

Montana House Conservation Hotlist: Week of February 24, 2025

	SUPPORT	OPPOSE
HB 372	✓	
HB 440	✓	
HB 450	✓	
HB 477	✓	
HB 660	✓	
HJ 8	✓	
HJ 15	✓	
HB 258		X
HB 295		X
HB 389		X
HB 424		X
HB 466		X
HB 490		X
HB 506		X
HB 554		X
HB 587		X
HB 616		X
HB 623		X
HB 630		X
HB 648		X
HJ 12		X
HJ 17		X

PLEASE SUPPORT:

HB 372—Revise license fees used for funding of upland game bird enhancement program (UGBEP), Rep. Tom France (D-Missoula), Passed as Amended House Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Support. HB 372 would increase funds allocated to the UGBEP, primarily through increasing non-resident game bird and combination license fees. The UGBEP funds critical habitat enhancement projects for wildlife, and promotes collaboration between landowners and FWP. This bill has been amended to address concerns with the fiscal note. Contact: Peter Dudley, MT Audubon, 406-443-3949, peter@mtaudubon.org.

HB 440—Provide tax incentives to put Montana-produced food first, Rep. Jane Weber (D-Great Falls), Scheduled for Second Reading 2/24, Support. HB 440 provides for a tax incentive for Montana retailers to stock Montana foods on their shelves, providing a subtraction from individual income and corporate income taxes for the income from Montana-produced food. Contact: Caroline Canarios, NPRC, 901-651-5930, caroline@northernplains.org.

HB 450—Generally revise bird dog training licensing laws, Rep. Eric Albus (R-Glasgow), Awaiting F.A., House Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Support. HB 450 aims to enhance data collection on the effects of bird dog training on wild bird populations. This bill requires bird dog trainers to report how many dogs they are training under a license and provides rulemaking authority for the commission to regulate the number of licenses issued. Contact: Peter Dudley, MT Audubon, 406-443-3949, peter@mtaudubon.org.

HB 477—Phase out polystyrene single use food containers, Rep. Marilyn Marler (D-Missoula), Hearing, House Natural Resources 2/24, 3pm, Support. HB 477 would phase out the use of styrofoam containers through statewide regulation. Styrofoam poisons our ecosystems and wildlife, and it chokes our municipal waste systems. Its continued, unfettered use threatens our right to a clean and healthful environment. Contact: Ben Catton, MEIC, 307-920-1843, bcatton@meic.org.

HB 660—Require Rules to Limit Greenhouse Gases, Rep. Debo Powers (D-Polebridge), Awaiting Hearing in House Natural Resources, Support. HB 660 would require the Montana DEQ to adopt regulations limiting greenhouse gases to protect public health, safety, welfare and the environment. Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.org.

HJ 8—Requesting an interim study of electric vehicle fees and taxation, Rep. Becky Edwards (D-Bozeman), Passed as Amended House Transportation, Support. HJ 8 directs an interim committee to examine the current vehicle fee and taxation methods for electric and internal combustion engine light passenger vehicles. Findings from this study resolution would be presented next legislature. Contact: Nick Fitzmaurice, MEIC, 406-534-9307, nfitzmaurice@meic.org, or Natalie Wright, MCV, 406-426-2645, natalie@mtvoters.org.

HJ 15—Resolution supporting increased transmission capacity in Montana, Sen. Greg Kmetz (R-Miles City), Passed House Energy, Technology, & Federal Relations, Support. HJ 15 opens the dialogue with utility stakeholders and government

officials on Montana's critical need to expand electric transmission capacity, emphasizing that affordable, reliable electricity depends on robust transmission infrastructure. Contact: Nick Fitzmaurice, MEIC, 406-534-9307, nfitzmaurice@meic.org, Makenna Sellers, MREA, 406-850-4491, makenna@montanarenewables.org.

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PLEASE OPPOSE:

HB 258—Requiring the extension of wolf hunting season, Rep. Paul Fielder (R-Thompson Falls), Scheduled for Second Reading 2/24, Oppose. HB 258 requires the commission to extend the wolf hunting season to end in concurrence with spring bear season, typically June 15. This bill would allow for wolf hunting during denning and whelping season, and could lead to wolves being relisted in the Northern Rockies. Due to increased mortality of pups and changes to pack recruitment, the department anticipates that it will take 3-4 years before it can recalibrate its method for population estimates. Contact: Peter Dudley, MT Audubon, 406-443-3949, peter@mtaudubon.org.

