

# BUMPY FINISH



Western Colorado Alliance members **Melissa McKelvey** and **Kasey Weingart** met with **State Senator Dylan Roberts** during the most recent People's Lobby Trip in March.



by **Nick Allan**  
Lead Organizer

As the dust settles on the recent legislative session, we wanted to take a moment to reflect on our efforts, celebrate our victories, and learn from our setbacks.

While there were certainly bright spots, the outcome of the session was not as glowing as we had hoped. However, through careful review and analysis of our work over the past week, we have gleaned some important takeaways. These takeaways include learning from our losses, celebrating wins, and analyzing a new regulatory landscape for climate and energy policy in Colorado.

Our priority bill, Regenerative Agriculture Tax Credit (SB24-152), which would have provided a tax incentive to

Colorado food and beverage (F&B) businesses like restaurants and breweries to purchase produce and animal products from local farms and ranches that are utilizing, or transitioning to regenerative practices, failed to pass despite strong efforts. This bipartisan bill was led by Western Slope legislators Sen. Cleave Simpson and Sen. Dylan Roberts. However, it failed to receive a final vote before the end of the session.

A similar fate befell Analysis of Universal Health Care (HB23- 1075), a bill working to analyze the possibility of a single payer universal health care system in Colorado. This was not for lack of support for these bills, but rather the political complexities of passing bills in a turbulent legislative session that was fraught with

budget battles over income taxes and TABOR surpluses.

One key lesson we learned this year is that success in one chamber does not guarantee success in the other, especially when money is involved. To overcome the challenges of Colorado's budgeting process, we must win strong support from our lawmakers well in advance of session so that our priorities are in the top tier of issues considered in the budget. We are incredibly thankful to all of the bipartisan bill sponsors who worked to advance these bills and hope to work with them again next session to make them a reality.

West Slope Youth Voice is cheering the passage of Increase Access to School-Based Health Care (SB24-34). This bill was the focus of our youth lobby trip

in January where several of our students testified in support of the bill and helped pass it out of committee. This new legislation will significantly expand opportunities for student health access and services across the state.

We are also celebrating success in an emerging priority area for our Alliance, public transit. A shared priority with Gov. Polis and many lawmakers across the state. Methods to Increase Transit (SB24-32), is the first step in building a statewide working group to guide the process of increasing public transportation statewide. We are also pleased to see progress in agriculture and land protection with the Conservation Easement Income Tax Credit (SB24-126), which will provide additional

*Continued on page 8*

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# Celebrating major milestones for our Alliance



by **Andreya Krieves**  
Alliance Chair

This is an exciting springtime at the Western Colorado Alliance! I am thrilled to share with you some of the progress and positive momentum that our organization is experiencing from major milestones and accomplishments to key initiatives and goals looking ahead.

You may recall that at last year's annual conference, we recognized the unionization efforts of our Western Colorado Alliance staff. In a landmark development, Western Colorado Alliance staff have successfully unionized, marking a significant milestone in our organization's history. This achievement reflects our commitment to principles of equity, fairness, and empowerment, not only in the broader community but also within our own ranks. By unionizing, our staff members have ensured that their voices will be heard and their rights protected, while also setting an example of solidarity and collective action.

As an organization that values the power of collective action and community organizing, our Alliance is proud to support our staff in this important

step. We recognize the hard work and dedication of our team and are committed to working collaboratively with the union to ensure a fair and inclusive workplace for all.

Another exciting development for our Alliance is the recent purchase of the building at 601 North 1st Street in Grand Junction. This purchase marks a significant step forward in our efforts to expand our reach and impact in the community and our ability to purchase a building for the first time in our Alliance's history signals the stability and financial strength of our organization.

While we celebrate these milestones, we continue to look forward. I'm pleased to report that we are making steady progress on our strategic plan, which aims to enhance our advocacy, engagement, and organizational effectiveness in the future. The strategic plan is a roadmap that guides our efforts through 2026. This plan serves as a blueprint for our organization, outlining the key goals listed below that will help us achieve our mission and vision.

**Goal 1:** Grow our local and regional power through membership/ supporter growth and engagement.

**Goal 2:** Win significant and measurable victories with diverse grassroots leaders on priority issues identified through broad and diversified organizing cycles and campaigns.

