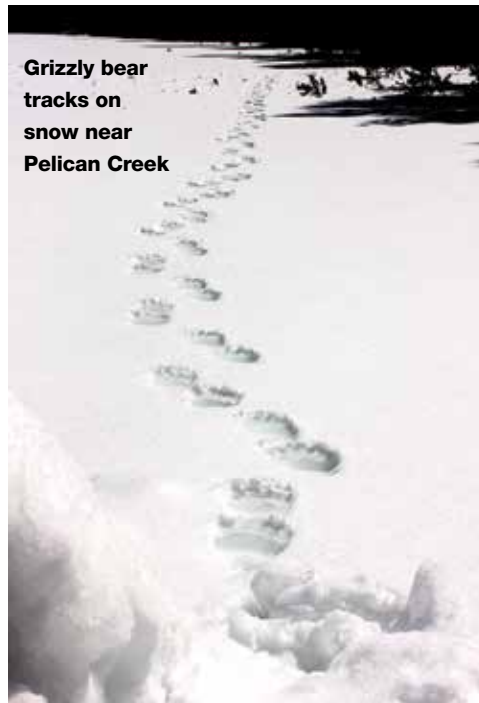
Sierra Club's Advocacy for Strong Grizzly Bear Advisory Council Recommendations Bears Fruit

BY **SARAH PAWLOWSKI**, Organizing Representative, Greater Yellowstone Northern Rockies Campaign

The Sierra Club actively worked to impact the recommendations made by the Montana Governor's Grizzly Bear Advisory Council (GBAC) over the past year. Montana plays a pivotal role in grizzly recovery in the lower 48 states because of the many opportunities for habitat connectivity for bears and because four of the six of the recovery zones are partially or wholly in Montana. The GBAC's process wrapped up in early September with many good management recommendations that would be great for bears and people if implemented. These recommendations are important because they will guide decisions regarding state management of grizzlies going forward. Despite the Council weighted towards backgrounds associated with the livestock and timber industries, the Council came to consensus on many good recommendations on increasing resources and programs to promote coexistence with grizzly bears and to prevent conflicts. Additionally, the Council recognized the importance of connecting grizzly bear populations to achieving full recovery. Due to widespread public and Tribal opposition highlighted by the Sierra Club and our partners during the Council's deliberations, they thankfully did not achieve consensus on recommending a trophy hunt and acknowledged in their final report that hunting is not a good tool to prevent conflicts.

Hundreds of comments from Sierra Club supporters were sent to the Council with an emphasis on personal connection to wildlife. We also analyzed thousands of additional public comments to highlight how many people locally and nationally are opposed to hunting grizzlies. We helped generate media coverage as well as worked with Sierra Club members and supporters to write and submit LTE's and Op-eds about the GBAC. We also

Due to widespread public and Tribal opposition highlighted by the Sierra Club and our partners during the Council's deliberations, they thankfully did not achieve consensus on recommending a trophy hunt and acknowledged in their final report that hunting is not a good tool to prevent conflicts.



Grizzly bear tracks on snow near Pelican Creek

worked with a coalition of local guides and business owners in Montana and Wyoming to highlight to the Council how important healthy wildlife populations are to the region's tourism economy. We look forward to working with others in 2021 to implement the GBAC's recommendations to foster grizzly bear coexistence and full recovery. ▲



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Sierra Club Continues to Support Tribal Management of the National Bison Range

This year we continued supporting the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' in their long effort to regain the lands upon which the National Bison Range sits, and to manage the bison. With two tribal members and an attorney for the Tribes, we hosted an online screening of the Tribes' film "In the Spirit of Atatic: The Untold Story of the National Bison Range", and a discussion. It was well attended and several participants were interested in taking more actions to support the Tribes.

To share our perspective on the issue of NBR management and why an environmental organization would support the transfer, we are reprinting an Op-ed we penned in July and which ran in several Montana newspapers. It was signed by Summer Nelson, Sierra Club Montana Chapter Director; Stacey Hellekson, Chapter Chair; Len Broberg, Chapter Vice Chair; Bonnie Rice, Sierra Club Greater Yellowstone Northern Rockies Campaign Representative.

