

Montana Senate Conservation Hotlist: Week of February 17, 2025

	SUPPORT	OPPOSE
SB 63	✓	
SB 188	✓	
SB 220	✓	
SB 224	✓	
SB 266	✓	
SB 294	✓	
SJ 11	✓	
SJ 12	✓	
HB 57		X
HB 176		X
SB 21		X
SB 42		X
SB 81		X
SB 160		X
SB 214		X
SB 262		X
SB 283		X
SB 301		X

PLEASE SUPPORT:

SB 63—Revise law related to the use of motion-tracking devices while hunting, Sen. Pat Flowers (D-Bozeman), Passed Senate Fish & Game (8-4), Support. SB 63 extends the prohibition on motion-tracking technology to cover a calendar day, closing a loophole to protect fair chase hunting in Montana. This bill also prohibits a person from relaying motion-tracking information to another person as an aid to hunting. Contact: Matt Leow, MT Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, 406-370-3183, matt@tenaciouscampaigns.com.

SB 188—Revising solar energy policy laws, Sen. Chris Pope (D-Bozeman), Awaiting E.A., Senate Energy, Support. The Montana Solar Shares Act enables households and businesses to use shares in an electric generating solar system. Participating customers could individually purchase shares of the larger solar array, and each month receive a credit on their power bill equal to the shares of the energy generated. Contact: Caroline Canarios, NPRC, 406-248-1154, caroline@northernplains.org, or Makenna Sellers, MREA, 406-850-4491, makenna@montanarenewables.org.

SB 220—Generally revise election laws and procedures, Sen. Jonathan Windy Boy (D-Box Elder), Hearing, Senate Administration, 2/17, 3pm, Support. By establishing permanent satellite election offices and enabling the use of nontraditional addresses, SB 220 empowers more eligible voters to have their voices heard. Contact: Kearstyn Cook, MCV, 406-426-2422, kearstyn@mtvoters.org.

SB 224—Create Indigenous Peoples’ Day, Sen. Shane Morigeau (D-Missoula), Awaiting E.A., Senate Administration, Support. An act establishing Indigenous Peoples’ Day (the second Monday in October) as a legal holiday in Montana. Contact: Caroline Canarios, NPRC, 406-248-1154, caroline@northernplains.org, Shannon James, MEIC, 406-690-7757, sjames@meic.org, or Natalie Wright, MCV, 406-426-2645, natalie@mtvoters.org.

SB 266—Allow for triplex and fourplex housing, Sen. Jeremy Trebas (R-Great Falls), Awaiting E.A., Senate Local Government, Support. SB 226 allows the use of triplex and fourplex housing in cities with populations of 5,000 or more, as well as requires that zoning regulations for duplex, triplex, and fourplex housing are not more stringent than for single-family residences. This bill aims to increase infill while addressing housing issues as well as reduces climate-harming sprawl due to increased transportation needs. Contact: Laura Collins, MEIC, 406-443-2520 ext. 010, lcollins@meic.org.

SB 294—Requiring public utilities to report a plan for 100% renewables, Sen. Andrea Olsen (D-Missoula), Hearing, Senate Energy, 2/18, 3pm, Support. SB 294 would require each public utility to develop and submit a plan outlining options, timelines, and potential challenges for sourcing 100% of their in-state retail energy sales from renewable resources. The plan must be submitted to the interim committee by June 1, 2026.

Contact: Shannon James, MEIC, 406-690-7757, sjames@meic.org, or Natalie Wright, MCV, 406-426-2645, natalie@mtvoters.org.

SJ 11—Interim study on farmer's markets and food systems, Sen. Bruce Gillespie (R-Ethridge), Hearing, Senate Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, 2/18, 3pm, Support. SJ 11 would create an interim committee to study the impacts of farmer’s markets on Montana’s food systems to identify barriers to their success and opportunities to support them. Contact: Ben Catton, MEIC, 307-920-1843, bcatton@meic.org, or Caroline Canarios, NPRC, 406-248-1154, caroline@northernplains.org.

SJ 12—Interim study on energy transmission, Sen. Gregg Hunter (R-Glasgow), Awaiting Committee Assignment, Senate Energy, Technology, & Federal Relations, Support. SJ 12 requests an interim study to examine the impacts on Montana’s citizens and economy from electric transmission line congestion for pathways entering and exiting the state. Contact: Nick Fitzmaurice, MEIC, 406-534-9307, nfitzmaurice@meic.org.

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For questions, please contact Kearstyn Cook with MCV at 406-426-2422 or Natalie Wright with MCV at 406-426-2645.

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PLEASE OPPOSE:

HB 57—Designate quail as upland game bird species, Rep. Paul Fielder (R-Thompson Falls), Awaiting Second Reading, Oppose. HB 57 would make two non-native species of quail “Upland Game Birds,” and opens the door for them to be farmed and released in state. The FWP commission banned the “possession, sale, purchase, exchange, or transport of live birds” in 2011. This bill would sidestep the classification review process of the commission and designate California and Gambel’s quail as upland game birds. Montana should not encourage the introduction of non-native species without studying the impacts. Contact: Peter Dudley, MT Audubon, 406-443-3949, peter@mtaudubon.org.