**Goal 3:** Secure organizational stability through increased and diversified fundraising that supports hiring, training, and retaining diverse, quality staff and board.

**Goal 4:** Grow our organizational profile and awareness of our work through increased communications capacity, including language justice/ access.

So much forward progress is a testament to the hard work and dedication of our members, staff, and volunteers, and I am confident that together, we will



Western Colorado Alliance  
Chair Andreya Krieves

continue to make a lasting impact in our community. I encourage you to read about some of our Alliance's other exciting activities happening across the state this spring and summer, and I hope that you will join us!

## HOW TO SATISFY YOUR COFFEE JONES... AND SUPPORT OUR ALLIANCE!



**HOURS:**  
6 AM-1:30 PM  
Wed. - Mon  
759 Horizon Dr.  
octopuscoffeegj.com.

Octopus Coffee in Grand Junction is donating 10% of all sales of their delicious Midnight Walk blend to the Just Housing committee of Western Colorado Alliance of Mesa County, helping create housing solutions in Mesa County. This deal is also valid for online purchases of Midnight Walk for those outside of Mesa County who would like to help. We thank Octopus Coffee owner and Alliance member Alexis Bauer for her energy and generosity!



Western  
**COLORADO**  
ALLIANCE  
FOR COMMUNITY ACTION  
IN MESA COUNTY



brings people together to build grassroots power through community organizing and leadership development.

Our Alliance's vision for the future is one where engaged local voices are leading communities across Western Colorado that are healthy, just and self-reliant.

### Our Alliance's Staff

**Emily Hornback**, Executive Director  
**Jeriel Clark-Dyar**, Organizing Director  
**Shanna Shepherd**, Office Administrator  
**Nick Allan**, Lead Organizer  
**Hanna Arauza**, Community Organizer  
**María Luiza Pérez Chavéz**, Community Organizer  
**Bianca Diaz**, Community Organizer  
**Tyler McDermott**, Regional Organizer  
**Brian Williams**, Membership Coordinator  
**Arn McConnell**, Communications Coordinator

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### Our Alliance's Board of Directors

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Adriane Moline, Vice Chair, Grand Junction  
Bill Wellman, Treasurer, Crawford  
Haley Van Camp, Secretary, Grand Junction

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Peggy Rawlins, Grand Junction

# A new generation of solar in Mesa County



by Tyler McDermott  
Regional Organizer

It's official! After four months of a land development code revision process, the Mesa County Solar Moratorium has ended with an optimistic view for a clean energy future and solar infrastructure.

We have seen solar moratoriums adopted by numerous counties across Western Colorado for a variety of reasons and intents, and when Mesa County announced they would be pursuing one as well, we began to fear the worst. From the minute we found out this process would be underway, we launched an all-out campaign to ensure we were at the table every step of the way. Our members showed up in force to every planning commission workshop and county commissioner public hearing throughout the four-month process which allowed them to push back against members of the community who

sought to make solar economically infeasible or impossible to implement in our county. While many of the concerns that were brought up against allowing large-scale or community solar were entirely unfounded, such as that they leach chemicals into the soil, are a massive fire risk, or are noisy, others were based in reality and we are glad to see them addressed in this new code. Concerns such as view impacts, set backs to scenic byways and occupied dwellings, and using too much good agricultural land for solar were heard loud and clear and we stand by our community who wanted to see these addressed.

Additionally, we fought back against attempts to add extraneous and costly requirements like requiring an interconnect agreement from a utility before granting code approval, code approval that is often a necessity before being granted an interconnect from a utility, speculative bonding, and fire

suppression systems and rapid-shut offs that are redundant and unnecessary due to codes solar farms are already required to adhere to at the state or international levels. We also were able to ensure that agrivoltaics, the merging of solar and agricultural production on a single parcel of land, would be not only protected but encouraged so we can highlight our agricultural heritage while generating clean, cheap energy locally that will strengthen our farmer's ability to continue to run their farms and add value to them.

When members couldn't attend in person, they submitted well-reasoned comments online for the commissioners to read, wrote letters to the editor, and emailed the planning commission. While the County Commissioners had initially expected this process to take six months, through the diligent work and dedication to the process of Planning Department Manager Sean Norris, each

member of the Board of County Commissioners, and their staff, we saw this moratorium end early while never forsaking the need for community input, respectful dialogue, and careful attention to detail. It isn't every day that we get the chance to see the government move efficiently and effectively to make a positive change in the community. In Mesa County, on the subject of new solar land use codes, we have created an example to which all counties in the region ought to aspire.