Our Op-ed ~

The Montana Sierra Club unequivocally supports the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' rights to manage and care for the National Bison Range which sits fully within their ancestral and treaty-reserved lands, and we support the Montana Water Rights Protection Act, S. 3019, which would provide for the transfer of the range to federal trust ownership for the Tribes.

For several years the Sierra Club and other environmental organizations have supported the Tribes' efforts to regain the stolen land and the bison they have deep cultural and historical connections to, but today's racial reckoning in the U.S.



Screenshot of speakers during "An Evening with CSKT" — clockwise from top left, Summer Nelson (moderator), Shane Morigeau, Roy Bigcrane, and Brian Upton.

demands an even deeper assessment of the environmental movement and the origins of what has historically been a white-dominated field. We must work to reinvent what it means to be a conservationist, in part by prioritizing efforts that support the conservation and stewardship vision of Tribal Nations and front-line communities.

The lands of the National Bison Range were treaty-reserved lands that were taken without the Tribes' consent in order to create the Bison Range. When the lands were stolen, the Tribes did not even receive adequate compensation from the government. The National Bison Range thus presents the ideal opportunity to practice an approach to conservation that aligns with the stewardship vision and rights of Tribal Nations, where a return of land is doable and right.

While many of us hold dear to places like the National Bison Range, we don't see their return to the Tribes as a loss. Rather, it is one step towards making reparations

and making a place – and people – whole again. Moreover, The Montana Water Rights Protection Act specifically protects public access to the bison range and provides that the return of the land does not set a precedent for any other transfer decisions, but will be recognized as a restoration of lands and wildlife under the care of the Flathead Indian Reservation and the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes. We look forward to seeing the lands returned to the Tribes, and to visiting the bison range someday soon to witness the Tribes' thoughtful, skillful, and holistic approach to managing the range for bison conservation and public access.

Let's work together as people who care about conserving wildlife and promoting social and racial justice to right the historic – and present – injustices imposed on Tribal Nations, including by supporting The Montana Water Rights Protection Act and its provision for returning the National Bison Range lands to federal trust ownership for the Tribes. ▲

Introducing 30 x 30, an Initiative to Protect 30% of Nature by 2030

SCIENTISTS TELL US THAT TO HALT MASS EXTINCTION AND SOLVE THE CLIMATE CRISIS WE NEED TO NOT ONLY PRESERVE EXISTING WILD SPACES, BUT ALSO PROTECT MORE NATURE.

In the United States, we need to protect about 30% of lands and waters by 2030, and reach 50% by 2050. With only 12% of the country's lands currently protected, reaching that goal means more neighborhood green space, more protected wildlands, and everything in between. The Sierra Club is part of the movement to protect half of the earth's natural spaces, with 30% by 2030 as an interim goal. This



Top: Claire Carlson, UM graduate student and intern presenting to a Missoula crowd about 30 x 30

Left: 30 x 30 event attendees share ideas for local nature protection projects



year, the Montana Chapter introduced this framework and vision to our local and state nature protection advocacy, through a graduate student internship and two events. The two events, the first

in Missoula before Covid-19 officially arrived, and the second based “in” Bozeman but held virtually, hosted dozens of interested Montanans to learn about 30 by 30 and provided space for participants

to brainstorm project ideas to advance the initiative locally. Ideas ranged from natural area clean-ups and installing more urban gardens, to identifying particular wildlands to seek permanent protection for. Unfortunately, the pandemic led to a loss of some key volunteers and our ability to carry out the proposed in-person projects immediately. Yet there was plenty of interest and excitement, and we are on the verge of re-launching the vision with volunteer teams

and a toolkit for local advocacy.

Interested in getting involved? Contact Chapter Director, Summer Nelson, at summer.nelson@sierraclub.org. ▲



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