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Building Resilience in Coal Country: An Open Community Forum



Pictured Left to Right: Kelli Roemer, a Ph.D. student in Montana State University's Resources and Communities Research Group, Jack Morgan, National Association of Counties



Attendees listening to Kelli Roemer's presentation

Dakota Resource Council (DRC) has been engaging in organizing efforts in Coal Country over the last several months. We listened to what community members in Beulah had to say, including a call for rural planning and community conversation about the future. On October 3rd, DRC hosted a public forum and discussion, “Building Resilience in Coal Country”. This forum featured two speakers, Jack Morgan from the National Association of Counties (NACo) and Kelli Roemer a Ph.D. student from Montana State University. There was a variety of representation at the event including Mercer county, industry, local institutions, and community members. The discussion called for proactivity, cooperation among stakeholders, learning from peer coal communities, and rural communities working together to solve the energy changes and economic challenges we face in the future.

The speakers that were invited to present for this event had backgrounds working specifically with coal communities around the country. Roemer presented the current research on community resilience and transition planning. She pointed out that we are still seeing closures even with the removal of many environmental regulations, which shows that the energy economic transition has more to do with natural gas prices and other factors, than environmental regulations. Morgan's presentation highlighted successful coal community efforts around the country, including in Appalachia which is a historically coal-dependent region. Morgan emphasized that economic diversification is good practice for communities even when times are good and gave specific examples of how communities can begin to think about economic diversification. Both speakers remained steadfast in that this conversation is non-bias against coal and instead is an honest conversation about our economic future. Energy transitions have happened before in our history in response to a wide variety of factors.

During the facilitated community discussion, many different opinions were voiced. Some of the common themes that were widely expressed by attendees were regionalism, cooperation between institutions, a proactive approach, possible alternative uses for coal, and learning from other communities that have faced similar challenges. Regionalism is recognizing that communities within a region are inter-dependent and are often facing similar challenges. Communities working together can accomplish more than an individual community could achieve alone, and all rural communities are facing obstacles in the future. Multiple attendees agreed that there has been longstanding competition between communities in the region and that there might be significant advantages in cooperating more. There was some contention on whether good communication exists between institutions and between industries already, but there is definitely room for improvement. *Continued Page 3*



April Fairfield, DRC Chair

Coffee with Sarah Vogel

Funny how a chance meeting with a North Dakota superhero at a Bismarck coffee shop can jolt you into a new situational awareness.

Executive Director Scott Skokos, Ag organizer Sam Wagner, and I were discussing the grim economic situation facing North Dakota agriculture when, lo and behold, North Dakota's agriculture's patron saint, Sarah Vogel, walked through the door. As anyone that has spent any time with Sarah will tell you, conversation with her is like a graduate level seminar is

agriculture, law, social justice, and North Dakota history all wrapped into one.

We weren't far into the discussion with the former ND Ag commissioner, legal eagle, and DRC member when it became clear that past is prologue. The farm crisis of the Eighties may be decades behind us, but what farmers face now is dire, if not reminiscent, of the intense difficulty of the Eighties.

North Dakota farmers and ranchers are facing significant financial stress. Farm incomes have been dropping steadily since they peaked in 2013. Since then, farm income has been cut, roughly, in half. Producers haven't been hit by hyperinflation or the floor dropping out from under land values as they did thirty plus years ago, but farmers are confronted with a trade war that could and likely will leave its mark long after the US and China reach a trade deal.

As I write, trade negotiations between China and the US are underway. Of course, the Trump Administration is promising results that are huge and the greatest ever. But, the reality of this trade war is that those hard fought for Chinese markets have already been filled by Brazil and Russia. Even if China concedes everything and the US wins "bigly" those markets could be gone, indefinitely.

DRC has deep roots in the state's agriculture economy. For forty years, our farm and ranch members have been on the front line fighting for fair trade, landowner rights, local control, and family farmer friendly Ag policy. DRC has been at the forefront on issues like protecting our markets from the release of gm wheat, livestock market concentration and unfair trade agreements.