We are thrilled to see this code unanimously adopted, and look forward to seeing new solar projects come online that will generate locally produced, clean, and cheap energy that we will all benefit from for decades to come. I must extend my deepest gratitude to all of our members who participated to make this possible and the County Commissioners for listening to the community. BRAVO!

# Co-op elections could mean more clean energy



by Tyler McDermott  
Regional Organizer

Elections are upon us! While America is just beginning to consider the national, state, and municipal elections coming in November, elections have already begun for Western Colorado's rural electrical co-operatives!

You may recall electric co-ops began just under a century ago, as a means of bringing safe, affordable, and reliable electric power to rural areas. Today, more than 1.5 million Coloradans get their power from a co-op.

We are in the voting period for elections to the board of Delta-

Montrose Electric Association (DMEA), which provides power and high-speed internet to Montrose and Delta Counties. The election ends on June 6, and elections for Mesa County's Grand Valley Power (GVP) begin shortly after that and will end at the GVP annual meeting on August 8.

Our Alliance and allied organizations distributed a questionnaire to board candidates in the DMEA race and has endorsed three candidates: **Steve Metheny, Ryan Sedgeley, and Kevin Williams.** (Co-op board positions are not considered "public office," so organizations like Western Colorado Alliance can endorse candidates in these races.)

Steve Metheny's formal education was in electrical engineering and business leadership, specific to power systems. He worked in many capacities at DMEA

from 1981 until his retirement in 2018. Steve is passionate about Colorado's West Slope and has been on the DMEA Board since November 2023.



Ryan Sedgeley

Ryan Sedgeley lives in Montrose with his wife and dog. He holds a law degree from the University of Wyoming College of Law and is a Master of Arts in Environment and Natural Resources. He is currently

co-chair of the Design Committee for the Development and Revitalization Team in Montrose and has worked closely with the board of directors of the Wyoming Outdoor Council. Ryan would like to see DMEA reach 100% renewable energy as quickly as possible.

And as a resident of Montrose for 40 years, Kevin Williams has led efforts to safeguard Western Slope water, ensure development pays its own way, and improve the public education system, just to name a

few. As a DMEA board member, Kevin has supported making monthly board packets and financial reports available online for all members to see, participated in listening sessions across the DMEA service area, and backed a policy that DMEA shall be nonpartisan in all political matters.



Kevin Williams

If you are a member-owner of DMEA, we hope you will vote for one of these forward-thinking candidates!

The election ends on June 6. You can get more information on the DMEA election (including instructions for how to vote) at <https://westerncoloradoalliance.org/dmea-election-2024/>.



Steve Metheny

# Farm tour season has begun!



Farm tour season has officially kicked off! A record total of 36 attendees toured **Happy Hive Farm** in Grand Junction, and learned about their unique approach to regenerative agriculture, using chickens. Thank you to Alliance member **Tomek Barc** for welcoming us to Happy Hive. The passion Tomek and his wife, **Timmie**, put into the field and operation truly shines! And don't worry if you missed our first tour, as we have six left to go! Stay tuned for announcements and sign-ups as the season continues!

## ENJOY ANY OF THESE GREAT TOURS!

**Come to 1 – or all 6!**  
**Educational fun for the whole family!**

JUNE 17 • 9-11 am  
**Lobato Farms**  
 FRUITA

JULY 10 • 9-11 am  
**Early Morning Orchard**  
 PALISADE

JULY 22 • 1-3 pm  
**Sandy Seed Farm**  
 MONTROSE

AUGUST 13 • 10 am-noon  
**Gray Acres Farm**  
 PAONIA

OCTOBER 5 • noon-2 pm  
**Blaine's Farm Store**  
 CLIFTON/PALISADE

TBA  
**TBA**  
 GARFIELD COUNTY



For more information,  
 contact:  
**Nick Allan**  
 970-270-9991  
 nick@westerncoloradoalliance.org



# What's under your feet?



**Lily and Lovey**, the **Lobato Farm's** donkeys in Fruita, proved very popular with children in last year's farm tour. You can visit them again on **June 17!**



by **Karen Rose**  
Alliance Member

What's under your feet? If you're standing on a farm that practices regenerative agriculture, it's a living ecosystem. Come to one of our Family To Farm 2024 Farm Tours, and learn for yourself how the healthy soil of a living ecosystem grows healthier food!

