

connections



Opportunity Link's
Quarterly
Newsletter

BNSF Railway in Havre now Runnin' on Montana Biodiesel



U.S. Senator Jon Tester, Opportunity Link executive director Barb Stiffarm and project partners BNSF, MSU Northern Bio-Energy Center, Bear Paw Development and Earl-Fisher BioFuels, celebrate BNSF's initial use of Montana biodiesel July 17th in Havre

U.S. Senator Jon Tester joined the celebratory kick-off ceremony by BNSF Railways and partners July 17th in Havre. The event marked BNSF's use of a 20% biodiesel blend in its switch engine for one year to pilot the use of locally produced biodiesel and demonstrating improved fuel performance, consumption, emissions, and conformity to standards. Biodiesel performance will be compared with that of another designated switch engine using regular diesel fuel. Both switch engines will be based in BNSF's Havre Diesel Shop but will be used in regular runs throughout the year including during

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Established in 2004, Opportunity Link is a non-profit organization that creates and implements long-term solutions and encourages partnerships that will build prosperity in the Northcentral region of Montana. Opportunity Link devotes its resources to promoting public-private sector collaborations to develop systemic solutions. Opportunity Link, Inc. was established in partnership with the Northwest Area Foundation (www.nwaf.org) which is dedicated to helping communities reduce poverty for the long-term. For more information, visit

www.opportunitylinkmt.org.

US Department of Transportation recognize OppLink for Transit Planning

This year's Transportation Excellence Planning Awards recognized Opportunity Link for its work in successfully establishing and coordinating public transit services in Northcentral Montana. Opportunity Link was nominated for and was awarded the Planning & Leadership category and was also awarded the Tribal Transportation Planning category.

Opportunity Link's North Central Montana Transit director Jim Lyons accepted the award on behalf of Opportunity Link during the awards ceremony in Minneapolis last July 13th.

The Transportation Planning Excellence Awards (TPEA) is a biennial

awards program developed by the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) and



NCMT director Jim Lyons with office of planning directors from FTA and FHWA Charles Goodman and James Cheatham respectively in an awards ceremony in Minneapolis June 11th

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2010 Transportation Planning Excellence Award Winners

Transportation and Land Use Integration

Capital District Transportation Committee, Albany, New York

Safety Planning

Cheyenne Metropolitan Planning Organization, Wyoming

Modeling and Technology Applications

Georgia Department of Transportation

Transportation Planning and Environment

Florida Department of Transportation

Modeling and Technology Applications

Florida Department of Transportation

Freight Planning, Planning Leadership, and Public Involvement and Outreach

Minnesota Department of Transportation

Livability/Sustainability

New York City Department of Transportation, New York

Freight Planning and Safety Planning

North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, New Jersey

Planning Leadership and Tribal Transportation Planning

Opportunity Link, Inc., Montana

Livability/Sustainability and Public Involvement and Outreach

City of Salem, Oregon

Livability/Sustainability

City of San Jose, California

<http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/tpea/index.htm>

BNSF runnin' on biodiesel (continued from page 1)



severe winter weather conditions.

The biodiesel used is produced locally by Earl-Fisher BioFuels in Chester (refer to page 9) and tested by Montana State University Northern's Bio-Energy Center.

BNSF Railways' Havre Diesel Shop alone consumes approximately 30 million gallons of diesel every year. Should the technical and economic aspects of biodiesel use meet the railway industry's technical and business needs, an increased demand for local production of biodiesel fuel is possible and could boost economic development not only in Montana but throughout the United States.

Opportunity Link will be working to increase awareness of producers and growers in Northcentral Montana on the

potential for development of a sustainable local biodiesel industry in Montana.

The project is a result of an ongoing partnership between BNSF, MSU Northern's Bio-Energy Center, Opportunity Link, Bear Paw Development Corporation, and Earl Fisher Biofuels with support from Montana Department of Agriculture's Growth Through Agriculture Program and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality Alternative Energy Development Program through a recent grant awarded to Opportunity Link, Inc.

For more information, please contact project partners Beau Price at beau.price@bnsf.com, Greg Kegel at kegel@msun.edu, or Barbara Stiffarm at bstiffarm@opportunitylinkmt.org.

Transportation Planning Excellence Awards (continued from page 1)

The Transportation Planning Excellence Awards (TPEA) is a biennial awards program developed by the Federal Highways Administration (FHWA) and Federal Transit Administration (FTA) of the U.S. Department of Transportation and co-sponsored by the American Planning Association. They recognize outstanding initiatives across the country to develop, plan, and implement innovative transportation planning practices.

