

# Down to Earth

NEWS FROM THE MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL INFORMATION CENTER



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# Replacing the Copper Collar with the NorthWestern Noose

by Anne Hedges

Cover Photo:  
Fire pit at a  
campsite on  
the Smith  
River. Photo  
by Malcolm  
Gilbert.

**N**orthWestern Energy (Montana's largest for-profit utility) seems committed to treating its customers as ATM machines. And with the latest rumors swirling around that NorthWestern is negotiating to buy an increased share of Colstrip, the plant and the company's history should be of serious concern to its customers.

After a long history of trying (and sometimes succeeding) to overcharge customers, it now wants another \$25 million (see below) to partially pay for its own misdeeds. The latest request follows a long line of NorthWestern attempts to enrich itself and its executives at the expense of its customers.

First, the company pocketed about \$200 million when it bought its share of the Colstrip plant for \$187 million in 2007 and then charged its customers \$407 million for that purchase. It seems NorthWestern expects its customers to keep paying off that \$407 million

at a 10% interest rate until 2042, regardless of whether the Colstrip plant is operating.

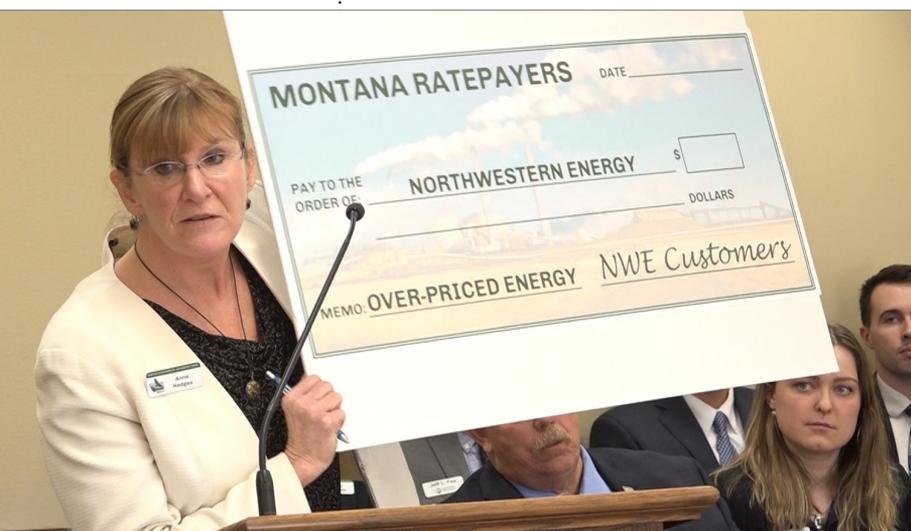
Second, when the Colstrip plant broke down for six months in 2013, NorthWestern tried to force its customers to pay an extra \$8 million for replacement electricity even though customers were already paying for the plant as if it were operating (which it wasn't). MEIC objected and fortunately the Montana Public Service Commission (PSC) and a court agreed that the company wasn't entitled to that \$8 million.

Third, NorthWestern asked the 2019 Montana Legislature to give it a blank check so it could buy a larger share of the constantly breaking-down Colstrip plant without PSC oversight. NorthWestern, of course, wanted the right to pass along to its customers the untold millions in costs related to that purchase, escalating fuel and maintenance costs, and the massive cleanup costs. Fortunately, after intensive lobbying work by MEIC and others, the Legislature emphatically said NO.

Further, in late 2018 NorthWestern filed a rate case with the PSC in which it initially insisted with complete certainty it needed a \$34 million rate increase – until it later agreed that only a \$6.5 million increase was actually needed. Does that sound as if the company was putting its customers first, or instead playing a game to find out how much it could squeeze out of the customers this time?

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Anne Hedges  
testifying  
at the 2019  
Legislative  
Session.



# NorthWestern's Resource Plan: Costly and Ill-Advised

by Brian Fadie

**W**ant to hear a crazy story? NorthWestern Energy wants to build a fleet of expensive fracked-gas power plants, and to continue using a dirty coal-fired power plant for 20 years, and force Montana families and small businesses to pay for all of it. That's the upshot of the company's "2019 Resource Procurement Plan."