Today, those who live in rural areas and make their living off the land are still the foundation of membership activity. Whether it is maintaining local permitting control for large scale confined animal feeding operations or protecting our precious Theodore Roosevelt National Park, DRC's strength is in the members of a community coming together, sharing their stories with the world, and taking a stand against unjust causes.

It is this intersection, between the vibrant history of DRC agricultural activism and the reality of the precipice upon which farmers and ranchers are currently perched, that we must come together for North Dakota.

What is just as true now as it has been since DRC's inception and every farm crisis that North Dakotans have endured, the answers to what ails us lies with us.

We don't have to agree on everything. Some of us may be rural and some urban. We may not belong to the same political party, belong to the same church, or root for the same teams, but we do need to stand together if we are to get through another farm crisis. It is that chorus of voices from our fields, our farms, and our hometowns to our leaders in Washington that will affect change for North Dakota.

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So where do we go from here? One community discussion isn't going to fix all the problems that are being faced in Coal Country, but attendees expressed that this event was a good first step towards taking action as a community. The region is hoping to get ahead of challenges and allow for a collaborative approach to planning that includes community members. DRC members and the call for proactivity in planning will lead the direction for DRC organizing in Coal Country in North Dakota.

You're Invited
to the

Dakota Resource Council Annual Meeting



Please Come to DRC's Annual Meeting

DRC's Annual Meeting will be held in New Town, ND, October 26, 2019 at the Civic Center. It should be a great meeting this year! We sure hope you will join us. You can hear about the great work DRC has done over the past year, meet the staff that's been hired since the last meeting, and meet other DRC members from across the state.

The Keynote speaker is Kalie Rider along with the film *Our Country No More* which talks about the work that Kalie and her neighbors did to prevent a refinery from being built near Trenton North Dakota. Kalie will answer some questions and sing a few original songs. After that, Kalie will sit on a panel with Theodora Bird Bear and Linda Weiss to discuss the work each panelist has done to oppose refineries in their own communities.

As always there will be a state of the state given, organizer reports from the field, a silent auction, and DRC's business meeting. Everything but the business meeting is open to the public so if you know someone that would enjoy our meeting, please bring them along; if they like DRC they can join and stay for the business meeting, too.

We hope to see you in New Town, it's always great to catch up with members and hear about what's happened in the past year.

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Events & Meetings

October 3 - Building Resilience in Coal Country
Forum

October 8, 9 & 10 – WORC Ag & Food Campaign
Team Meeting

October 10 – Hour to Empower (H2E)

October 26 – DRC Annual Meeting

November 13 – BARC @ NDSU Natural Resource
Management club meeting

November 16 – H2E/MVRC Kickoff Dinner 5-7 pm

December 5 & 6 – WORC board meeting
in Billings, ND

Coal Country

Blackjewel's Messy Bankruptcy in Wyoming is a Cautionary Tale for North Dakota



Blackjewel Mine in Wyoming

Another company has left its coal workers hung out to dry. Coal companies in Wyoming have long been claiming that Powder River Basin (PRB) coal would never decline in the way Appalachian coal did. “It is different here in Wyoming” they claimed. Sound familiar? Yes, that is what we say here in North Dakota too. Yet, here we are with hundreds of workers in Wyoming who were told not to come into work without any advance notice. Regardless of coal’s economic viability, communities in North Dakota do not need to be unprepared. We can

mitigate the impacts of some possible scenarios, such as Blackjewel, through economic diversification, community resilience planning, and rural economic development.

Blackjewel LLC is the company that has left their workers struggling, leaving job service centers in Wyoming overflowing and lacking resources. Blackjewel LLC coal workers were left in the dust when their last paychecks bounced, otherwise known as wage theft. This is in addition to coal workers unexpectedly losing their jobs, medical benefits, and 401(k) plans. The job market isn’t prepared for hundreds of new job seekers with similar skill sets either. Meanwhile, Kentucky Blackjewel coal workers are leading protests by holding up a coal train to demand that workers are paid before other Blackjewel debts. Communities are also struggling as many didn’t plan for the possibility of losing that tax revenue from Blackjewel. So how did this happen? CEO Jeff Hoops couldn’t secure interim financing to keep the mines open so Blackjewel filed for bankruptcy on July 1st. They were operating with very little funds and did not even have the money to pay the workers their last checks. Blackjewel is currently in bankruptcy court. This is still an active issue and new developments will continue.