Healthy soil is fundamental to regenerative agriculture which, simply defined, means an agricultural practice that renews itself year after year without the use of chemical "inputs." It does that by keeping the soil alive. And that living soil ecosystem includes not only the minerals that we think of as "dirt," but also water, decomposing organic material, and many living creatures ranging from earthworms to microscopic organisms. Working together, these soil components nourish the plants that feed us.

Natural, healthy soil is alive, and regenerative practices aim to keep it that way. You can see it in action in all our farm tours this summer.

We started with the Happy Hive Farm in northwest Grand Junction on May 18. Happy Hive raises pasture-fed chicken using regenerative farming practices. Incorporating livestock is one of the primary principles of regenerative farming. At Happy Hive, chickens do that job, contributing fertilizer and helping with insect control. The chickens rotate through the farm in movable coops so all the soil benefits from their work. Thirty-six people showed up to tour and

meet some happy chickens at Happy Hive. They also enjoyed a petting zoo with chicks and baby rabbits!

The Lobato Farm in Fruita will host us on June 17. This farm grows delicious and healthy vegetables using another regenerative practice, "no-till," which minimizes soil disturbance and allows the soil ecosystem to grow and thrive. Other important regenerative principles on display here are "roots in the ground at all times" and "keeping the soil covered," both of which help to keep the essential soil ecosystem alive and thriving. And at Lobato's, you'll enjoy the farm's two miniature donkeys, Lily and Lovey!

Join us at Early Morning Orchard (EMO) in Palisade on July 10. EMO grows a wide range of vegetables and fruits, illustrating a fifth important tenet of regenerative agriculture – diversity. Unlike in a monoculture, growing diverse plants on your farm can minimize insect damage, since a large monoculture crop of a single plant can attract a very large infestation of a single species of predatory insect. At EMO see how vegetables begin their life in a greenhouse and then graduate to a spot in the ground outside as they mature. You can purchase healthy vegetables grown by Early Morning Orchard at Skips Market in downtown Fruita.

Sandy Seed Farm in Montrose is next on our Farm Tour agenda on July 22. Sandy Seed has a unique approach to growing their organic produce. They have a small space of their own,



and also have additional farm plots on land "borrowed" from others. In that way, traditionally landscaped lawns can become producing farms – a benefit for both farmer and homeowner. With today's high cost of land, it's a good approach for young farmers as they work up to owning a farm of their own.

On August 13 this year, we'll travel to Paonia, to Gray Acres. Similar to Happy Hive, Gray Acres is a family farm that produces pasture-raised chicken. They process the meat themselves, and sell it under the "Mountain Bird" label. Gray Acres nurtures their chickens lovingly throughout their lives, making sure each one always has access to clean living conditions, good food, and fresh air. Gray Acres also raises milk goats, and sells their milk.

On October 5, as the summer growing season comes to an end, we'll visit Blaine's Farm Store in Palisade. Blaine's touts itself as "bringing the community together around locally and sustainably grown food and flowers." They grow vegetables

of their own, and are especially known for tomatoes, but also offer food, flowers, and products from other local producers in their very quaint and fun Farm Store. An attraction at Blaine's is their luffa tunnel, a tall greenhouse-like tunnel grown over with luffa plants – the same plants that produce the luffa sponges you might find in your own home. A shaded table under the tunnel is a wonderful place to enjoy a lunch from Blaine's!

And we will also be scheduling a farm tour in Garfield County in September or October. Watch your email or the Alliance Facebook page for details once they are finalized.

Here in our Alliance, we believe in healthy food, grown locally, feeding healthy families right here in our community. It benefits us, our children, and our local economy. And it helps create opportunities for young people who are excited about this new (and at the same time very ancient) method of farming — working in intimate cooperation with nature.

## Interns working to make the Grand Valley safe for students



by Arn McConnell  
Communications  
Coordinator

Western Colorado Alliance is proud to announce Mila Stephan and Charlotte Allen have been chosen as our Alliance's 2024 summer interns.