Utilities periodically create these kinds of plans to analyze different options for providing electricity at the lowest reasonable cost over the next 20 years. Unfortunately, NorthWestern's plan appears to have been created to pad the pockets of its company executives and shareholders with ratepayer dollars (while worsening the climate crisis in the process).

What's in the plan? About 800 megawatts of new fracked-gas plants built by 2025, no new wind or solar power plants, and the Colstrip power plant (NorthWestern is a part-owner) running for 20 more years.

The Resource Plan is important. The Montana Public Service Commission (PSC) and others use it to inform key decisions, such as approving or denying new power plants. But NorthWestern made some fundamental errors when creating this one, including:

#1 Failing to include the cost of gas pipelines in the cost assumption for gas-fired power plants. Gas pipelines are expensive and NorthWestern has previously stated new pipelines are

needed to operate any significant new gas-fired power plants on its system.

#2 Failing to identify, manage, and mitigate the costs of the Colstrip power plant and the risk that the plant will shut down well before the end of the NorthWestern's 20-year planning horizon.

#3 Failing to model appropriate cost estimates for wind and solar energy facilities, including not modeling solar paired with battery storage (which would be lower cost than solar sited separately from storage, thanks to access to the federal Investment Tax Credit).

#4 Failing to model the costs of existing power plants to demonstrate the company is managing a least-cost portfolio for ratepayers.

The PSC is taking public comments on the plan right now and needs to hear from you. There are three ways to comment:

#1 Visit the MEIC website ([www.meic.org](http://www.meic.org)). Click on the first image that pops up titled "NorthWestern's Resource Plan is a Problem." We have set up a tool that will send comments



**The above image is available on a yard sign (the size of typical campaign signs). If you would like one for your yard, call the MEIC office at (406) 443-2520.**

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# Guest Opinion: Copper Mine Threatens Smith River

by Wayne Chamberlin

The Montana Conservation Elders are opposed to the proposed mine that would threaten the legacy and preciousness of the Smith River. Our group consists of seniors who have spent their lives defending Montana's wild places in our various roles as citizens, agency personnel, teachers, journalists, authors, professionals, career conservationists, outfitters, and Congressional staff. We created our organization to work together to continue our lifetime

passions for Montana's outdoors.

The proposed Black Butte Copper Project is the latest in the long list of Montana mine proposals that sell the project to the public as a job creator with no downside. History, something near and dear to our group, demonstrates the true stories of mining in Montana. For a few jobs upfront, Montana's environment is irreversibly damaged, and at the end of so many mining operations the mining corporations declare bankruptcy. American bankruptcy laws are for corporations, not for citizens — and these corporations have insufficient bonding to cover the costs of cleanup, leaving taxpayers with the expense and subsidizing these temporary mining jobs. Ghost towns and polluted streams across Montana speak to this boom then bust cycle.

## Quick Update on Smith River Permit Status

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is precipitously close to releasing a final environmental analysis for the Smith River Mine that could have far-reaching and incredibly damaging impacts to the Smith River. In the September 2019 issue of *Down to Earth* the final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was projected to be released some time in October. However, due to the draft of the document identifying potential impacts to surface water quality as a result of the dewatering associated with mine operations, the final release date has been pushed back to December 2019. Within 15 days after the final EIS is released, DEQ will make a final determination on the permit for the mine and explain its reasoning through a Record of Decision (ROD). You can bet the farm that MEIC and partners will be reading the EIS and ROD very carefully, and holding DEQ and the mine proponents accountable. 🐦

## Changing Owners

As is so often the case, the group pressing for this Smith River scheme demonstrate a history of corporate shenanigans and shifting allegiances. First it was Cominco American in charge, then Tintina Resources, then Sandfire Resources (Australian). Now it's Sandfire Resources America (which is actually Canadian).