However, this is not an isolated incident. We fall in the shadow of the Westmoreland bankruptcy that affected miners even just south of Beulah in ND. Nationally, many major coal companies have gone bankrupt including Cloud Peak Energy, Peabody Energy, Arch Coal, and Alpha Natural Resources, just to name a few. Who wins in these bankruptcies? It’s definitely not the workers or local communities. Top executives and other creditors generally leave with their pockets full after bankruptcy. CEO Jeff Hoops tried to write an apology letter to miners for bounced paychecks and “messy” bankruptcy, but it did nothing but prove his ignorance for the issues facing working class people.

What does this mean for North Dakota? It means that despite what coal companies may believe or portray to communities and workers, some things are outside of their control such as market forces and energy sector changes. Some things are within the companies control like proper management, but we generally never find out about mismanagement until it is too late. It is a strategy, or in the best interest, of companies to keep private their true financial stability. Rural communities have the opportunity to take responsibility for their future and make themselves resilient to possible changes by having a back-up plan. It has been said that having a back-up plan never hurt anyone.

Rural communities can start building resilience for themselves by planning for possible changes collaboratively and engaging in a community effort for rural economic development and diversification. Community resilience means that towns respond and recover quickly from difficult times. Self-sufficiency is a core value in the hearts of many North Dakotans and will continue to be so as rural communities adapt to changes in the market. It is never a good idea to have all your eggs in one basket, so they say. There is still a role for coal, but it is a smart decision for communities to plan for changing times. So, what are we in North Dakota going to do to prepare?

DMR Looking to Improve Abandoned Well Issue



An Abandoned Well Site

The North Dakota Department of Mineral Resources (DMR) recently proposed an overhaul to North Dakota's oil and gas rules in order to improve regulations and to help prevent a potential bonding and reclamation crisis. A series of hearings were held between October 7-9 in Bismarck, Minot, Dickinson, and Williston. Overall the rules are a big improvement. Some improvements that were a part of the new reforms include: increased bonding for saltwater disposal wells, requiring companies to increase bonds on wells that remain on temporary abandoned status for more than 7 years, and requiring companies that purchase old wells pay for the full bond of the well they purchase.

DRC staff testified regarding the new rules at the hearing in Bismarck on October 7. At the hearing DRC staff asked the DMR to improve the reforms by increasing statewide blanket bonds (the bond that covers all oil and gas wells in North Dakota) to at least \$250,000. DRC staff also urged the DMR to stop allowing alternative bonds (specifically collateral bonds, and self-bonds) and instead only require surety or cash bonds. Self-bonds and collateral bonds are problematic because they are difficult to collect if a company goes bankrupt. This is specifically because self-bonds are

financial assurances with no money backing them, and collateral bonds are merely backed by the sale of equipment, which may be lost during bankruptcy.

DRC hopes that the DMR listens to our suggestions. Overall the new rules are an improvement, but with DRC's suggested improvements, the rules could protect North Dakota even more. Comments are being accepted until October 18.

10 Gallon Spill or 10 Million Gallon Spill?



Circled is the Location of the Garden Creek Facility



Site of the Oneok Natural Gas Spill at their Garden Creek Facility near Watford City

In August, a massive natural gas liquid spill was uncovered by a whistleblower. The spill, which had been reported as a 10 gallon spill, was grossly underreported. Some estimates have the spill at 11 million gallons, making it the largest spill in recorded history.

After being exposed for not amending the spill report, the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality (NDDEQ), formerly the North Dakota Department of Health, was pressure to amend the spill report to show more than 800,000 gallons of natural gas liquids were spilled.

Company has applied for North Dakota's First High Level Radioactive Material Dump

DRC is working with members and potential members in opposing the permitting of 13 Mile Landfill which would be the first site in North Dakota to legally accept high level TENORM (Technologically Enhanced Radioactive Material) waste up to 50 picocuries per gram. The permit application is causing concern for a number of reasons, including TENORM and industrial waste being co-mingled, up to 25,000 tons/yr. could be disposed of but there is variance

that allows for the disposal of more than 25,000 tons/per of TENORM that hasn't been addressed in the permit, and the company that has applied for this permit, Secure Energy Services, has a track record of non-compliance, and there is documented water contamination from the current landfill site, all of which makes the people nearest the landfill very concerned. If regular waste is in the stream what guarantees do they have that radioactive material won't find its way into the water?