Among 80 projects that were nominated, they identified 11 Award Winning projects and 11 were recognized with Honorable Mentions (refer to side panel for a complete list of winners). Nominations were evaluated following the criteria: community and public involvement; equity; implementation; innovation; intermodalism; livability/sustainability; and partnerships and collaboration.

For more information, visit the website at www.fhwa.dot.gov/planning/tpea/.

The board and staff of Opportunity Link, Inc. and the North Central Montana Transit recognize our planning partner



our planning sponsor



and all of our community partners in the planning process for their assistance and generous support.

Thank you very much!

Opportunity Link is moving ahead

Karen Thomas, Board Member, Opportunity Link

We are proud of what Opportunity Link has achieved over the last three years. As a board member, I can say that Opportunity Link fulfilled what they set out to achieve while keeping true to its principles and strategic directions set by the communities of Northcentral Montana almost eight years ago. For its work on transportation, Opportunity Link not only established four new transit systems but continues to receive recognition – two national awards and an international commendation – for its accomplishments.

I believe this can be attributed to Opportunity Link's dedicated staff, supportive board, network of partners and resources, and by having a three-year workplan that helped guide, direct and assess all of their efforts. This quarter, the board of directors and staff worked to identify action strategies and priorities for guiding our work in the next five years. Opportunity Link's 2011-2015 workplan will be focused on economic development, asset and wealth creation, transportation and health.

The board of directors and staff continue to take advantage of

opportunities to learn from existing best practices and innovative projects in developing the organizational work plan while remaining connected to our original plan. This includes research, networking and information-sharing events focused on rural communities such as Northwest Area Foundation's Grassroots and Groundworks and this year's Rural Community Conference.

We are confident that Opportunity Link will continue its good work in the region. They can be assured of my support and hopefully of your support as well.



R-L: Karen Thomas with OppLink board member Randy Barrett, Northwest Area Foundation president Kevin Walker and OppLink executive director Barb Stiffarm

Opportunity Link in National Roundtable

Opportunity Link executive director Barbara Stiffarm was invited to join a national roundtable discussion on "Keeping Kids Moving: How Equitable Transportation Policy Can Prevent Childhood Obesity." The roundtable was held July 15th at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Over 300 individuals attended the meeting with over 500 more viewers on its live webcast.

Other featured speakers include Martha Coven, Special Assistant to the President, Domestic Security Council,

Roy Kienitz, Undersecretary for Policy, US Department of Transportation, Dr. Howard Koh, Assistant Secretary for Health, US Department of Health and Human Services, among others.

The national roundtable was organized by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Center to Prevent Childhood Obesity, Convergence Partnership, Transportation for America and Policy Link.

To view the webinar recording, visit <http://www.reversechildhoodobesity.org/keepingkidsmoving>



Keeping Kids Moving

How Equitable Transportation Policy Can Prevent Childhood Obesity

OPPORTUNITY LINK

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NORTH CENTRAL MONTANA TRANSIT

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Providing sustainable public transportation throughout the region with services that are safe, accessible, affordable, reliable, efficient, and clean for all



Phillips County Transit Authority coordinator Betty Hasler signs her support during the proclamation ceremony



First Year Highlights

Ridership up to 1,600 monthly

Use of 5 to 20% biodiesel blend in buses

Through Opportunity Link,

- *recognized by FTA & FHWA 2010 Transportation Planning Excellence Awards*
- *received a commendation from the International Association of Public Transportation (UITP)*
- *selected for the 2010 Accessible Transportation Coalitions Initiative by Easter Seals Project ACTION*

www.ncmtransit.org

Accessible Transportation Initiative develops shared vision, action plans for Northcentral Montana

Representatives from all ten public transportation systems in Northcentral Montana joined State agency representatives and other transportation stakeholders in a 2-day networking and plan development session facilitated by Easter Seals Project ACTION June 9 & 10.

The group formulated a vision for the region and prioritized sustainability of existing services, partnerships and safety as its primary focus for action. Montana Department of Transportation Director Jim Lynch and Department of Public Health and Human Services Anna Whiting Sorrell opened the meeting. Both voiced their overwhelming support to transportation systems that link people through the sparsely populated region to services and each other. Director Lynch stressed the importance of working together and said that a goal of a coalition of transit systems should be to provide linked lines that would enable people to travel from community to community. He added, "Having both directors of two agencies working together



Directors Jim Lynch and Anna Whiting Sorrell with agency representatives Tom Stuber and Patrick Sanders (above); Fort Belknap Transit director John Healy explains importance of safety to other transit managers (below) during the meeting.



is first in the country and is historic at best."