The financial statements of the auditor's report for Sandfire Resources as of June 2019 reveal the flimsy condition of the corporation. I quote: "The group incurred a loss of \$14,194,685 during the year ended June 30, 2019." The group lost \$10,008,510 in 2018. The report

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# Colstrip Plant is a Big, Expensive Mess That's Likely to Get Worse

by Anne Hedges

The owners of the Colstrip coal-fired power plant in southeastern Montana and the neighboring coal mine don't want to spend the money to clean up their mess. And the State of Montana seems willing to let them "kick the can" down the road. Similar things have happened many times before. Big companies tell the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) that they can't clean up after themselves because it will be too expensive and cause them to have to shut the operation or project down. DEQ then backs off and the plant or mine or other facility closes anyway, leaving an expensive mess, both in terms of pollution and legal wrangling. Unfortunately, this sad story seems to be repeating itself at Colstrip.

## Coal Ash Ponds Clean-up Proposals Don't Actually Clean Up

The coal ash disposal ponds at the plant leak 200 million gallons of polluted water into the groundwater each year. However, Talen (the plant's operator) has continued the absurd description of the ponds as "a zero-discharge facility." The ponds have leaked since they were built in the 1980s, but DEQ and the plant owners have consistently ignored the problem until residents of the town of Colstrip started filing lawsuits (starting with the suit filed by Colstrip State Senator Duane Ankney and others, who eventually settled their suit for \$25 million). In 2012 DEQ and the plant owners agreed

on a process that would eventually result in the cleanup of the ash ponds.

But for seven years, Talen has successfully stalled clean-up efforts.



Colstrip Power Plant.

Recently Talen presented DEQ with five clean-up alternatives for the largest area of ash ponds of the Colstrip plant's Units 3 & 4. All five proposals fail to clean up the site according to the established criteria. The question is, will DEQ be duped again?

Talen's first three clean-up options were so deficient they don't deserve mention. The fourth option is the one Talen wants. It's relatively inexpensive. However, Talen admits that it fails to meet the fundamental clean-up criteria spelled out by DEQ. Talen says that the site will meet the standard for sulfates by 2070, but the cleanup of pollutants such as boron, manganese, selenium, and cobalt may not even meet the criteria by 2120! That's right. This proposed

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# Showdown Over the Purchase of Montana's Largest Coal Mine

by Anne Hedges

There is nothing simple about what is going on at Montana's largest coal strip mine, the Spring Creek Mine. The mine was owned by Cloud Peak Energy for decades. Once considered a leader in coal mining nationwide, Cloud Peak fell victim to the same market force impacts as all other coal mines and plants and it declared bankruptcy in Spring 2019. All three of its massive coal mines were put on the auction block. In August 2019 a relative newcomer to the coal mining



WELC attorney Shilo Hernandez overlooking land that NTEC owns and hopes to mine.

industry made the winning bid. Navajo Transitional Energy Company (NTEC) apparently put in a bid with enough cash and sufficient bonding to be chosen as the new owner of all three mines.

But there was a glitch. NTEC is a company completely owned and controlled by the Navajo Nation, and NTEC didn't bother to ask the Navajo Tribal Council or its own Navajo board of directors if it could rely on the Tribe to back up the necessary \$450 million of bonds for these mines. The Navajo Council asked the company to explain itself, and NTEC refused to do so. It arrogantly behaved as if it didn't need to answer to the Tribe.

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) refused

to let NTEC take over the mine without a guarantee that it would abide by Montana's laws and post adequate bonds to guarantee cleanup should NTEC go bankrupt. Instead of negotiating with DEQ in good faith, NTEC used workers as pawns and abruptly closed the mine. DEQ and NTEC quickly reached a temporary agreement (good for only 75 days) to let NTEC operate the mine and put the miners back to work. But the real negotiations will come when NTEC tries to transfer the mining permits into its name. Prior to approving the transfer DEQ must verify that NTEC can meet all the financial and legal requirements.