HB 295—Revise laws related to judicial transparency and elections, Rep. Paul Fielder (R-Thompson Falls), Passed House Judiciary, Oppose. HB 295 would allow Montana judges and justices to identify a party when they are running for a judicial position. If they don't identify a party, candidates must list "undisclosed" on their affiliation. This bill would inject extreme partisanship into our judiciary, which should only apply the facts and the law, not partisan considerations. Contact: Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org, or Caroline Canarios, NPRC, 406-248-1154, caroline@northernplains.org

HB 389—Provide for setbacks for wind turbine generators, Rep. Brandon Ler (R-Savage), Awaiting E.A., House Energy, Technology, & Federal Relations, Oppose. HB 389 would kill Montana wind power generation through untenable setbacks (up to 1.5 miles)—which is 4 to 12 times more restrictive than typical wind regulations. Contact: Nick Fitzmaurice, MEIC, 406-534-9307, nfitzmaurice@meic.org, or Makenna Sellers, MREA, 406-850-4491, makenna@montanarenewables.org.

HB 424—Revise taxes for class 17 data center property, Rep. Katie Zolnikov (R-Billings), Passed as Amended House Taxation, Oppose. HB 424 would give an 85% property tax reduction to the Hardin Generating Station, decreasing state and local revenue. It would give the 20 year old coal plant a lower property tax rate than homeowners. HB 424 was amended to encourage the development of new power generation for data centers but the amendment lowers the property tax rate for the Hardin plant from 6% to 0.9%. Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.org.

HB 466—Provide categorical exclusions from MEPA, Rep. John Fitzpatrick (R-Anaconda), Awaiting E.A., House Natural Resources Committee, Oppose Unless Amended. HB 466 provides for a categorical exclusion under MEPA and gives DEQ the authority to determine when a categorical exclusion from MEPA is acceptable. This means that DEQ (or other state agencies) would have broad authority in determining whether or not a proposed action requires environmental review. Contact: Caroline Canarios, NPRC, 406-248-1154, caroline@northernplains.org, or Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org.

HB 490—Revise Civil Liability Laws for utilities causing wildfires, Rep. Amy Regier (R-Kalispell), Awaiting E.A., House Judiciary, Oppose. HB 490 would shield utilities from liability when they cause wildfires. This bill puts the burden on the PSC to review utility wildfire plans without providing sufficient time or expertise. Utilities are not required to have a wildfire mitigation plan in order to avoid liability, it doesn't require utilities to follow wildfire mitigation plans to avoid liability, and it contains about a dozen provisions that prevent homes, businesses and communities from holding utilities responsible when they start wildfires due to poor operations. Contact: Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.org.

HB 506—Constitutional amendment revising selection of supreme court justices, Rep. Brad Barker (R-Red Lodge), Awaiting E.A., House Judiciary, Oppose. HB 506 would adopt an appointment process for Supreme Court justices whereby the president of the Senate, the speaker of the House of Representatives, the minority leaders of each house, and two current or former attorneys send a list of names to the governor for selection. The selected individual is subject to Senate confirmation. An appointment process would eliminate the ability for Montanans to directly elect their Supreme Court justices and to continue holding them accountable through subsequent elections. Contact: Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org, or Kearslyn Cook, MCV, 406-426-2422, kearslyn@mtvoters.org.

HB 554—Remove FWP requirement to regulate wolves as furbearers or game animals, Rep. Brandon Ler (R-Savage), Hearing, House Fish, Wildlife, & Parks, 2/27, 3pm, Oppose. Wolves were classified as a species in need of management after reintroduction, with the intention that the department would reclassify the species as a furbearer or game animal. This bill runs counter to the department's intention to classify wolves as furbearers with HB 101, and maintains that wolves should be managed unlike any other species in Montana. Contact: Peter Dudley, MT Audubon, 406-443-3949, peter@mtaudubon.org.