North Central Montana Transit celebrates first year of service

Contributed by Jim Lyons, Director, North Central Montana Transit

North Central Montana Transit celebrated its first year of operations last August 24th. This first year we have provided 18,136 rides – equivalent almost to the entire population of Hill and Blaine Counties. Initially projected at 250 to 300 monthly, our current ridership averages 1,600 since the start of 2010.

What we are most proud of is our safe and reliable service where we were able to transport all riders to their destinations with no accidents while operating all of the service days. It is this trusting relationship and mutual respect between our passengers and drivers that pushes us to serve them better.

For more information or to keep updated, join our [Facebook page](#), visit our website at

www.ncmtransit.org or call (406) 265-3699.



U.S. Senator Jon Tester proudly supports NCMT's use of Montana biodiesel in its buses. L-R: Hill County commissioner Mike Anderson, Opportunity Link executive director Barbara Stiffarm, NCMT director Jim Lyons, Senator Jon Tester, NCMT operator Rana Weber

Opportunity Link expands regional employment training

New curriculum addresses young Native American job seekers

Opportunity Link is expanding regional *Workin' It Out* soft skills employment training this year by offering a curriculum written specifically for Native American entry-level job seekers. "Soft skills" refer to unspoken rules of the workplace such as employment etiquette, effective communication, and problem solving.

Opportunity Link currently offers the 12-hour *Workin' It Out* program in more than twenty North Central Montana high schools, youth facilities, tribal colleges, TANF programs, Job Service offices, youth detention programs, and a regional prison. Since 2006, more than 1,000 students, entry-level workers, at-risk youth and ex-offenders have completed the training.

Opportunity Link recruited Dr. Steve Parese, Ph.D. Ed., nationally recognized author of the *Workin' It Out* series, to develop an additional curriculum for use in North Central Montana. In April 2010, Dr. Parese met in Havre with a team of employment specialists from Blackfeet Manpower, Fort Belknap Employment Services, and Chippewa Cree Tribal TANF. The group suggested adaptations, and Dr. Parese rewrote the course's scenarios and exercises to reflect people, places and situations often encountered by job applicants on rural reservations.

In June additional *Workin' It Out* facilitators and graduates joined the editing group to test the new curriculum's first draft. Some sections were rewritten to better represent community and family beliefs and relationships. Each chapter was introduced with a quote from a Native American leader.

The course is tentatively titled *Workin' With Tradition*, and will be piloted in four training sites this fall. Feedback from instructors and students will be



Ariane, workshop participant, shares reasons why people seek work as part of a group activity during the first Workin' with Tradition workshop in Havre July 14-16

incorporated into Parese's final version, to be released in Spring 2011.

"*Workin' It Out* introduces young people to employers' expectations of professionalism, dependability, and courtesy," says Elaine Top Sky, director of Chippewa-Cree Tribal TANF. "Young Native American workers may encounter racism, and they may be intimidated entering unfamiliar communities and worksites. We are trying to help them deal with new situations, which might be very different from their previous experiences."

Opportunity Link will offer the curriculum throughout the region within a year. It may also be used by other job training programs in the state this year. "Local employers encouraged us on this project," says Barb Stiffarm, Opportunity Link executive director, "They saw a need for training to help our Native American youth be more successful in finding and retaining jobs."

For more information on *Workin' With Tradition*, please e-mail Day Soriano, Opportunity Link development director at dsoriano@opportunitylinkmt.org or call (406) 265-3699.

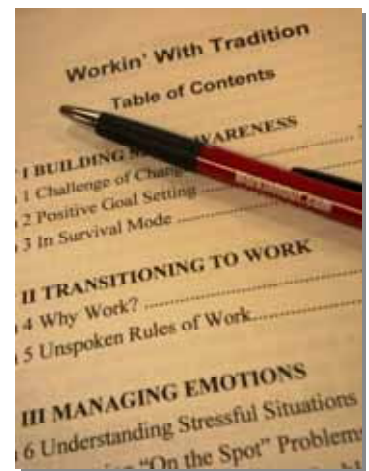
Workin' It Out

WHO?
New or dislocated workers unfamiliar with the unspoken rules of the workplace.

WHY?
Many of today's entry-level workers, especially those raised in disadvantaged areas, seem to lack basic interpersonal skills. The common-sense expectations of many employers may be foreign to those with little experience in the workforce.

