

Montana House Conservation Hotlist Week 14: April 5, 2021

Please Support:

SB 249 - Revise funding for the Montana greater sage-grouse stewardship act, Sen. Mike Lang (R-Malta) House Natural Resources, 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:

HB 648 - Generally revise natural resource laws, Rep. Josh Kassmier (R-Fort Benton), House Natural Resources, Oppose. This bill would create a new government program that is responsible for determining the existence of oil and gas deposits in the state and for marketing coal ash. These activities are usually paid for through private dollars, and it is inappropriate to use public money for the research and development activities of long-established industries. *Contact Derf Johnson, MEIC, at 406-581-4634 or djohnson@meic.org*

HB 661 - Revise taxation of stripper oil and gas wells, Rep. Josh Kassmier (R-Fort Benton), Second Reading, Oppose. This bill would create an exemption for "stripper wells" producing natural gas in which they would pay virtually no taxes. Stripper wells would fall into this category if the price per MCF for natural gas is below \$4.75. Prices are currently well below this, and not projected to rise above this price through 2029. Further, stripper wells have received tax breaks in at least the previous two sessions. *Contact Derf Johnson, MEIC, at 406-581-4634 or djohnson@meic.org*

HB 695 - Generally revise environmental laws, Rep. Denley Loge (R-St. Regis), House Natural Resources, Oppose. This bill is a "pay to participate" in government bill that would allow for state agencies to require members of the public to pay a fee in order to comment on an environmental impact statement. Comments would not be considered by the agency unless the fee is paid. This bill is likely unconstitutional, will hinder the ability for state agencies to consider relevant information from the public, and will chill public engagement in our government. *Contact Derf Johnson, MEIC, at 406-581-4634 or djohnson@meic.org*

HB 697, Reimburse landowners for crop damage by wildlife, Rep. Josh Kassmier, R-Ft. Benton, House Agriculture, Oppose. This bill would limit Montana FWP biologists' ability to manage big game, and take funding from the Habitat Montana program. It would require reimbursement for crop damage in any hunting district that is double the objective population where FWP uses limited permits for bulls and bucks, implying that killing bull elk is the solution to overpopulated elk herds. *Contact Nick Gevock, Montana Wildlife Federation, at 533-9432 or ngevock@mtwf.org*

SB 201 - Revise avoided cost rate-making, Sen. Steve Fitzpatrick (R-Great Falls), House Energy, Hearing 3/17, 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 231 - Revise exempt well laws related to family transfer parcels, Sen. Mark Blasdel (R-Kalispell), Second Reading, Oppose. As currently written, this bill would allow anyone using the family transfer exemption in the subdivision and platting act to also be guaranteed an exemption from obtaining a water right for a well that pumps up to 35 gallons per minute. This would eliminate any checks on the location of the new well and whether it will have any influence on neighboring water wells or sewage. The family transfer exemption is already a big exemption in the subdivision law, and this bill would compound the problem. *Contact Derf Johnson, MEIC, at 406-581-4634 or djohnson@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 257 - Prevent local governments from imposing carbon penalties, fees, or taxes, Sen. Jason Small (R-Busby), Second Reading, Oppose. This vaguely written bill is intended to stop local governments from adopting carbon taxes, which none of them are trying to do. But the language is so broad that it could prevent local governments from adopting any regulation that even tangentially impacts carbon emissions including transportation plans, design standards, noise limitations, development patterns, etc. It is opposed by Missoula, Helena, and Bozeman who are developing clean energy plans. *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), Senate Business and Labor, 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), House Natural Resources, 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 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 extreme attempt to drive wolf numbers 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 334 - Establishing cost calculations for transmission systems, Sen. Brad Molnar (R-Laurel), House Energy, Oppose. This bill would confuse, complicate, and make management of the transmission system far more complicated, uncertain, and disadvantageous to renewables but to the advantage of utility owned gas generation resources. *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), House Natural Resources, 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@meic.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

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