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PLEASE OPPOSE:

HB 587—Revise mine reclamation laws, Rep. Gary Parry (R-Colstrip), Hearing, House Natural Resources, 2/26, 3pm, Oppose. HB 587 would redefine the term “material damage” under the Montana Surface and Underground Mine Reclamation Act (MSUMRA) and deviate from the federal definition. Under the proposed change, material damage would have to be demonstrated through an expensive and time-consuming statistical analysis “measured to a significant degree of confidence.” This definition will lead to water quality impacts outside of coal mines, and a more difficult process for citizens and adjacent landowners to hold coal mining companies and the DEQ accountable. Contact: Caroline Canarios, NPRC, 406-248-1154, caroline@northernplains.org or Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org.

HB 616 – Allow data modeling for mine bond release, Rep. Steve Gist (R-Cascade), Hearing, House Natural Resources, 2/26, 3pm, Oppose. HB 616 would allow for the coal company to provide its own predictive modeling to determine whether coal mines have achieved reclamation objectives and should receive bond release. While this bill may offer an additional tool for assessing reclamation, it does not provide the public with ready access to the modeling information to assure that the model and its assumptions are accurate and not subject to manipulation. Contact: Caroline Canarios, NPRC, 406-248-1154, caroline@northernplains.org or Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org.

HB 623—Revise laws related to nuclear energy, Rep. Gary Parry (R-Colstrip), Hearing, House Energy, Technology, & Federal Relations, 2/26, 3pm, Oppose. HB 623 would authorize the storage of radioactive nuclear waste on-site of any future nuclear energy facility developed in Montana. There exists no national repository for radioactive nuclear waste, which can remain harmful to humans for tens of thousands of years. Therefore, “temporary” storage could mean that dangerous waste remains on-site in Montana communities for hundreds if not thousands of years, posing tremendous risk to public health and the environment. Contact: Nick Fitzmaurice, MEIC, 406-534-9307, nfitzmaurice@meic.org.

HB 630—Require legislative approval of greenhouse gas rules, Rep. Curtis Schomer (R-Billings), Awaiting Hearing, House Natural Resources, Oppose. HB 630 would prevent the DEQ from implementing any regulation limiting greenhouse gases without first approval of the legislature in the next legislative session. DEQ regularly writes air pollution rules to protect public health and safety, but this bill would prevent DEQ from doing so for greenhouse gases until the legislature agrees with the rule, thereby denying Montanans of their constitutional right to a healthy climate. Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.org.

HB 648—Require FWP notification before the release of large predators, Rep. Brandon Ler (R-Savage), Awaiting Hearing in House Fish, Wildlife & Parks, Oppose. HB 648 is overly burdensome and requires FWP to notify county commissioners, the sheriff’s office, and tribal governments 30 days prior to the release or relocation of large predators. It implies that the department will be aware of predators in need of relocation prior to capture and may incentivize the department’s ability to lethally manage large predators instead of relocating them. Contact: Peter Dudley, MT Audubon, 406-443-3949, peter@mtaudubon.org.

HJ 12—Resolution regarding electric vehicles, Rep. Randyn Gregg (R-White Sulphur Springs), Passed House Energy, Technology, & Federal Relations, Oppose. HJ 12 would thank the U.S. President for taking actions to eliminate EPA vehicle tailpipe pollution standards that are mischaracterized as an “Electric Vehicle mandate,” further mischaracterizing the current state, performance, and suitability of EV technology in Montana. The standards were projected to result in nearly \$100 billion in annual net benefits to society. Contact: Nick Fitzmaurice, MEIC, 406-534-9307, nfitzmaurice@meic.org.

HJ 17—Resolution regarding energy, Rep. Steve Fitzpatrick (R-Great Falls), Hearing, House Energy, Technology, & Federal Relations, 2/26, Oppose. HJ 17 calls on Congress and the President to weaken or eliminate the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Nuclear Regulatory Commission regulations, mining laws, and laws to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and toxic air pollution from Colstrip. It calls on the President to use the Emergencies Power Act, the Defense Production Act and more to bypass safeguards for protecting the public as well as protections for clean air, clean water and our public lands. Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.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 Kearstyn Cook with MCV at 406-426-2422 or Natalie Wright with MCV at 406-426-2645.

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers * Montana Audubon * Montana Conservation Voters * Montana Environmental Information Center * Montana Renewable Energy Association * MontPIRG * Northern Plains Resource Council * Wild Montana