While all of this wrangling with DEQ was going on, many Navajo people and the Tribal Council became increasingly nervous about what secretive deals NTEC might have struck that would commit the Tribe to covering clean-up costs should NTEC disappear. Finally, on November 12th of this year, the Navajo Tribal chairman issued a surprise announcement that he had revoked NTEC's ability to commit the Tribe to cleaning up these enormous coal mines.

What happens next is anyone's guess. MEIC is concerned because it has a lawsuit against the federal government regarding the Spring Creek mine that is on hold until the completion of Cloud Peak's bankruptcy proceedings. We don't want these ownership, permitting, and bonding issues to interfere with the resolution of that case. In the meantime, DEQ has allowed NTEC

*continued on page 14*

# MEIC Is Protecting the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness

by Derf Johnson

One of the more unique and cherished landscapes in the vast and varied geography of Montana is the Cabinet Mountains Wilderness in the northwest corner of the state. It's wet (up to 100 inches of rain annually), it's wild, and it's remote. This inland rainforest is home to mountain goats, wolverines, wolves, lynx, bull trout, and a vulnerable but recovering population of grizzly bears. Due to its unique attributes and wilderness qualities, MEIC and several other organizations have been involved in a decades-long fight to stop large-scale hardrock mining from occurring inside the Wilderness. The greatest threat right now comes from the proposed Rock Creek and Montanore mines. These projects would both mine under the wilderness area. And they both are owned by Hecla Mining, a company based in Idaho.

## A Legal Victory for Grizzly Bears and Bull Trout at Rock Creek

In early October 2019, a Montana federal district court judge ruled in our favor in a case involving the Rock Creek mine and a major procedural hurdle. That ruling will allow MEIC and its partners to submit the substance of their complaints to the court for review. The mine projects clearly would harm grizzly bears and bull trout, both recognized as endangered or threatened species under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA). The

Trump Administration attempted to prematurely dismiss key claims in the litigation, but the judge didn't bite.

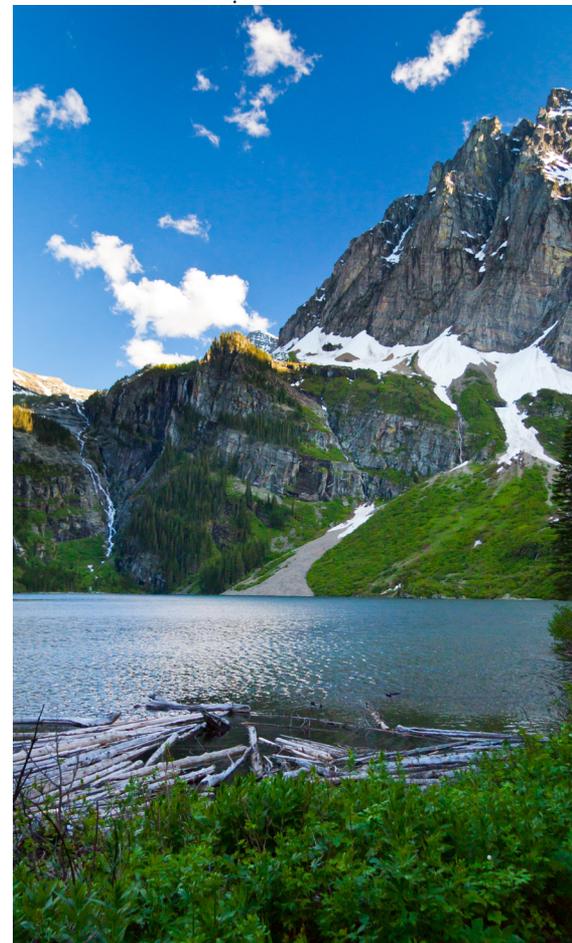
Now we can fully present our claims to the judge. Under the ESA, other federal agencies are required to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service when a proposed project may hurt listed species, and to re-initiate consultation any time that new information reveals effects not previously considered. New information that has come to light on the mine's threats to imperiled grizzly bears requires re-initiation of the Forest Service's and Fish and Wildlife Service's consultation process. The agencies' decisions regarding impacts on bull trout also violated the ESA.