These are not minor concerns, especially after it was proven that the Oaks Disposal facility, just outside of Glendive, MT, contaminated groundwater with radioactive material. As long as this material is being produced it needs to be disposed of but it must be done as safely and responsibly as possible, and by companies that are careful and follow the law.

Residents in the area have reached out to DRC as they work to oppose this permit. They have sent their concerns to county officials and DRC will help them in their work as best they can.

Badlands Area Resource Council (BARC)



BARC members at BARC Annual Meeting

Badlands Area Resource Council (BARC) members continue their work to relocate the proposed Davis Refinery set to be built 3 miles from Theodore Roosevelt National Park (TRNP.) Members are active and working to let people know that the refinery is far from being constructed which counters the overly optimistic Meridian narrative.

BARC has had several letters to the editor (see pg ?) published. We love to see the opinions of those that would be directly affected if this refinery were to be built. Letters are not the only way DRC/BARC is moving this campaign forward. Legal challenges and public events are avenues BARC is using to further their campaign.

DRC, along with our ally Environmental Law & Policy Center (ELPC), has an appeal at the ND Supreme Court. This is a process appeal regarding the formal complaint that DRC filed asking the PSC to require a siting permit for Meridian's proposed Davis Refinery. We are appealing the fact that the Public Service Commission (PSC) considered evidence from Meridian Energy without considering DRC/ELPC's evidence. Nor did the PSC afford us the statutorily required opportunity for discovery (a legal process for gathering information), or a hearing. So, we are asking the Supreme Court for a court order requiring discovery and a hearing.

In this appeal we are in the middle of briefing, and oral arguments are likely to begin in the next month or two, with a decision about 6 months out.

DRC's ally, National Parks Conservation Association, also has an appeal at the ND Supreme Court appealing Meridian's Air to Construct Synthetic Minor Permit. The timeline for this case is similar to DRC's case.

Over the summer, BARC members tabled at several events in Western North Dakota including at Painted Canyon which gave members a good opportunity to talk to people who appreciate TRNP. Later this fall and into next year, BARC members will be meeting with NDSU's Natural Resource Management club and will host a couple of events with a T. Roosevelt impersonator. We hope he will draw a good crowd. He will talk about the impact North Dakota had on TR, particularly his ideas of use and conservation, and then we will discuss our work to protect the Park and surrounding areas from the impacts of a refinery on its doorstep.

BARC members are also concerned about a proposed expansion of the Fryburg Rail Facility. Comments for that are due Oct 16. One of the main things we will be asking for is a public hearing but there are several other concerns that will be brought up.

In mid-September members from BARC attended Soil and Water Conservation Society's "Soil & Water Summit: Back to the Badlands" in Medora. Topics ranged from ND Department of Health and its relationship to the energy industry to landowner concerns, rights and perspectives, and the intersection of TRNP and private property rights. There were many familiar faces and some good information was



Davis Refinery site...still no construction



Davis Refinery site...still no construction

exchanged.

Finally, BARC members held their annual meeting August 29. A highlight was viewing the film *My Country No More* which follows people in Trenton, ND as they (successfully) worked to prevent a refinery from being built near their town. The film was such a hit that DRC will be showing this film at its annual meeting in New Town, Oct 26. Not only that, but one of the people featured in the film, Kylie Rider of Trenton, will be at the meeting to answer questions and talk about the work she and her neighbors did to keep the refinery out.

During the business meeting of the annual meeting, by-laws were reviewed, and elections were held. Our newly elected BARC officers are Pat Hedstrup – Chair, Linda Weiss – Vice Chair/Treasurer, Wayne Fisher – Secretary, and Pat Ashley – BARC representative to the DRC board.

BARC members are steadily working on their refinery campaign while working on other issues that affect western North Dakota. BARC along with DRC affiliates, especially Fort Berthold POWER, is proof that the voice and the work of the people of North Dakota are powerful.