Every year, our Alliance chooses a couple of students from West Slope Youth Voice (WSYV), our Alliance's non-partisan student group. The role of the head interns is to support their fellow interns in organizing the summer program and preparing for the upcoming legislative session. This includes creating the youth issue report, setting up meetings with elected officials, and presenting student survey finds to local elected boards. This is an opportunity for a young adult to learn some of the "ins and outs" of what it takes to be an organizer.

Both Mila and Charlotte are no strangers to the summer intern positions, as this is their second year each as our Alliance's interns.

For Charlotte, who is a graduating senior at Palisade High School, the appointment marks her final months with West Slope Youth Voice. "I'm excited to finish my time with WSYV strong



**Mila Stephan**

working off of what Mila and I built last year to continue to grow the program and keep our local influence alive."

Mia, as a junior at Palisade, hopes to continue with our Alliance's non-partisan student group throughout the next year. "I hope to further this goal so that every student feels seen and heard. As a group, I am immensely proud of the work we have managed to do in my time as a head intern, from advocating for a Student Based Health Center in Grand Junction High School to testifying for bills in Committee at the State level. I believe that every action our group takes leads us closer and closer to ensuring that the Grand Valley is a safe, inclusive place for our students."

When Mila isn't in school

or working with West Slope Youth Voice, she may be found competing as part of her school's Speech and Debate team, and working as part of the National Honors Society and International Baccalaureate (IB).

Charlotte has also started testing with the IB program, and also has enjoyed working at Palisade High School's fish hatchery to raise endangered razorback suckerfish.

time. I joined this group because I felt that as a student, and more importantly, as a young person in this community, my voice was not being heard. I wanted to feel as though people cared about my thoughts and opinions, and this program has given me this and more. When I joined, I don't think I ever expected to have nearly as many opportunities as this program has given me, and I am grateful for whatever future opportunities await us as well."

Both students see their experience with West Slope Youth Voice as being very important in preparing them for future life. "This program has offered me one of the most unique experiences that I continue to be grateful for. Learning how our political system works and how to be involved from a young age has been really beneficial for me," Charlotte says. "As a senior, I only have a few months left in the program, so I plan to make the most out of it."

Mila agrees. "I have been a part of this program for a little over two years now, and I've loved to see the way both this program and I have grown in this



**Charlotte Allen**



## UPCOMING BOARD MEETINGS

<b>June 14 • 12 pm</b>	Board meeting via Zoom
<b>Aug. 24 • 9 am</b>	Annual Conference & board meeting
<b>Oct. 4 • 12 pm</b>	Board meeting via Zoom
<b>Dec. 13 • 12 pm</b>	Board budget meeting via Zoom
<b>Feb. 25 • TBA</b>	Board retreat

*Members are welcomed and encouraged to participate in Board of Directors meetings but are not able to make motions or vote. If it seems necessary by a majority of the Board of Directors, member participation and discussion will be limited to a structure of time laid out in the Board of Directors' agenda.*

# Uncompahgre Valley Alliance gets moving!



by **Bianca Diaz**  
Community Organizer

Let's be honest: Two years ago, the Uncompahgre Valley Alliance was in poor shape.

Many shifting circumstances led to our Alliance's decline. But your affiliate is no longer dwelling in the past.

Members and supporters banded together recently, motivated by the notion that they could shape our Alliance back into the organizing powerhouse it once was. Before we could bring this vision to life, we had to ask ourselves a couple big questions :

What were we even going to work on? What could we potentially win for our community while also building our collective power?

Two years of intensive listening and planning created the conditions for a choice. For those who missed it, we started in June of 2022 by knocking on doors and talking with neighbors. After five months of canvassing neighborhoods in Montrose, we transitioned to small group conversations which wrapped up in September 2023. No matter the venue, we asked folks to tell us what was troubling them and their loved ones. They shared many different sentiments with us from "I would like to take the bus to the farmers market," to "I went to seek medical care and found it to be very expensive." It was at people's doors and in dedicated conversation spaces where we first learned that people were having a hard time moving themselves around in the community.