Wilbert Buckskin of Ksanka Kupaqa **Xa'tzin**, one of our partners in protecting the Cabinets, recently stated: "The Ktunaxa (Kootenai Nation) are fortunate to have a voice of reason at the federal level. As protectors of these lands, Kupaqa **Xa'tzin** in will continue to challenge unnecessary destruction of Klawala (grizzly bear) habitat and fisheries. Our ancestors respected wildlife and that's why we exist today."

Along with MEIC, Earthjustice is

*continued on page 13*

Cabinet Mountains Wilderness. Photo by Flickr user Troy Smith.



## Justice Advocate, Michaelynn Hawk, to Receive MEIC's 2019 Conservationist of the Year Award

Each year MEIC's Conservationist of the Year Award goes to a person who has dedicated their life to protecting Montana's environment. Michaelynn Hawk understands the connections between social and environmental justice and has devoted her life to making Montana a just and equitable place for all.

As a community organizer and leader, Michaelynn Hawk has dedicated much of her working life to addressing disparities in education, healthcare, policing, and access to voting, along with other social, economic and environmental justice issues. She is the executive director of Indian People's Action (IPA), an organization that has worked to stop the Keystone XL and Dakota Access pipelines, brought attention to the disproportionate impact of practices in the criminal justice system on Native communities, and fought on behalf of Native plaintiffs for equal access to voting. Michaelynn is a great resource and advocate for the Native community in Montana. She has worked for many years in the Montana legislature as an advocate for a clean environment for Native communities, in favor of low-cost clean energy, and against costly investments in fossil fuels.

Michaelynn, an enrolled member of the Crow Tribe, has six boys and is raising her grandson. After years of coordinating the First Peoples' Market in Butte for the Montana Folk Festival, Michaelynn saw an opportunity to create a unique youth leadership program, Native Youth Art in Action (NYAA), that runs in conjunction with the First Peoples' Market. NYAA brings talented youth from Montana Reservations to learn about environmental, economic, and social justice while being mentored by renowned traditional and contemporary artists.

Michaelynn's tireless work on environmental and social justice is an inspiration, and MEIC is proud to honor her with its highest award. 🦅



Michaelynn Hawk

## NorthWestern Noose (cont'd from page 2)

And now NorthWestern says it needs another \$25 million from its customers to cover cost overruns during 2018. A closer inspection of its request reveals that at least \$7 million of it is to cover the cost of replacement electricity the company had to purchase when the Colstrip plant broke down during Summer 2018. The shutdown occurred because the plant was violating the mercury and air toxics standards under the federal Clean Air Act. NorthWestern wants its customers to pay more because it violated the law and put unhealthy levels of hazardous air pollutants into the air.

MEIC decided to challenge this latest proposed rate increase before

the PSC because it's simply unfair to force ratepayers to pay more when the company violates the law. All utilities are required to be in compliance with all laws at all times. Customers shouldn't have to pay more because of NorthWestern's carelessness and illegal behavior.

*NorthWestern wants its customers to pay more because it violated the law and put unhealthy levels of hazardous air pollutants into the air.*

Given Colstrip's expensive purchase price and the consistent, expensive breakdowns – plus the air pollution violations – it is clearer than ever that the plant is neither cheap nor reliable. 🐦

## Resource Plan (cont'd from page 3)

to the PSC. The deadline is January 3, 2020.

#2 Mail or e-mail the PSC. Feel free to use the list of deficiencies noted above to inform your comments. Make sure to include the docket number (2019.08.052) somewhere in your comments. For example, starting the letter by saying "These comments are regarding docket 2019.08.052". Send them to the e-mail address [psc\\_utilitycomment@mt.gov](mailto:psc_utilitycomment@mt.gov) or to the street address 1701 Prospect Avenue, Helena, MT 59601. The deadline is also January 3, 2020.