HB 176—Require unlimited wolf hunting quota when population is at or above 550 wolves, Rep. Shannon Maness (R-Dillon), Hearing, Senate Fish & Game, 2/20, 3pm, Oppose. This bill was amended to allow the commission to set an unlimited statewide quota on wolves while the population estimate remains greater than or equal to 550 wolves, allows for unlimited wolf licenses for individuals, and removes commission authority to set regional quotas until that number is reached. Wolves could be targeted in areas with low populations, likely impacting the Greater Yellowstone Ecosystem and local wildlife tourism businesses. Contact: Peter Dudley, MT Audubon, 406-443-3949, peter@mtaudubon.org.

SB 21—Allowing legislative and executive leadership to vacate a writ of mandamus, Sen. Barry Usher (R-Billings), Passed Senate Judiciary, Oppose. SB 21 would ostensibly allow for elected officials, such as the governor and legislators, to vacate a writ of mandamus issued by a court that would compel that official to follow the law. This bill likely violates separation of powers principles, and would allow for elected officials to ignore writs of mandamus, which are court orders that are granted when the government has a clear legal duty, but is failing to comply with that duty. Contact: Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org, or Kearstyn Cook, MCV, 406-426-2422, kearstyn@mtvoters.org.

SB 42—Provide for the partisan election of judges and justices, Sen. Daniel Emrich (R-Great Falls), Passed Senate Judiciary, Oppose. SB 42 would force Montana judges and justices to identify a party when they run for a judicial position. This unnecessary bill would inject an extreme amount of partisanship into our judicial system, which by its very nature should only apply the facts and the law, and not include partisan considerations. SB 42 is a significant threat to the impartial judiciary, the rule of law, and the ability for Montana citizens to pursue justice in our court system. Contact: Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org, or Kearstyn Cook, MCV, 406-426-2422, kearstyn@mtvoters.org.

SB 81—Revise Lease of State Lands for Underground Gas Storage, Sen. Josh Kassmier (R-Fort Benton), Awaiting Hearing, Senate Energy, Oppose. SB 81 would expand gas storage laws to allow for carbon capture and sequestration (CCS) projects on state public lands. This statute was designed for natural gas (methane) storage, and is not suited to manage risks that CCS could pose to the public, including pipeline rupture and CO2 leakage that can cause asphyxiation and death. CCS poses risks to our health, safety and working landscapes. Contact: Nick Fitzmaurice, MEIC, 406-534-9307, nfitzmaurice@meic.org, or Gusty Catherin-Sauer, NPRC, 406-869-1911, gusty@northernplains.org.

SB 160—Revise Alternative Energy Project Laws to Require a Bond Prior to Construction, Sen. Bob Phalen (R-Glendive), Awaiting E.A., Senate Energy, Technology, & Federal Relations, Oppose. SB 160 changes existing solar and wind facility decommissioning bonding and planning requirements from being due once a facility begins operation to being due prior to construction. Other generation facilities don’t have these requirements prior to construction, putting wind and solar developments at an economic disadvantage. Contact: Makenna Sellers, MREA, 406-850-4491, makenna@montanarenewables.org, or Nick Fitzmaurice, MEIC, 406-534-9307, nfitzmaurice@meic.org.

SB 214—Revise zoning laws to clarify decisions regarding prior nonconforming use of property, Sen. Greg Hertz, (R-Polson), Awaiting E.A., Senate Local Government, Oppose. SB 214 mandates that any ambiguity in zoning laws be interpreted in favor of property owners. This would potentially allow for unintended or disruptive developments to bypass regulations without clear local consent. Additionally, this bill undermines historic preservation efforts by removing local historic boards’ authority over zoning permits. Contact: Laura Collins, 406-443-2520 ext. 010, lcollins@meic.org.

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SB 262—Exempt subdivision, water/sewer plans from environmental review, Sen. Forrest Mandeville (R-Columbus), Awaiting E.A., Senate Local Government, Oppose. SB 262 would exempt subdivisions from having to conduct an environmental analysis under the Montana Environmental Policy Act when reviewing water treatment plans. MEPA is necessary for cataloguing and considering the cumulative impacts associated with the impact of subdivisions on water quality. Contact: Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org.

SB 283—Generally revise laws relating to wind generation facilities, Sen. Bob Phalen (R-Glendive), Hearing, Senate Energy, Technology, & Federal Relations, 2/18, 3pm, Oppose. SB 283 would establish a maximum wind turbine tower height of 350 feet and would establish lighting limitations beyond minimum requirements with the Federal Aviation Administration. Minimizing excessive light pollution is acceptable, but height limitations could inhibit future wind development. Contact: Nick Fitzmaurice, MEIC, 406-534-9307, nfitzmaurice@meic.org, or Makenna Sellers, MREA, 406-850-4491, makenna@montanarenewables.org.

SB 301—Generally revise utility line and facility laws, Sen. Daniel Zolnikov (R-Billings), Hearing, Senate Energy Technology & Federal Relations, 2/20, 3 pm, Oppose. SB 301 would create two separate approvals for transmission lines instead of one, making it a longer and more difficult process to get permission to build a transmission line. It eliminates some of DEQ's MFSA review authority and allows the PSC to make decisions on transmission without defining how the PSC must make a decision to determine the public convenience and necessity of a transmission project. SB 301 could put customers on the hook for billions of dollars of investments with no criteria for PSC decisionmaking. Contact: Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.org.

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