

Montana House Conservation Hotlist Week 11: March 13, 2023

PLEASE SUPPORT:

SB 58 - Increase landowner payment cap for block management, Senator Steve Hinebauch (R - Wibaux) Hearing scheduled in House Fish, Wildlife and Parks Committee for 3.14, Support This bill increases the financial compensation cap offered to landowners as assistance for access to their land for the public and hunting. The new compensation model would allow landowners to receive payments up to \$50,000/year instead of the current system which tops out at \$25,000/year. For more information contact Molly Bell, MCV, 406-698-9440 or molly@mtvoters.org, and Amy Seaman, MT Audubon, 406-210-9449 or aseaman@mtaudubon.org.

HB 574- Establish workforce housing trust fund, Representative Kim Abbott (D- Helena) Hearing scheduled in House Business and Labor Committee for 3.13, Support. This bill would appropriate \$500 million to provide loans and grants for the development and preservation of rental housing and homes for purchase intended for the Montana workforce at affordable housing rates. Half of the principal in the fund will be reserved and invested to earn interest and the remaining principal must be used to provide loans and grants to eligible applicants. Investing funds in this program is important to leverage public/private investments and federal monies toward affordable housing projects. For more information please contact Ann Schwend at aschwend@meic.org/ 406) 596-1013.

PLEASE OPPOSE:

SB 39- Revise permitting for incinerators, Sen. Dan Bartel (R-Lewistown) Hearing scheduled in House Natural Resources for 3.13, Oppose. SB 39 would eliminate public participation in the state's air quality permitting for human and pet crematoriums. These crematoriums exist in communities across the state and can have high emissions of mercury and other harmful substances. For more information, contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546/ahedges@meic.org

SB 55- Join Interstate Mining Compact Commission, Sen. Steve Hinebauch (R-Wibaux), Hearing scheduled in House Natural Resources Committee for 3.17, Oppose. This bill would authorize Montana to join the Interstate Mining Compact Commission as a full member. The bill would require \$30,000 of state funds in membership fees annually, which would otherwise be dedicated towards other programs at the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. The Commission opposes reforming and modernizing the regulation of hardrock mining on public lands. For more information, please contact Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634/djohnson@meic.org and Caroline Canarios, Northern Plains Resource Council, 406-248-1154/caroline@northernplains.org.

SB 85- Require management of grizzly bears at sustainable levels upon delisting, Sen. Mike Lang (R-Malta), Hearing scheduled in House Fish, Wildlife, and Parks Committee for 3.16, Oppose. SB 85 states that grizzly bears will be managed at numbers upon delisting from the federal Endangered Species Act to keep them from returning to the list. It lacks language ensuring a healthy population that is well-connected with bears moving between the established recovery zones to bring better genetic diversity to the populations. It also lacks language ensuring that other threats to grizzly bears are eliminated and should include education and more preventative measures for management. This bill impedes Montana from properly managing grizzly bears while they are still a listed species. For more information, contact Amy Seaman, MT Audubon, 406-210-9449/aseaman@mtaudubon.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 MCV at 406-698-9440 or Jocelyn Leroux with MCV at 406-794-0016

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:

SB 176-Revise interim and statutory committee membership, Sen. Keith Regier (R-Kalispell, Hearing scheduled in House Legislative Administration Committee for 3.16, Oppose. This bill would politicize interim committees. Instead of both parties working together in the interim to analyze topics and find bipartisan solutions, this bill would generally require interim committees to be comprised of 3 members from the majority party and one member from the minority party, regardless of the composition of the legislature. The EQC appointments must be 4 members of the leadership party to 2 members from the minority party, regardless of the composition of the legislature. The Consumer Committee must be 2 from the majority party of each house and one from the minority. For more information, contact Anne Hedges, MEIC 406-461-9546/ahedges@MEIC.org.

HB 220- Create select committee on energy planning and acquisition, Rep. Josh Kassmier (R-Fort Benton), Out of House 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/ ilund@meic.org.

HB 462- Revise distribution of marijuana revenues, Rep. Marta Bertoglio (R-Clancy), Hearing held in House Appropriations Committee on 2.16, Oppose. This bill would strip over \$30 million in voter-approved revenue from the Habitat Montana program and permanently block the program from tapping those funds again. HB 462 seeks to redistribute how recreational cannabis tax revenue is spent in Montana. This goes against the will of Montana voters who approved recreational cannabis with the understanding that a portion of the revenue would go toward Habitat Montana. There is plenty of money to go around to fund new programs along with Habitat Montana, a popular land protection and access fund that among other things contributed to the purchase of the Big Snowy Mountains Wildlife Management Area. For more information please contact Jocelyn Leroux, MCV, 406-794-0016/jocelyn@mtvoters.org and Noah Marion, Wild Montana, nmarion@wildmontana.org/406- 624-9622.

HB 669- Revise laws related to allocation of marijuana tax revenues, Rep. Bill Mercer (R-Billings), Hearing held in House Appropriations Committee on 2.23, Oppose. HB 669 would zero-out all marijuana revenue that was dedicated to conservation and outdoor recreation programs by Montana voters and by the previous Legislature. Over the next two years alone, HB 669 would rob over \$50 million from state parks, trails and recreation, the Habitat Montana Program, and nongame wildlife management. It would also permanently block these programs from ever tapping those funds again. For more information please contact Jocelyn Leroux, MCV, 406-794-0016/jocelyn@mtvoters.org and Noah Marion, Wild Montana, nmarion@wildmontana.org/406- 624-9622.

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