#3 Attend the PSC public comment hearing. State law requires the PSC to hold at least two public meetings to

receive comments on the plan. The PSC decided to meet this requirement by holding both meetings on the same day in the same location: December 9th at 1:30 PM and 5:00 PM at the PSC office at 1701 Prospect Avenue, Helena, MT 59601. If you would like to attend the hearing and want more information to inform your comments, please feel free to call the MEIC office at 406-443-2520 or e-mail me at [bfadie@meic.org](mailto:bfadie@meic.org).

Building fossil-fuel gas plants and running an expensive coal plant for 20 years will not only harm the climate, but it will harm the pocketbooks of ratepayers. Please submit your comments today! 🐦

## Smith River *(continued from page 4)*

states in its notes that “due to its under capitalization, a material uncertainty exists that may cast significant doubt on the group’s ability to continue as a going concern.”

Mining promoters say this time it will be different. Don’t believe that, not with the long history of irresponsible mining in Montana. Look at the Berkeley pit — permanently scarred land, forever requiring taxpayer funded remediation. It’s been said that “the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.” This goes for the end results of most mining operations in this state.

This proposed mine involves exposing sulfide deposits that accompany the copper. The sulfides are oxidized to form sulfuric acid, bad enough itself, but in addition it leaches out arsenic and cadmium. All of these elements and molecules are toxic to all living things. Mine proponents claim that cement will be used to treat a portion of the tailings to minimize the risk of acid drainage. The problem there is that basic chemistry dictates that the acid will disintegrate the cement. The remaining tailings will be transported to a lined tailings pond, eighty acres in size. However, again, history establishes

these lined ponds inevitably leak over time. A retrospective evaluation done by Montana Trout Unlimited and Earthworks found that mining corporations’ water quality estimates since 1980 were understated in eleven out of twelve cases involving hardrock mines.

We’re not opposed to all mining operations, just those that are suspect. It is proven history that substandard mining outfits are not to be trusted by the citizens of Montana. The glue that holds any relationship between two entities together is trust. In our personal lives and relationships we expect people to do the right thing and abide by the golden rule. Should our values be any different for corporations?

### Smith River Tourism

Tourism in Montana is big business. According to the Institute of Tourism and Recreation Research nonresidents spent over \$3.7 billion in Montana in 2018. These visitors paid \$180 million in taxes, which means a reduction in taxes for each individual Montana taxpayer of \$430 each year, according to the Montana Office of Tourism and Business Development. Nonresident travel in Montana directly supports 39,000 jobs in our state, indirectly another 14,000 jobs. Together, that’s one in nine jobs in Montana. These jobs are less cyclical than those in the mining industry. The Smith River alone generates over \$10 million for the Montana economy, as analyzed by Southwick Associates.



Boats on the Smith River. Photo by Malcolm Gilbert.

These visitors don't come to Montana to see settling ponds, acid drainage, and dead fish.

The Smith River country has its own intrinsic value as a fishery, as a provider of wildlife habitat, and as a tourist destination. The Smith River and environs are for all Montanans, not just one community. The demand for permits to float the Smith has led to it being the only river in Montana with a permit system. Roughly only one in ten applicants get the prize — a permit. We have no right to permanently damage this special place.

Jim Posewitz, one of our members, writes of Montana as the “Last Best Place,” of its wild abundance being

protected throughout history by citizens in this democracy, those coming “from each succeeding generation who carry a powerful and persistent land ethic.” He continues “that it is an effort that will always be a work in progress.” This is one more time that the people of Montana, as individuals and as groups, must step up to protect a piece of the “Last Best Place” – the Smith River. The generations that follow are counting on us. 🌿

*Wayne Chamberlin, of Helena, is president of Montana Conservation Elders. For more on the group, visit Montana Conservation Elders on Facebook.*

Smith River.  
Photo by  
Malcolm  
Gilbert.



## Colstrip (continued from page 5)

clean-up plan isn't expected to meet the clean-up requirements in 100 years.

DEQ required Talen to consider one more alternative, Alternative 5. That alternative would require Talen to place the waste in a properly designed landfill. But Talen designed the fifth alternative to fail. In fact, Talen didn't analyze any alternative that meets the established cleanup criteria in 100 years. Not one.

