

Montana House Conservation Hotlist Week 5: January 30, 2023

PLEASE SUPPORT:

HB 276- Establish a farm to food bank program, Rep. Marty Malone (R-Pray), Hearing Held in House Agriculture on 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 contact Caroline Canarios, Northern Plains Resource Council, at 406-248-1154 or caroline@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.

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

Clark Fork Coalition * Montana Audubon * Montana Conservation Voters * Montana Environmental Information Center
Montana Renewable Energy Association * Northern Plains Resource Council

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PLEASE OPPOSE:

HB 55- An act establishing a tax on electric vehicle charging stations, Rep. Denley Loge (R-St. Regis), Hearing scheduled in House Transportation for 1.30, Oppose. HB 55 would add a \$0.03 tax on electric vehicles (EVs) charging at public stations. The stated goal is to capture revenue from out-of-state EV drivers who aren't paying the gas tax. However, Montanans traveling in-state also will be required to pay the tax but will supposedly be reimbursed for the fees through some vague process. Unfortunately, the undefined reimbursement process will likely be cumbersome under the best case scenario and will be one more barrier to EV deployment in Montana. This new program will cost the state an extraordinary \$2.3 million to implement because it is so complex. While there are some good elements of the bill, including a provision that would allow charging station operators to price electric vehicle charging based on the cost of electricity, as introduced the bill will unnecessarily discourage the adoption of electric vehicles. For more information contact Ian Lund, MEIC, 406-333-1858 or ilund@meic.org.

HB 220- Create select committee on energy planning and acquisition, Rep. Josh Kassmier (R-Fort Benton), Referred to House, Energy, Technology and Federal Relations Committee, 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 261- Revise e-bike laws, Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-Libby), Hearing held in House Local Government Committee on 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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