DRC Members Speak Out for Clean Air

On October 17, 2019 members of DRC's affiliate, FB POWER, and people from WORC (Western Organization of Resource Councils) will be going to Dallas, TX to testify to oppose President Trump's Executive Order on the rollback of the 2012 and 2016 Methane Rules. An EPA analysis determined that the 2016 rules would reduce methane and other hazardous air pollutants by 2025. With the rollback there would be no reduction, instead millions of metric tons of hazardous air pollutants would be put into the atmosphere annually with no implemented rule(s) to reduce this pollution in the future.

The annual meeting for the FB POWER board elected its officers for 2019 – 2020. Chair – Joletta Bird Bear, Vice-Chair – Lisa Deville, Secretary – Theodora Bird Bear, Treasurer – Laura Sandavol.

Fort Berthold POWER is continuing making bold decisions for the future for their reservation and tribal members.

Agriculture and Food

DRC Staff Attends WORC Ag and Food Campaign Team Meeting

DRC staff attended the WORC Ag and Food Campaign Team meeting October 8-10 to discuss Ag issues among the member groups of Western Organization of Resource Councils (WORC), including DRC, to set our 2020 priorities for the region. Due to an early fall snowstorm preventing travel, DRC staff attended the meeting via video conference.

During the meeting, the group discussed issues affecting farmers and ranchers all across the region. Including the impacts of the trade war, the current state of the cattle markets, CAFOs (confined animal feeding operations), soil health, and carbon sequestration. Discussions were held about the status of WORC's storytelling project, "Homegrown Stories" and how these stories, told by local farmers and ranchers, about their personal experiences with the issues we face can shift the narrative regionally and nationally.

Workshops were held about base building and strengthening our power, along with a round table discussion about the Homegrown Stories Project and WORC campaigns on federal policy. WORC's Regional Ag Organizer former DRC Ag and Food Organizer Tim Glaza led discussions about prioritizing our resources and identifying what issues WORC would be most effective in helping the member groups in the coming year. Overall the meeting was a great way to cross pollinate ideas across the region and a great way to set regional priorities for 2020.

Ag and Food Task Force

DRC Ag and Food Organizer, Sam Wagner, is working to get DRC's Ag and Food Task Force reformed and up and running by the end of 2020. The main purpose of the Task Force will be to help set DRC's agriculture and food priorities for 2020 and beyond. After the committee is seated it will start meeting in the later part of 2019. The Task Force will be discussing both new and legacy DRC agriculture and food issues. The Task Force, along with input from members across the state will decide what DRC's Ag and Food campaigns will be. One issue DRC will likely focus on is talking more about how the trade war impacts North Dakotans

AG and Food has always been and still is a cornerstone of DRC's and our ties to the land is the common thread that binds us together as an organization dedicated to prosperity to all North Dakotans. We are excited to have a new

Ag and Food organizer who can give his full attention to the problems facing our members involved in Ag and Food across the state. We look forward to bringing new members to DRC who can add their voices and experiences to the work we do. DRC is working hard to elevate the voices of farmers and ranchers across North Dakota. Together we will face any challenge that comes our way.

Affiliates Being Revitalized

Bismarck Mandan's Hour to Empower Transitioning to Missouri Valley Resource Council

Hour to Empower is a new model for reorganizing existing or sleeping affiliates, it can also be used to get people together to identify a new issue. Just like the name says, it's a one-hour meeting that is held in a park or facility with a playroom so families with young children can attend as well as anyone else that shares an interest in working together to create a more perfect community.

Our first couple of meetings were centered on people's visions for their community as well as a brief introduction to what grassroots organizing is, and how it can help motivate people to take action. It also brought people together from the community that might not otherwise have met.

The last two meetings focused on how to have what we call one on one (1:1) conversations which are intentional conversations to learn about people's self-interest and to hear what their visions or needs are within the community. Sometimes the person doing the 1:1 asks the other person to do something (like come to the next meeting or join DRC.)