DEQ may think that the company will always have a deep enough pocket to pay for the cleanup this contaminated mess. The odds are incredibly high that it won't. Utilities aren't immune from bankruptcy and collapse. Think of the Montana Power Co. or Pacific Gas & Electric in California. DEQ

needs to combine the best of Talen's five inadequate alternatives and require a cleanup that will control the source of the pollution and clean up the groundwater. Period. DEQ gets only one shot at forcing companies to post adequate bonds before they start declaring bankruptcy or re-arranging their corporate assets. Montana shouldn't let history repeat itself and allow Talen to leave behind a site that will be contaminated forever.

### MEIC Takes Trump Admin. to Court Over Colstrip Coal Mine Expansion

DEQ and the Trump Administration's Office of Surface Mining (OSM) have both approved a gigantic expansion of the Rosebud

Mine, which supplies all the coal for the Colstrip plant, and has the plant as its only significant customer. The Rosebud Mine is one of the largest coal strip mines in the nation and the Colstrip plant is one of the largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the country. The 6,746-acre expansion would allow the recently bankrupt mine owner to mine another 70 million tons of coal and would extend the life of the mine by 19 years.

Last Summer, MEIC challenged

## You're Invited... to MEIC's Holiday Party!

Help us to celebrate the season and honor our friend  
Michaelynn Hawk with MEIC's Conservationist of the Year Award



**When:** Thursday, Dec. 12th,  
5pm-8pm

**Where:** The Myrna Loy  
Theater, Jailhouse Gallery,  
15 N. Ewing, Helena

We'll provide appetizers and lively conversation! Drinks will be available for purchase. If you can bring a dish to share, or have questions, contact Cari at 443-2520 or [ckimball@meic.org](mailto:ckimball@meic.org).

DEQ's approval of the expansion. Then on November 13th we joined with other organizations to file suit in federal court challenging OSM's approval as well.

The expansion of the mine will destroy water resources, harm wildlife and public lands, and exacerbate the climate crisis. The expansion also threatens to further damage habitat for the pallid sturgeon in the Yellowstone River, an endangered species. Unfortunately, OSM refused to consider the cost to the environment and the economy in mining and burning this 70 million tons of coal, which will generate roughly 140 million tons of greenhouse gases. Instead, OSM glossed over the harmful impacts of the mine expansion and the long-term impacts on the climate.

Coal-generated electricity is rapidly declining in the United States as utilities continue to adopt cheaper and cleaner alternatives. Half of the units of the Colstrip plant will close at the end of 2019 and a majority of the owners are

planning their exit from the final two units in 5 to 10 years. OSM cannot legally turn a blind eye to the rapidly changing coal market, water resources, endangered species, and the serious consequences of climate change.

Western Environmental Law Center filed the complaint on behalf of MEIC, Indian Peoples Action, 350 Montana, and WildEarth Guardians. Sierra Club is a party as well. The case was filed in federal district court in Billings, Montana. 🌿



## Cabinet Mountains (cont'd from page 7)

representing the Ksanka Kupaqa **Xa'tzin**, Rock Creek Alliance, Earthworks, Defenders of Wildlife, Sierra Club, and Center for Biological Diversity in the lawsuit.

### Protecting Water Quality and Quantity in the Cabinets

As mentioned in the September 2019 issue of *Down to Earth*, this Summer a state district court in Helena vacated the water pollution discharge permit covering the first five years of the Montanore project. This was

a big victory in our fight to protect the Cabinets. But no good deed goes unpunished – the case is now on appeal to the Montana Supreme Court, with a decision anticipated by the end of 2020.

Similarly, our legal victory regarding dewatering of wilderness streams by the Rock Creek project has been appealed by the mining company. A decision in this case is also expected by the end of 2020. 🌿

## Are You Registered to Vote?

by Steve Gilbert

In Montana, the Constitution guarantees the right to a clean and healthful environment. In elections, your vote is your voice to assure protection of our clean air and water and our public lands and open spaces.



