

## Montana House Conservation Hotlist Week 16: April 19, 2021

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### Please Support:

**SB 147 - Establish commercial property assessed capital enhancements program, Senator McNally (D-Billings), Second Reading, 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](mailto:makenna@northernplains.org)*

### Please Oppose:

**HB 318 - Clarify definition of bison, Rep. Kenneth Holmlund (R-Miles City), Returned to House, Oppose.** This bill changes the definition of "wild bison" or "wild buffalo" to include "has not been reduced to captivity", "never has been subject to a per capita fee under 15-24-921, and "has never been owned by a person." The changes may mean that even Yellowstone National Park bison held captive for quarantine would be treated as livestock. A new amendment changes the language to include offspring of bison covered by this definition as well. *Contact Amy Seaman, Montana Audubon, at 406-210-9449 or [aseaman@mtaudubon.org](mailto:aseaman@mtaudubon.org)*

**HB 448 - Increasing the cap on non-residential net metering systems, Rep. Joshua Kassmier (R-Fort Benton), Returned to House, Oppose.** The bill was hijacked by Northwestern Energy and anti-solar interests. The original bill attempted to raise the cap for rooftop solar to help Montana's small businesses, schools, and libraries. HB448 received strong bipartisan support until Northwestern stepped in with its anti-solar agenda. As amended, the bill will ensure Northwestern can force the PSC to discriminate against solar owners and take money out of the pockets of Montanans. It will also take jobs away from Montanan's solar professionals by requiring solar owners to hire non-solar installers, who lack experience with these systems, to conduct operational and maintenance tasks. Montanans want to make their own decisions about solar energy, not have them dictated to them by the utility. *Contact Andrew Valainis, Montana Renewable Energy Association, at 401-965-5170 or [andrew@montanarenewables.org](mailto:andrew@montanarenewables.org)*

**HB 481 - Protect critical infrastructure, Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-Libby), Returned to House, Oppose.** The bill would severely increase penalties for trespassing on or tampering with energy infrastructure property, despite existing laws that cover trespassing and vandalism. It could also threaten to bankrupt organizations deemed "guilty by association" for acts of vandalism that they did not cause. The bill intimidates Montanans from using their first amendment rights to peaceful protest with vague language and harsh reprimands. *Contact Makenna Sellers, NPRC, at 406-850-4491 or [makenna@northernplains.org](mailto:makenna@northernplains.org)*

**HB 599 - Generally revise opencut laws, Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-Libby), Returned to House, Oppose.** HB599 is a radical re-write of gravel pit laws to cut the public out of the permitting process in most instances. The bill eliminates dozens of requirements for gravel pit operators, prohibits DEQ from: limiting the hours of operation of pits; requiring range or wildlife "fire prevention and control" measures; and consideration of acid mine drainage or sedimentation on adjoining lands or waterways. Finally, it completely excludes notification and involvement of neighboring landowners in most gravel pit permitting processes. *Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, at 461-9546 or [ahedges@meic.org](mailto:ahedges@meic.org)*

**SB 86 - Generally revise obligations and conditions for property impacted by coal, Sen. Duane Ankney (R-Colstrip), House Energy, Oppose.** The bill would create a new government

program to heavily penalize Colstrip owners who must transition to cleaner energy by requiring them to pay DEQ for all potential residential and commercial property value reductions across the state that could be attributed to the closure or pending closure of Colstrip. It also tries to force the transfer water rights and water infrastructure to the town of Colstrip regardless of water rights law or availability of other options for the town to obtain water. *Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, at 461-9546 or [ahedges@meic.org](mailto:ahedges@meic.org)*

**SB 237 - Revise community renewable energy project requirements, Senator Doug Kary (R-Billings), Third Reading, 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](mailto:ahedges@meic.org)*

**SB 306 - Revise structure of fish and game commission, Senator Mike Lang (R-Malta), Oppose.** This bill would require that four of the seven Fish and Wildlife Commissioners are landowners engaged in agricultural production. This bill makes it clear that sportsmen and sportswomen's concerns will be shut out in key decisions on wildlife management. *Contact Nick Gevock, MWF, at 533-9432 or [ngevock@mtwf.org](mailto:ngevock@mtwf.org)*

**SB 379 - Generally revise coal-fired generation laws, Sen. Steve Fitzpatrick (R-Great Falls), House Energy, Oppose.** This bill would cost NorthWestern customers well over \$1 billion to pay for Colstrip and would remove Public Service Commission oversight for all of NorthWestern expenditures in the plant for decades to come regardless of whether those costs are prudently incurred. *Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, at 461-9546 or [ahedges@meic.org](mailto:ahedges@meic.org)*

**SB 399 - Generally revise and simplify income taxes, Sen. Greg Hertz (R-Polson), House Tax, 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](mailto:makenna@northernplains.org)*

**SB 354 - Revise laws related to land servitudes and easements, Sen. Steve Hinebauch (R-Wibaux), Free Conference, Oppose Amendments.** This bill was amended in a way that restricts access to public lands, and makes prescriptive easements more difficult to obtain. The Conservation Working Group supports this bill without amendments added in the House. *Contact Nick Gevock, MWF, at 533-9432 or [ngevock@mtwf.org](mailto:ngevock@mtwf.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 Wilderness Association \* Montana Wildlife Federation \* Northern Plains Resource Council \* Montana Smart Growth Coalition \**