The affiliate's initial leadership team, a committee consisting of Kendra Stucki, Lisa Thomas, Amy Dickinson, Becky Shankle, Laura Baker, and Svetlin Nachev, considered all the data, stories, and feedback from the deep listening campaign. Utilizing a consensus decision-making process, they decided that helping people move around in Montrose County (ie. public transportation) would be the best way to actively engage our members and demonstrate our Alliance's importance to the community.

Rural communities are often overlooked by statewide public transportation initiatives, but the people who call this place home still have places to be and people to see. If you do not have

a car or are unable to drive one, your mobility is severely limited in this county and region. From all the people who mentioned public transportation throughout our deep listening journey, there was a strong sense that they felt stuck. A community's health and success relies on people's ability to be active participants. So, when folks are struggling to get to work or can't fully participate in local events because they lack transportation, everyone feels the effects.

All Points Transit provides the public bus service in Montrose. And while they strive to move more people more often, context is helpful to understand their limitations.

All Points Transit was incorporated as a 501c3 in 1990. That's right – the responsibility of public transportation is shouldered by one nonprofit organization with a small paid staff. They are primarily funded by state and federal Department of Transportation grants, small local government grants (from the city of Montrose, Montrose County, Ouray County, and the town of Ridgway), and Medicaid funding which makes their popular on-demand service, "Dial-a-Ride," a reality. They also rely on the Oktoberfest fundraiser that is held in Montrose every fall to bring in funds. By no means does All Points Transit have all the resources they need

to bring all their ideas to life. That's where we come in.

Members and supporters of the Uncompahgre Valley Alliance are already finding ways to flip the



script and ensure that Montrose County residents can go where they need to go.

Our campaign team's first focus will be to interview public bus users. In partnership with All Points Transit, we will gather data that will help us identify a specific issue that we can attack first. From there, we will be identifying a target (also called a "decision maker") that can get us the result we want.

No matter what issue our Alliance works on, we follow the same formula: Listen.

Identify the issue. Research. Write the campaign plan. Bring people into the work. Take action. Evaluate. Then do it all over again!

Our core group has done all the preliminary work to put our Alliance back in the saddle. We will show that grassroots people power can have an impact on how people move around Montrose County.

And, at the same time, we are rebuilding and strengthening

Uncompahgre Valley Alliance.

Whether it's more buses, new routes, or any other realistic solution, our relational organizing will be the reason it happens. If you live in Montrose County, are passionate about public transportation and rural connectivity, and want to step into your community, please get in touch with us. If you know someone who relies on public transportation we also would like to be in touch.

It's all hands on deck now!



# Westerners applaud new oil & gas leasing rule



by **Emily Hornback**  
Executive Director

After decades of grassroots organizing, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)'s new oil and gas bonding standards will help ensure taxpayers and frontline communities no longer have to suffer from the environmental impacts of abandoned wells or pay for well cleanup. In the first significant update to the federal oil and gas bonding program in over 60 years, the BLM finalized their Onshore Leasing Rule on April 12, 2024.

“At last with the release of the finalized rule, BLM has taken the common-sense step to ensure that oil and gas operators shoulder the fiscal responsibility that was theirs in the first place,” said Dr. Barbara Vasquez, WORC Vice Chair and Western Colorado Alliance member from Cowdrey, Colorado. “These rules will help solve the orphaned well crisis that has been spiraling out of control for decades.”

For more than a half-century, insufficient bond requirements incentivized oil and gas companies to walk away from their cleanup obligations on our public and Tribal lands and minerals, leaving behind a toxic legacy of orphaned wells. Consequently, the burden of cleanup has largely fallen on taxpayers and frontline communities. “I’ve lived here through several boom-and-bust cycles and seen formerly open country transformed into industrial

wasteland with unplugged wells, abandoned waste ponds, and no reclamation of roads or drilling sites,” said Maria Katherman, Powder River Basin Resource Council Board Member from Converse County, Wyoming.

Orphaned wells are a significant source of leaking methane, a greenhouse gas 87x more potent than CO<sub>2</sub> over a 20-year period as well as volatile organic compounds known to cause cancer and respiratory illnesses. Leaking wells can also contaminate groundwater used for drinking and watering livestock.

“I’ve seen firsthand what happens when developers skip town without cleaning up their mess once drilling is complete, including hospital visits from ingesting leaking methane and concerns about benzene and arsenic in our soil and groundwater,” said Kirk Panasuk, Bainville, Montana, rancher and member of Northern Plains Resource Council.

