

STEVE CHARTER: My name is Steve Charter. I'm a member and the immediate past chair of the North Plains Resource Council. Northern Plains is part of the western organization of Resource Councils. I ranch over a longwall mine north of Billings, Montana. First I would like to thank the Department of Interior for taking on the big task of modernizing the federal program, and I would especially like to thank Secretary Jewell for protecting the rights of surface owners consent over strip mining of our federal coal. For the past 40 years I've had a ringside seat to personally witness the broken federal program that has allowed coal companies to take advantage of loopholes and giveaways and avoid accountability at the expense of taxpayers, our land, air, water, and wildlife. During this time, U.S. taxpayers have been shortchanged over \$30 billion. The high quality coal that is now being mined in my area was once all owned by the people of the United States. Half of this great coal reserve was given to a railroad company in the 1880s. Then in the 1990s, millions more tons of coal was traded to the successor of the railroad company for a fishing access site amounting to less than one cent per ton. Finally in 2013 the rest of the coal was leased for a mere 30 cents per ton in an auction with only one bidder. Half of all this lost revenue of the coal being mined now would be going to the state of Montana which is badly needed. Further, this deeply flawed system has not ensured that the mine land is reclaimed or the water aquifers restored. Out of a total of 562 square miles of mine land across Wyoming, Montana, Utah, New Mexico, Colorado, and North Dakota only 77 square miles, 14 percent, has been fully reclaimed. Now we face the prospect of the land not being reclaimed or the taxpayer will be forced to pick up the tab thanks to the now bankrupt coal companies that were allowed to self-bond. The coal companies have gotten huge profits while the public has gotten the shaft. I think the reason this was able to happen was that the BLM believed that by preferentially serving the coal industry they were serving the 69 country by providing cheap power and boosting local economies. What they did not consider and what they must now take into account are the huge externalized costs of coal. Land, water, and air degradation and now the tremendous cost of global climate change, these costs may be external to the coal companies, but they are not external to the people like me all over the world who bear these costs. The transition away from coal is inevitable and necessary, and I think part of that inevitability is that coal is becoming less cost competitive with other energy resources, but in making this

transition we need to put generous resources into making this transition as best as possible for the people who have made their living in the coal industry and the communities of coal country. Thank you.