Staff demonstrated a 1:1 and then asked those in attendance to do a 1:1 with another attendee. Each person in the pair did a 1:1 and then we came together to discuss how they went. The feedback we got was that the training and practice was helpful. And that they learned quite a bit about the other person.

Now that folks had some practice having these types of conversations, we asked that they have three separate conversations with friends or neighbors to learn what they would like to see in their community or a problem that they see that affects them directly. We are looking forward to hearing what people are talking about, so we get a greater understanding of what people in the Bismarck Mandan area are thinking about.

The more people we hear from the more likely we are to pick an issue for a campaign that has wide appeal which increases a campaign's success. Individuals have their own ideas but it's important to find a common thread so people have buy-in and will work together.

Now that we have had four H2E meetings, and there is quite a bit of interest in the group, it is time to start coming together as Missouri Valley Resource Council (MVRC.)

The first MVRC meeting will be held November 16, at the Bismarck Mandan Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, from 5pm – 7pm. We will have dinner and talk about what an affiliate is and does, how it is structured, and see what issue people think would be the best campaign issue. There are specific criteria that DRC uses to decide on a good issue, and we will go over those. While having a focus is important, we don't want to get ahead of ourselves and pick an issue too soon. We need enough people and energy behind whatever we pick so that people are interested in accomplishing the goal.

There have been many things brought up already including decreasing light pollution in the city, getting recycling to churches and apartments, working on improving the city bussing, and many more.

If you are in the Bismarck Mandan area, please come to our MVRC kick-off meeting with dinner. It doesn't matter if you haven't been to any of the previous meetings, we would love to have you and we can get you caught up in no time and we would love to hear the ways you think Bismarck Mandan could get closer to being your ideal community. The more input the better the decision we will make, and the more people involved the more power we'll have to effect change. More information will be sent out soon but if you have questions, please call the DRC office at 701.224.8587 and ask to speak to either Janessa or Liz.

MCETA Making Plans

Long-time DRC affiliate, McKenzie County Energy and Taxation Association (MCETA), is in the process of identifying issues that impact landowners in McKenzie County. MCETA members met in August to brainstorm issues impacting McKenzie County. Some issues that came up at the meeting included: unnecessary paving of section lines, accountability regarding county spending, issues surrounding oil and gas royalty payments, and best ways to

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mitigate the impacts of oil and gas to county landowners. MCETA plans to meet again later this fall to narrow its set of issues, potentially elect new officers, and start planning for work in 2020. If you are interested in learning more about MCETA please call the DRC office at 701-224-8587.

DRC Legislative Committee Gets the OK

At a recent DRC Board of Directors meeting a brand-new committee, the Legislative Committee, was approved. The goals of this committee are to be diverse and cross issue focused, increase the understanding of legislative work both in and out of session, increase the number of people that participate in the next session, and develop or improve the relationship that DRC and its members have with legislators.

As the mission of DRC includes empowering people “...to influence the decision-making processes that affect their lives and communities.” A committee that will make proactive decisions (as well as respond quickly when needed) regarding the work DRC will do at the legislature, host trainings, facilitate relationship building with our legislators, and last but not least, increase membership participation in the legislative session through written and oral testimony and talking to legislators. DRC hopes to develop a group of people that live in or around Bismarck who will be the go-to people when there is hearing to attend or other work to do at the Legislature. This is important because often hearing times are changed at the last minute making it difficult or even impossible for members who live far away.

The first thing that will happen will be to invite five to seven members to form the committee. This should be done early in 2020. Then, the committee will figure out some guidelines and processes to decide what bills DRC will work on and whether DRC will put forth a bill(s) in the 2021 session.

The plan is to host a number of legislative trainings in 2020 and 2021, including one on both the eastern and western sides of the state and two in Bismarck. There will be an interim trip to the Capitol, orientations during the session, and lobby days as needed for legislative committee meetings, floor votes, and caucus meetings.

To make testifying and lobbying even more effective, we will introduce members to legislators in both the House and the Senate and we will invite current and former legislators (likely DRC members) to come and speak at our trainings. The committee will also facilitate relationships with in-district legislators of affected communities.