WHAT?
WIO has ten interactive 90-minute lessons. Participants come to better understand employers' expectations, and learn simple but practical skills for communicating and resolving workplace problems.

www.workinitout.com



Workin' With Tradition is designed to help Native American job-seekers of Northcentral Montana improve self-esteem while developing self-awareness and interpersonal "soft-skills" needed to successfully enter into and advance in the world of work



Workin' It Out facilitators and members of the curriculum development team co-teaching Workin' with Tradition with series author Steve Parese in Havre

To schedule or participate in *Workin' With Tradition* or in other *Workin' It Out* program series, please contact Star Perkins, community development officer, at (406) 265-3699 or e-mail sperkins@opportunitylinkmt.org



www.harvestcleanenergy.org



Committed to the future of rural communities.

www.rurdev.usda.gov/mt/

Workshops for clean energy funding set in Havre

Contributed by Al Kurki, Program Specialist, National Center for Appropriate Technology

This fall and winter Montana farmers, ranchers, and small businesses – along with agency and non-profit staff and private grant writers – will be able to learn more about how to tap renewable energy and energy efficiency opportunities for rural Montana. Starting November 16 and 17, MSU-Northern in Havre will host the first two “Tapping Clean Energy Funding for Rural Montana” workshops.

The workshops will outline what loans, rebates, and grants are available in energy efficiency and renewable energy for farmers, ranchers and small town businesses. The workshops will include a specific focus on the USDA-RD’s Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) grant and loan program.

People who attend these workshops will gain a better understanding of utility, state and federal rebate, loan and grant programs for energy efficiency and

renewable energy development.

Clean Energy Funding workshop participants will receive educational materials and sample applications that can be used with REAP and other loan/grant applications. The Havre sessions are the first in a series of Clean Energy Funding workshops and webinars that will be offered around the state over the winter months.

These November workshops are sponsored by the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) along with Harvesting Clean Energy, Opportunity Link, Montana Food and Ag Development Centers, MSU-Northern, Montana Economic Developers Association and the Montana Department of Agriculture, in partnership with USDA Rural Development in Montana.

For more details on registering for either of these workshops, contact Al Kurki at (406) 449-0104 or e-mail akurki@ncat.org.

Energy conservation on the ground

Contributed by Holly Hill, Energy Corps AmeriCorps Program Director, NCAT

Over the last 10 months, Montana Energy Corps AmeriCorps members have provided valuable energy services to individuals and communities throughout North Central Montana. Energy Corps members in Havre, Rocky Boy, Fort Belknap and Browning have installed weatherization materials in homes, organized community energy workshops, performed tribal building energy assessments, produced biodiesel to be used in the North Central Montana Transit buses, and educated countless numbers of community members on using energy more efficiently. The first round of Energy Corps members completed their AmeriCorps terms at the end of August. We’d like to extend our thanks for the extraordinary service and accomplishments of our dedicated team!

Due to the continued need for community energy services and the success demonstrated in the first year, the Montana Energy Corps program has been

awarded funding to increase the number of Energy Corps members from 10 to 15 across the state during the second year of operation. Additionally, the Energy Corps program has received a national grant to expand services to Arkansas, Iowa and Pennsylvania. The program is currently accepting applications for the next round of Energy Corps members beginning this fall. Please contact Holly Hill at (406) 494-4572 or hollyh@ncat.org for further information.

The Energy Corps is an initiative of the National Center for Appropriate Technology (NCAT) in partnership with Opportunity Link and the Corporation for National and Community Service that was created to address unmet community energy needs by promoting sustainable energy consumption and education, fostering community sustainability and helping to mitigate the effects of global climate change.

Opportunity Link is proud to be an integral part of a project that was able to demonstrate such a high level of success for replication!



Governor Brian Schweitzer with NCAT staff and 2009-2010 Energy Corps members during an energy training in Helena



Curtis Windy Boy, 2009-2010 Energy Corps member with Fort Belknap Indian Community learn of biodiesel at the Harvesting Clean Energy Conference in Seattle

YouthBuild of North Central Montana

Contributed by Robert Anderson, Director, YouthBuild North Central Montana

On June 25th YouthBuild of North Central Montana held its first graduation ceremony. 17 trainees participated in the cap and gown ceremony. The 2009/2010 trainees framed, sided and roofed two homes for the Chippewa Cree Housing Authority. One was built at the Montana State University Northern campus and transported to the reservation and the other was built on site. During the construction process, the trainees learned skills in carpentry, plumbing, and residential wiring while they worked on attaining GED's and lifelong living skills.

YouthBuild started this year's first session August 9th with another session scheduled to begin January 10, 2011. Each session is planned for 20 students and will last for 20 weeks. The trainees will spend part of each day working on attaining academic goals and a portion working in the construction lab or job-site. This year the program has partnered with District IV HRDC's Mutual Self Help Housing program

to frame homes for the participating families. Building on the successes of last year, trainees will again focus on goal setting, improving employability skills, interpersonal skills, job safety, and the importance of being involved in the community.