*In order to vote in Montana you must be:*

1. a citizen of the United States.
2. 18 years of age on or before the election.
3. a Montana resident for at least 30 days before the election.

You may register to vote at your polling place on the day of the election, but it is much easier to do this well in advance. Montana voter registration forms are available on-line (google Montana Voter Registration Form) or at the County Clerk and Records office. Registering takes about 2 minutes.

*At [mt.gov/voterinfo](http://mt.gov/voterinfo) you can check:*

- ✓ If you are registered to vote.
- ✓ If your voter registration address is correct.
- ✓ The location of your polling place.
- ✓ Mail-in ballot option, and the status of your mail-in ballot, if you have sent one in.
- ✓ A sample ballot.

*REMEMBER, every privilege carries with it responsibilities. So register and vote!*

## Coal Mine Showdown (cont'd from page 6)

to operate the mine for 75 days while it negotiates with NTEC to verify that it will follow Montana's laws, and will provide a \$110 million bond for the Spring Creek Mine.

Will DEQ stay strong, require NTEC to adhere to the law's permitting and bonding requirements, and protect the long-term interests of the state and the people of Montana? We'll see. 🐦

# President's Column

by Kathy Juedeman

In this issue of *Down to Earth*, you will find updates on MEIC's successes and on end of year challenges to our clean air, water, and land in the spaces that are special to us in Montana. The work is important, and your support allows this work to be successful.



The MEIC Board and staff met this Fall to plan for the year ahead, and to celebrate 2019 milestones. The team makes notable and substantial improvements toward our goals of clean air, water, and land for Montana – even as we see the enormous challenge of the changing climate – and the planning meeting was a good one. During our coffee breaks, what I noticed is that talk always turned to outdoor adventures, and the unbridled joy of Montana living.

All of us on the Board, like you, appreciate the grandeur that is outside our doorsteps. The weather this Summer was extravagant – nothing less. Some of our team got away on weekends and vacations to float wild rivers with life-long friends, and some took time after work to hike a local trail with their kids. Some of the team members drove out to local spots to photograph grizzly bears preparing for the Winter. Most recently, some were collecting apples

for cider. But the story that has stayed with me after that meeting is this one: a father in our group told a story from some years past, in a Spring season when the Smith River ran high, and he floated it fast. His son was there to regale us with that story and the details with his Dad, and our circle of friends was there to join in, admire the story, and keep it close in our



hearts. This story will surely be told in their family, and will join the collection of stories shared around campfires and in living rooms in my family as well.

These stories of larger than life hikes, taking a wrong turn and crossing paths with an 8-point elk, racing in canoes down special rivers, or maybe meandering down a slow river on an August day, become treasured family stories, passed down like jewels to the next generation. If you don't have an outdoor story yet, plan an outing this Winter, or next Spring. The stories are only possible because we have preserved our one-of-a-kind rivers and landscapes. The stories are only possible because we have clean air for hiking.

What is your story of embracing the outdoors in Montana? And who will you share that story with, in this holiday season? 🐻

Grizzly bear in Tom Miner Basin. Photo by MEIC board member Charles Besançon.



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## **CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED**

**It's that time of year when we take stock of all the good in our lives.  
And here at MEIC we have a lot to be grateful for:**

- Crisp autumn air and fir trees frosted with a skiff of snow.
- Clean, drinkable water running out of our kitchen faucets and in our rivers and streams.
- Elastic waistbands.
- Our right, as Montanans, to a clean and healthful environment.
- **MEIC's two generous donors who are both MATCHING year-end contributions from our members!**
- YOU—MEIC's incredible supporters who are fighting for the best imaginable version of Montana.

**If you make a \$50, tax-deductible donation today, MEIC will receive an additional \$100 in matching funds. If you have room in your heart and your budget, please make a year-end gift to triple your impact.**

Regardless of your giving capacity, thank you for your support of MEIC. You are truly the heart and soul of our organization, and we simply could not do this work without you!

