



**For Immediate Release**

**Contact:** Brian Moody, AERO Outreach Coordinator  
406-443-7272

AERO to Collect Oral Histories from the Early Days of Montana's Sustainable Energy  
and Agriculture Movement

*Organization Receives Grant Funding to Interview Pioneering Members*

[Montana, May 2019] AERO, a Montana non-profit organization, recently received grant funding from the Montana History Foundation to collect oral histories from a select group of people active during the early years of the sustainability movement in the state. These stories are integral to the history of agriculture and renewable energy in Montana, and are at risk of disappearing without proper preservation and dissemination.

In 1974, few local resources existed for farmers, ranchers, and other Montanans interested in sustainable food production and renewable energy options. In response to this need, a group of motivated people established a nonprofit they called the Alternative Energy Resources Organization, or AERO. The early members of AERO came from across the state and from diverse backgrounds, and generated an enormous body of work for a new organization with a small budget and few means. AERO members and staff were the impetus behind innovations like the Montana Organic standard, educating the public through traveling demonstrations like the New Western Energy Show and contributing to research through Farm Improvement Clubs. AERO also spurred the founding of complimentary nonprofits like the Montana Organic Association. At the heart of these accomplishments lies a methodology for civic engagement and social change that proved effective in Montana across geographic, political, and social divides.

Unfortunately, the story of the early years of AERO only exists in scattered secondary source materials, many of which are inaccessible to the public. Jenn Battles, AERO's Executive Director says, "We are so grateful for the support of the Montana History Foundation in recording and sharing the pivotal and compelling stories of our elder members, especially now - as the need for climate change solutions, soil and food systems protections, cleaner and more efficient energy use - have only intensified in the past four decades. We are at a critical moment for making small and large scale change, and these stories highlight the path to a

sustainable future for all of us." According Corrie Williamson, AERO member and prior staff member who championed the efforts to collect these oral histories, "These are valuable stories, as well as valuable models, that reveal possibility and surprising power in addition to history."

Thanks to nearly \$5000 in grant support from the Montana History Foundation, AERO Outreach Coordinator Brian Moody will be interviewing five of AERO's pioneering members during the summer of 2019. The interviews will be video recorded and transcribed, and then preserved in collaboration with the Montana Historical Society. These publically accessible oral histories will serve as a document of an important era in our history, and help serve as a guide to all Montanans interested in the work of sustainable energy and agricultural production and community-building. The project will be complete and made available to the public by May of 2020 on our website [www.aeromt.org](http://www.aeromt.org) and with the Montana Historical Society.

If you are interested in learning more, or being involved in the project, please contact Brian Moody via email: [bmoody@eromt.org](mailto:bmoody@eromt.org). Additionally, we'll regularly provide updates our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/aeromt](http://www.facebook.com/aeromt) as we make progress.