

Montana House Conservation Hotlist Week 15: April 12, 2021

Please Support:

SB 249 - Revise funding for the Montana greater sage-grouse stewardship act, Sen. Mike Lang (R-Malta), House Appropriations, Hearing 4/12, Support. SB 249 proposes a new funding structure for the Sage Grouse Stewardship Act that includes sharing administrative expenses between Fish, Wildlife & Parks and the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation and putting a \$25,000 cap on MSGOT meeting costs while keeping the makeup of MSGOT the same. *Contact Amy Seaman, Montana Audubon, at 406-210-9449 or aseaman@mtaudubon.org*

SB 147 - Establish commercial property assessed capital enhancements program, Senator McNally (D-Billings), House Energy, Support. Montana businesses often face high utility bills due to old or inefficient buildings. The upfront cost of upgrades poses a major financial challenge, especially when small businesses' pocketbooks are stretched thin. SB 147 establishes a program to overcome this financing gap by leveraging private dollars for energy efficiency upgrades. The financing is paid back through a line item assessment on the property's annual or biannual property tax. This program is voluntary once enabled and counties opt-in to participate. This bill would boost economic development for main street Montana, and help create an environment where businesses are able to thrive, create good-paying jobs, and increase opportunities for all Montanans. *Contact Makenna Sellers, NPRC, at 406-850-4491 or makenna@northernplains.org*

Please Oppose:

SB 84 - Generally revise consumer committee laws, Sen. Duane Ankney (R-Colstrip), Senate Energy, House Energy, Oppose. This bill would make it much more difficult for the Montana Consumer Counsel to protect Montanans from utilities who want to overcharge customers. The Montana Consumer Counsel is the only entity constitutionally charged with protecting consumers from monopoly utilities in proceedings before the PSC. The Consumer Counsel is a very small office that hires experts and consultants to help review utility filings and argue for consumer protections before the PSC. This bill makes it harder for the Consumer Counsel to do so. *Contact Makenna Sellers, NPRC, at 406-850-4491 or makenna@northernplains.org or Anne Hedges, MEIC, at 461-9546 or ahedges@meic.org*

SB 201 - Revise avoided cost rate-making, Sen. Steve Fitzpatrick (R-Great Falls), House Energy, Second Reading 4/12, Oppose. SB 201 would make it easier for NorthWestern Energy to avoid having to purchase renewable electricity from solar, storage, and wind energy developers. Under current law, when considering most renewable energy projects, the MT Public Service Commission must consider costs that would be avoided by relying on renewable energy. This bill tries to prohibit considerations of these costs; thus, ignoring important benefits of clean energy. *Contact Conor Ploeger, MEIC, at 443-2520 or cploeger@meic.org*

SB 237 - Revise community renewable energy project requirements, Senator Doug Kary (R-Billings), House Energy, Oppose. SB 237 would eliminate the penalty imposed on NorthWestern Energy's shareholders to pay a \$2.5 million penalty to state and tribal low-income energy assistance programs. Montana Dakota Utility has complied with the CREPS requirement in the renewable energy standard law but NWE has not. *Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, at 461-9546 or ahedges@meic.org*

SB 260 - Generally revise laws related to property interests and transfer of businesses, Sen. Steve Fitzpatrick (R-Great Falls), Oppose. SB 260 would require state and local governments to compensate landowners whenever a regulation diminishes the value of private property by 25% regardless of the need for the regulation for public health, welfare or safety reasons. *Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, at 461-9546 or ahedges@meic.org*

SB 266 - Revise unfair trade to include certain actions related to electric generation, Senator Steve Fitzpatrick (R-Great Falls), Second Reading 4/12, Oppose. SB 266 would force the owners of Colstrip to keep the plant open regardless of the expense. SB 266 likely violates state and federal constitutional law by allowing the legislature to override the original contract between the Colstrip owners. *Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, at 461-9546 or ahedges@meic.org*

SB 284 - Generally revise county gravel pit permitting, Senator Russ Tempel (R-Chester), Second Reading 4/12, Oppose. This bill would remove the requirement for mitigation through the state sage-grouse conservation program for gravel pits permitted by a county. Though the creation of gravel pits can have a number of long-term habitat impacts, this exemption chips away in particular at a strong state conservation program that requires the participation of all stakeholders. *Contact Amy Seaman, Montana Audubon, at 406-210-9449 or aseaman@mtaudubon.org*

SB 314 - Revise laws related to wolf harvest, Sen. Bob Brown (R-Thompson Falls), Second Reading, Oppose. SB 314 would take extreme measures including baiting, night hunting and no bag limits in an attempt to drive wolves down to a bare minimum number. It's unneeded when we have a sound wolf season and already have the tools with the Fish and Wildlife Commission to manage the population. *Contact Nick Gevock, MWF, at 533-9432, ngevock@mtwf.org*

SB 323 - Generally revise Montana Administrative Procedure Act, Sen. Chris Friedel (R-Billings), House Business and Labor, Hearing 4/14, Oppose. This bill would prohibit state agencies from adopting any rule if it may cost more than \$1 million to businesses. \$1 million is a very low threshold for rules that have widespread impact, impact hunting on private lands, or that require installation of pollution control equipment. Only the legislature would have the authority to adopt such rules, putting the executive branch, that is in charge of adopting rules, at the mercy of the legislative branch. This would increase political pressure and prevent agencies from implementing important programs including those that are required under federal law, such as the clean air act, the clean water act, solid and hazardous waste laws and so much more. SB 323 applies to all government rules including those at the Departments of Public Health and Human Services, Revenue, Business & Labor, Commerce, Fish Wildlife & Parks, Environmental Quality and others. *Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, at 461-9546 or ahedges@meic.org*

SB 358 - Repeal numeric nutrient standards for water quality, Senator John Esp (R-Big Timber), Third Reading, Oppose. This bill would eliminate numeric nutrient standards that are currently established and enforced by the Montana Department of Environmental Quality through administrative rules. This bill would result in more nutrients to the detriment of our rivers and streams. Nutrient pollution has major impacts to human health and aquatic ecosystems. *Contact Derf Johnson, MEIC, at 406-581-4634 or djohnson@meic.org or Mikindra Morin, NPRC, at 406-599-0848 or mikindra@northernplains.org*

SB 399 - Generally revise and simplify income taxes, Sen. Greg Hertz (R-Polson), House Tax, Hearing 4/13, Oppose. This bill includes a repeal of the state's alternative energy systems tax credit and the energy conservation tax credit, both which have a maximum of a \$500 tax credit per household. These credits are critical for Montanans, and they reduce energy demand. *Contact Makenna Sellers, NPRC, at 850-4491 or makenna@northernplains.org*

The Weekly Hotlist is published as an educational service to lawmakers and citizens by the Conservation Working Group, composed of the organizations listed below. Contact Jake Brown, Montana Conservation Voters at 406-855-7821 or Whitner Chase, Montana Conservation Voters at 407-235-8203

** Clark Fork Coalition * Environment Montana * Montana Audubon * Montana Conservation Voters * Montana Environmental Information Center (MEIC) * Montana Public Interest Research Group (MontPIRG) * Montana*

