

Montana Senate Conservation Hotlist Week 12: March 20, 2023

PLEASE SUPPORT:

HB 243-Revise hunter education laws, Rep. Marilyn Marler (D-Missoula), Hearing Scheduled in Senate Fish and Game for 3.21, Support. Requires an in-person field day to teach hands-on firearm safety and other important outdoor skills. For more information contact Amy Seaman, MT Audubon, 406-210-9449/aseaman@mtaudubon.org or Jocelyn Leroux, MCV, at jocelyn@mtvoters.org/406-794-0016.

PLEASE OPPOSE:

HB 55- An act establishing a tax on electric vehicle charging stations, Rep. Denley Loge (R-St. Regis), Awaiting hearing in Senate Highways and Transportation Committee. 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 Anne Hedges, MEIC, (406)461-9546/ahedges@MEIC.org.

HB 241 – Prohibit government from requiring buildings be constructed with solar panels, Rep. Josh Kassmier (R-Fort Benton), Hearing scheduled in Senate Local Government for 3.20, 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/ilund@meic.org and Makenna Sellers, Montana Renewable Energy Association at (406)214-9405/makenna@MontanaRenewables.org.

SB 442, Allow marijuana tax revenue to be used for county road maintenance, Sen. Mike Lang, (R-Malta), Hearing held in Senate Finance and Claims on 3.17, Oppose. This bill would take marijuana tax revenue that was directed to Habitat Montana under previous legislation and redirect it towards county road maintenance. This would shortchange Habitat Montana by more than \$30 million dollars. Habitat Montana is an important habitat protection and access program that provides state funds for the acquisition of conservation easements and Wildlife Management Areas. In the last year, money from this fund was used to purchase land for the Big Snowy Mountains WMA and an addition for the Mount Haggin WMA. For more information, contact Jocelyn Leroux, MCV, at 406-794-0016/jocelyn@mtvoters.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:

HB 524 – Revise energy laws relating to solar panels, Rep. Joshua Kassmier (R-Fort Benton), Hearing scheduled in Senate Business, Labor, and Economic Affairs for 3.21, Oppose. HB 524 adds regulations to residential solar panel installers and distributors regarding reporting country of origin. This is already covered by federal law and is not needed in Montana code. This bill also subjects small Montana solar businesses to lawsuits and heavy fines if the federal level country of origin information is questioned. HB 524 is a red tape relief bill waiting to happen. For more information contact Makenna Sellers, Montana Renewable Energy Association, 406-214-9405/makenna@MontanaRenewables.org, or Ian Lund, MEIC, 406-333-1858/ilund@meic.org.

HB 561, Revise Water Discharge Permitting, (Rep. Mary Malone, R-Pray), Scheduled for hearing in Senate Natural Resources Committee for 3.24, Oppose. This bill would require that appeals of water pollution permits go to the Montana Board of Environmental Review (BER) before they go to Montana District Court. The BER is composed of volunteers that are appointed by the Governor. Currently, the BER is unable to expeditiously review and decide cases because it is underfunded and lacks the necessary resources. Some BER cases take multiple years to resolve. During this time, the potential for water pollution and other environmental impacts continues unabated. For more information, contact Derf Johnson, MEIC, at (406) 581-4634/djohnson@meic.org.

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