By building a network of confident people around the state, DRC will increase the number of people that are willing to testify or lobby. If there are people within that network that live close to the Capitol we can respond quickly during the Legislative session and collaborate with members that want a personal message delivered to the legislators but cannot make the trip to Bismarck. If DRC members don't speak up and tell the legislators what is best for North Dakotans, industry and corporations, including oil companies and Big Ag, will.

Staffing



JP Holmes

Dakota Resource Council has hired JP Holmes to fill the open organizing position for Fort Berthold POWER/Oil and Gas.

JP Holmes is an enrolled member of the Oglala Sioux Tribe and was raised in Milwaukee, WI, he served 14 years in the military and has 4 years' experience working in the oilfield and he currently lives in Mandan, ND.

JP is a graduate of Sitting Bull College where he received his A.S. and B.S. degrees in Environmental Science. Some of his internships/research were, USDA/NIFA – An Ethogram of Big Brown Bats: General Behaviors and Social Interactions in an Artificial Roost, Bismarck, ND, NASA/KIKSAPA – GIS Tracking of Coyotes in a Rural Mid-Sized Urban Area, Bismarck, ND and Lawrence, KS, NSF – Dispersal of Tilapia in the Anthropogenic Canal Systems in Palo Verde, CRC and USDA APHIS – Internship, Bismarck, ND. Prior to coming on board as staff, JP has been a member

or DRC since 2013. He is currently working with Fort Berthold POWER and on DRC's oil and gas campaign.

DRC Members in the News

Letter: Davis Refinery should seek siting permit

What's happening with the Davis Refinery? In a Tribune article this week, Meridian CEO Bill Prentice blamed his refinery's multi-year setbacks on “environmentalists.” Later in the article, he admits that the company has only raised 5% of the money required to complete this project.

Maybe what has kept investors skittish is that the project is continually changing plans and capacity, with different permits issued for different sized refineries, some at 55,000 barrels per day and some at 49,500 barrels per day. Investors don't like changing stories to avoid regulation. Prentice could avoid this uncertainty, skittish investors, and lawsuits by telling the truth and agreeing to seek a siting permit for the refinery.

-Linda Weiss, Belfield

Letter: Davis Refinery site no longer productive land

The area where the proposed Davis Refinery is to be located in Billings County used to be a prime producer of agriculture products. Corn, wheat and soybeans were planted and harvested over the years. It was a joy to watch the many seasons as I drove by the area the past 30 years.

In July 2018, this 700 acres of rich, black soil was ripped up and piled into enormous berms and left vacant to grow weeds. The weeds were hard to control because of the contour of the land left by the huge earth moving machines. Now the land is vacant, the machines are idle and two years of crops aren't accounted for.

A decision needs to be made, soon, to get this land back to producing, whether that would be responsible industrial or agricultural. What is happening with Meridian Energy Group? So far, all that they have produced is a big scar on some beautiful, once productive land. This does not show that they are being a responsible company.

-Laura Grzanic, Belfield

Letter: Investors not interested in Davis Refinery

By this own admission, Meridian CEO Bill Prentice has raised only 5% of the money necessary to build his refinery on the edge of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. He has posted less than 8% of the county construction bond. If you look at the site today, you'll see weedy berms and three earth movers, one of which has a flat tire. Despite that, last week's reporting on the Davis Refinery began with Meridian CEO Bill Prentice blaming his project's woes on "environmentalists."

We've seen the Dakota Prairie Refinery go underwater after it was built and we're not interested in another out of state companies building an unprofitable refinery outside our state's largest tourist attraction. Keep Davis Refinery the cleanest in the country -- don't build it.

- Wayne and Joy Fisher, Dickinson

Letter: Oil spills: It's not all or nothing

Meridian Energy recently announced they are still moving ahead with their plans for the refinery they want to locate on the edge of Theodore Roosevelt National Park. The company says everything is peachy and the refinery won't even be noticeable.

This goes against common sense. But today, in North Dakota, that's not unusual.

Toxic oil industry spills on North Dakota farmland and by our water have become routine. Earlier this year, North Dakota farmer Daryl Peterson testified to Congress about the many years of soil destroying spills on his farmland. He said North Dakota officials have "minimized the impacts, rather than holding the oil companies accountable."

