

Montana House Conservation Hotlist Week 4: January 23, 2023

PLEASE SUPPORT:

HB 188- Extend funding to Coal Board, Rep. Gary Parry (R-Colstrip), Passed 2nd reading 99-0, Hearing scheduled in House Appropriations for 1.25, Support. HB 188 would extend the funding levels from the coal trust tax to local communities impacted by the increase or decline of coal development. Communities deserve continued support for funding to help offset the impacts of coal development. For more information, contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546 or ahedges@meic.org.

HB 246- Allow for the zoning of tiny dwelling units, Rep. Scott Kerns (R-Great Falls), Hearing scheduled in House Local Government Committee for 1.26, Support. HB 246 would allow cities and counties to create zoning districts which could include tiny dwelling units. Tiny dwelling units are defined “as a residential dwelling unit that is 350 to 750 square feet, is on a permanent foundation, and is used as a single-family dwelling for at least 45 days or longer.” Providing a definition for smaller, more modest homes will hopefully encourage innovative ideas, further clarify housing options, and increase affordability for Montanans. For more information, please contact Ann Schwend, MEIC, 406-456-1013 or aschwend@meic.org.

HB 276- Establish a farm to food bank program, Rep. Marty Malone (R-Pray), Hearing scheduled in House Agriculture Committee for 1.24, Support. This bill would establish a \$1 million grant account from Montana’s general fund, allowing regional food bank centers to purchase food from local producers. This bill supports family agriculture, while increasing access to locally-grown food for Montanans facing food insecurity. For more information, please contact Caroline Canarios, Northern Plains Resource Council, at 406-248-1154 or caroline@northernplains.org.

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For questions, please contact Molly Bell with Montana Conservation Voters at 406-698-9440

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PLEASE OPPOSE:

HB 60 - An act providing for an annual fee on electric vehicles registered in the state, Rep. Denley Loge (R-Saint Regis), Passed 2nd reading 89 to 10. Hearing scheduled in House Appropriations for 1.23, Oppose. HB 60 would make electric and plug-in hybrid vehicle ownership more expensive by charging an annual registration fee of \$130 for electric and \$70 for hybrid vehicles weighing less than 6000 lbs and \$190 for vehicles between 6,000 and 10,000 lbs, including electric trucks. Higher weight hybrids will have to pay \$100 each year, and even heavier vehicles may pay up to \$1,100. The goal of a registration fee is to replace gas tax revenue lost because EVs don't pay for gasoline, and are therefore not paying for road and highway maintenance. While EV registration fees are not uncommon, Montana's fees would be higher than many other states. These fees will undercut the financial benefits of switching to more affordable battery-powered vehicles. For more information, contact Ian Lund, MEIC, 406-333-1858 or ilund@meic.org.

HB 211-Revise the local subdivision review process, Rep. Larry Brewster (R-Billings), Hearing held in House Local Government Committee on 1.17, Oppose. HB 211 would give the local governing body unilateral discretion to decide whether the public should have an opportunity to review new, substantial information or changes to subdivision applications, thereby potentially depriving the public of a right to meaningfully participate and comment. Governing bodies must listen to the concerns of their constituents when making decisions that are of significant interest to their constituents. This bill infringes on the public's constitutional right to know and participate. For more information, please contact Ann Schwend, MEIC, 406-456-1013 or aschwend@meic.org.

HB 220- Create select committee on energy planning and acquisition, Rep. Josh Kassmier (R-Fort Benton), In First House Committee-Nontabled, Oppose. HB 220 is an attempt by NorthWestern Energy (NWE) to undermine a 2019 law and the recent rules adopted by the Public Service Commission (PSC) both of which greatly improve the resource planning process and the process for the utility to acquire more energy generation resources (a.k.a. power plants). NWE vehemently opposed the 2019 law and the new PSC rules. This bill would establish a partisan committee to review existing law and the newly adopted PSC rules and recommend changes. This committee would be designed to serve the interests of investor-owned utilities. The utilities spent the last two years trying to prevent the PSC from fully implementing the law, but in December 2022, the PSC unanimously voted to approve rules that establish a transparent and competitive bidding process the utility must go through before constructing new generation resources and passing the costs onto customers. While the investor-owned utility's primary interest is to make money for its shareholders, the current law and rules help ensure that the utility keeps the lights on with affordable resources. For more information, contact Ian Lund, MEIC, 406-333-1858 or ilund@meic.org.

HB 241- Prohibit government from requiring buildings be constructed with solar panels, Rep. Josh Kassmier (R-Fort Benton), Hearing scheduled in House Local Government Committee for 1.24, Oppose. In 2022, the Montana Department of Labor and Industry passed rules which updated Montana's building codes. Part of the rules allow self-governing cities to adopt "stretch codes," which are voluntary city codes that go beyond what the state requires. These voluntary stretch codes allow solar-ready building codes that would require new construction in those jurisdictions to design and build homes in such a way that adding solar would be a cheap, convenient, and efficient option for building owners. HB 241 would ban these solar ready stretch codes at a time when we need local governments to help create solutions to the climate crisis. For more information, contact Ian Lund, MEIC, 406-333-1858 or ilund@meic.org and Makenna Sellers, Montana Renewable Energy Association at (406) 214-9405 or makenna@MontanaRenewables.org.

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HB 261- Revise e-bike laws, Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-Libby), Hearing is scheduled in the House Local Government Committee for 1.23, Oppose. HB 261 attempts to define bikes that use electric motors for propulsion as non-motorized and force the use of these on all state and locally managed trail systems. This "open unless closed" approach opens the floodgates for new motorized use on trails that have been reserved for non motorized uses like traditional bikes, horse, and pedestrian travel. Additionally, this would put the state's definition at odds with the US Forest Service definition, causing jurisdictional challenges (Many trails start on local, private, and state land and travel to USFS land) and a need for increased expenditures for signage and enforcement of this new use. HB 261 would also put federal grant funding for non motorized trails at risk. For more information, please contact Noah Marion, Wild Montana, at 406-624-9622 or nmarion@wildmontana.org and Amy Seaman, Montana Audubon, 406-210-9449 or aseaman@mtaudubon.org

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