Youth Build is designed to help young people between the ages of 16 and 24 to build their lives while they learn to build a home. Traditional schooling has failed for most of the students who enter the program. The focus of the program is on the YOU in Youth Build and helping the students make the most of the opportunity that is presented. Their days are structured and filled with learning and hands-on construction activities. At the end of each day they get to stand back and see what progress they have made and actually see how their work have helped to build someone's dream.

For more information or to apply, contact Bob Anderson at (406) 265-3747, via e-mail to robert.anderson21@msun.edu or visit the website at www.msun.edu/youthbuild.



YouthBuild participants built and completed two homes as part of the 2009-2010 program



If from the demonstration project (refer to page 1) BNSF chooses to use a 5% biodiesel blend in their Havre Diesel Shop



An estimated 1.75 million gallons per year of biodiesel will need to be produced



That consumes 875,000 to 1,000,000 bushels of oilseed (oil yield of 2 gallons/bushel) grown on 43,750 to 50,000 acres (yield of 1,000 lbs/acre)



A source of income and alternative market for 50 to 150 farmers in the region!

PARTNER IN FOCUS: Earl Fisher Biofuels

Developing sustainable energy solutions in the region

Contributed by Logan Fisher, Partner, Earl Fisher Biofuels

If you can grow your own diesel fuel, you don't need to buy it from someone else.

Earl Fisher Biofuels, a partnership between two fourth generation Montana farmers Brett Earl and Logan Fisher, was started to create economic growth and employment opportunities by building a biodiesel production facility in Chester. The vision is that this will, in turn, create a self-sustaining industry by creating a market for oilseed crops that can be grown locally, converted to fuel locally, and consumed locally.

Earl Fisher Biofuels produces ASTM 6571 Certified B100 biodiesel made from a variety of Montana grown oilseeds such as safflower, canola and camelina.

Last July 1st, Earl Fisher delivered its first shipment of biodiesel to BNSF's Havre Diesel Shop. Earl Fisher Biofuels will be supplying BNSF with 20,000 gallons of

biodiesel – equivalent to 1,600 gallons a month – for the duration of the project.

For more information, please visit our website at www.earlfisherbiofuels.com, call (406) 759-5018 or send an e-mail to logan@earlfisherbiofuels.com.



Partners Brett Earl and Logan Fisher pressing oilseeds to produce biodiesel in its Chester facility to show visiting Stone Child College students and faculty



Warren Bell Trucking, owned by Warren Bell of Fort Belknap, was the recipient of a \$7,000 Indian Equity Fund grant in 2009

2011 Indian Equity Fund applications open

The Montana Department of Commerce's 2011 Indian Equity Fund is now accepting applications from small business owners and entrepreneurs around the state. The Indian Equity Fund is a grant open to enrolled members of Montana Tribes. Two recipients from each of the tribes may receive up to \$7,000 each to fund either a business start-up or to expand their existing business. Applications for the grant are due on

December 6. Opportunity Link will be offering workshops in Rocky Boy and Fort Belknap on October 13 & 14 to assist interested business owners in completing business plans as part of their applications.

For more information or to apply, contact Philip Belangie, entrepreneur development program manager, Montana Department of Commerce at (406) 721-3663, e-mail pbelangie@mt.gov or visit www.entrepreneur.mt.gov.

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Upcoming Events in and around the Region

- *2010 Fall Transit Management Workshops*, Montana Department of Transportation, October 13 & 14, Gateway Center, Helena and October 19 to 21, Hilton Garden Inn, Billings
- *Tax Telecourses*, Montana Credit Unions for Community Development, beginning October 19, www.MontanaFreeFile.org or call 1-800-755-5446 extension 142
- *Agricultural Biofuel Summit*, Ethanol Producers and Consumers (EPAC), October 19 & 20, Hensler Auditorium, MSU Northern, Havre
- *Forum on Expanding the U.S. Biofuels Market*, USDA, Hensler Auditorium, MSU Northern, Havre
- *Perennial Roots: Reimagining our Energy and Agriculture Future*, Alternative Energy Resources Organization 36th Annual Meeting, October 22 to 24, Lewis & Clark County Fairgrounds, Helena
- *Tapping Clean Energy Funding for Rural Montana*, November 16 (Agency, Non-profit & Grantwriters' workshop) & November 17 (Small Town Businesses, Farmers & Ranchers' workshop), Hensler Auditorium, MSU Northern, Havre
- *Paying for the Recession*, 2011 Economic Outlook Seminar, January 26, 2011, Hilton Garden Inn, Great Falls

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RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Special Section on Green Building for Rural Communities inside!!!