Now, last week, competing for top billing in state energy news, is the report that unknown millions of gallons of natural gas product spilled at an Oneok plant in western North Dakota. Oneok and current state officials listed this as a simple 10 gallon spill. And, in a significant slap in the face to North Dakotans, that spill happened in 2015, but officials never informed the public about how immense this disaster was.

Still, it appears industry and current officials think we're supposed to believe them when they tell us not to worry. They claim: Our incredible national park isn't threatened. Nothing could ever go wrong with an oil pipeline carrying over a million barrels per day under the Missouri

River. We have too many regulations. Let the industry do their job. They'll clean up any problems.

After years of never-ending spills, hiding things from citizens, and much more, state officials are still saying "trust us." Not anymore. We should be able to have oil development without so much of the place getting damaged in the process. It's not all or nothing. We need to insist on a better way.

-Don Morrison, Bismarck

Exactly how does a liquid natural gas spill reported to the ND Health Department as a 10-gallon spill end up as possibly the largest onshore spill in history?

The massive condensate spill at Watford City's Oneok plant raises serious questions about transparency, safety and industry oversight in North Dakota.

When did Oneok know how big the spill might be? The incident report was made back in 2015. In the four years since, did they contact state officials and update their initial estimate when they discovered the spill was a tad larger than first thought?

For a spill this size – which might be up to 11 million gallons, I find it hard to believe someone in state government didn't know. And if someone in state government did know, why didn't the public know?

If Oneok didn't tell anyone about the huge, highly-flammable spill, then it is a corporation that simply cannot be trusted. If they did tell someone in state government, whether an environmental employee or maybe the members of the Industrial Commission, it smells of a cover up.

Was this an unbelievable bout of incompetence? A colossal regulatory failure? Or something much, much worse?

Most importantly, are North Dakotans living with the false sense of security that the current regulatory structure is adequate for the health and safety of our residents? Or are state agencies, elected leaders and legislators looking the other way when things like this happen?

I won't hold my breath waiting for the answers to these questions.

-April Fairfield, Bismarck

Letter: The PSC isn't enforcing ND state law

As a resident of North Dakota, I am surprised that an agency, such as the Public Service Commission, is not required to enforce North Dakota law. I did everything I could to follow the "process," yet North American Coal Co. isn't being held accountable by the PSC.

NAC damaged our family's farmland when their pond water overflowed onto our farmland, which caused erosion that resulted in a loss of crop income. NAC also discharged pond water into the farmland creek, which resulted in flooding. In an attempt to fix the issue, NAC constructed a deep diversion ditch on the farmland and deepened the road ditch which now blocks access to farmland. All of this occurred outside the permit area.

The even bigger issue is that the PSC did nothing to address the issue when I filed a formal citizen complaint. The PSC determined that these actions are not mining related, which contradicts the fact that all changes and damage to farmland was done by NAC.

On June 12, I attended the meeting for my formal citizen complaint with the PSC. I was not allowed to speak at this meeting. I am not even certain if the PSC commissioners had read my complaint or comments. I have eight years of documentation of the issue and my communications with the PSC and NAC.

ND Century Code, ND Administrative Code, and PSC Memorandum specifically state that ND law also applies to land adjacent to mining activity. Disturbing our farmland is not allowed without a permit.

The PSC is not enforcing ND law. Does anyone hold the PSC accountable?

- Clyde Eisenbeis, Beulah

Letter: We must keep methane pollution safeguards in place

President Donald Trump and Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Andrew Wheeler are attacking our health and environment. Again. By proposing to eliminate critical standards that cut methane pollution from oil and gas development, Wheeler is creating loopholes for industry at the expense of our families' health and future generations.

Even big oil knows that they cannot significantly reduce methane pollution on their own. Today, "voluntary" pollution reduction programs represent just a small fraction of the industry and companies like major North Dakota oil and gas operators, Equinor and ExxonMobil, know that actions taken on their own are not enough to address methane pollution from the oil and gas industry.

It is critical that the EPA keep methane pollution safeguards strong and working to protect communities in North Dakota, instead of attempting to keep the vast majority of climate pollution from the oil and gas industry away from critical federal oversight for years to come.

-Lisa DeVille, Mandaree