“The recently finalized oil and gas bonding and reclamation reforms are a big deal for tribal communities like mine (Fort Berthold Reservation),” said Representative Lisa Finley-DeVile (ND4a), co-founder and VP of Fort Berthold POWER and Dakota Resource Council board member from Mandaree, North Dakota. “These rules will help protect tribal communities like Fort Berthold Reservation from having to pay to clean up big oil’s mess.”



Leaders from our Alliance and allied organizations (including **Dr. Barbara Vasquez**) met near the BLM during the rulemaking stage last August.

The new rule requires operators to post bonds that adequately cover the costs of plugging federal wells and reclaiming the impacted landscapes, as required by the Mineral Leasing Act. Adequate bonding amounts incentivize companies to honor their cleanup obligations or, if they fail to do so, cover the costs ensuring taxpayers or frontline communities aren’t stuck with the bill.

Under the new standards, operators will be required to post bonds that cover the costs of plugging federal wells and restoring the affected areas. Operators will now be required to post a minimum bond amount of \$500,000 for all their wells in a state, a significant increase from the current \$25,000. Additionally, the minimum bond amount for all wells on a single lease will be raised to \$150,000, up from \$10,000. The updated bonding program will ensure that operators are incentivized to plug and reclaim the wells and the land disturbed during

operation. This puts the financial burden where it belongs, on the oil and gas companies and not on the communities and taxpayers.

The new rules will also implement provisions in the Inflation Reduction Act that expedite the plugging and reclamation of inactive wells, put an end to non-competitive leasing practices, and increase royalties paid to the federal government and shared with states. The final rule also makes it more difficult for non-compliant companies or “bad actors” to receive new leases by defining a “qualified bidder” and “qualified lessee”.

While the final rule is a ray of hope for residents of western oilfield communities, it may not be the end of the story. Western Colorado Alliance and WORC members now call on the BLM for quick implementation and enforcement of the new standards and for Congress to protect these rules from attempts of repeal.

## Bumpy finish at the Colorado Capitol

*Continued from page 1*

funding to preserve properties in perpetuity, safeguarding them from development.

This session was a mixed bag for climate and energy legislation. We were working hard to pass new safety measures for oil and gas pipelines and to end tax exemptions on low producing wells, but all oil and gas legislation this session ended when Gov. Polis struck a deal with conservation organizations and the oil and gas industry to avoid a costly ballot initiative fight this coming November. The compromise put two new air quality bills forward, Oil & Gas Production Fees (SB24-230) and Ozone Mitigation Measures (SB24-229), which add some new reductions on emissions

from oil and gas operations, and impose new fees on upstream operations which will contribute substantial new funding for public transit and public lands.

This is a complex deal that certainly has good components within it, but it is also a hard pill to swallow as it comes with the price of not running any additional oil and gas related legislation for the next three years. Alliance leaders are still digesting the many facets of this compromise and assessing what it means for our work moving forward.

This session also saw the passage of HB24-1346 Energy & Carbon Management Regulation, a bill that updates the mission of the Energy and Carbon Management Commission to

allow for the regulation and permitting of carbon sequestration projects. This is a whole new world of carbon-related issues that has big implications for Western Colorado and we are paying close attention to how this new law goes into effect.

Thankfully, we did make progress on the clean energy front, with the passage of Access to Distributed Generation (SB24-207) and Local Govs Renewable Energy Projects SB24-212, which together will support more solar development across Western Colorado. SB24-207 will specifically give lower-income households access to clean energy at a lower cost. We hope this bill will help give an opportunity to spread the benefit of solar projects to all members of our communities. SB24-212

will provide a good roadmap and resources for local governments looking to develop responsible land use codes that balance conserving critical habitat, landowner rights, and clean energy projects.

While there were certainly challenges this legislative session, it’s important to acknowledge and celebrate the victories achieved. The Alliance Legislative Committee will be working on a more formal assessment of the session in the coming months and will share our 2024 legislative Scorecard soon. In the meantime, if you have any questions or want more information about any of these bills, please reach out to me at [nick@westerncoloradoalliance.org](mailto:nick@westerncoloradoalliance.org). We look forward to re-gathering our efforts for the 2025 session!