

Montana Senate Conservation Hotlist: Week of February 24, 2025

	SUPPORT	OPPOSE
HB 146	✓	
SB 188	✓	
SB 220	✓	
SB 224	✓	
SB 266	✓	
SB 294	✓	
SB 391	✓	
SB 406	✓	
SB 408	✓	
SJ 11	✓	
SJ 12	✓	
SJ 19	✓	
HB 122		X
HB 176		X
SB 21		X
SB 42		X
SB 283		X
SB 301		X
SB 307		X
SB 349		X
SB 368		X
SB 385		X
SJ 14		X

PLEASE SUPPORT:

HB 146—Revising hunting license fees for cranes and swans, Rep. Gary Parry (R-Colstrip). Hearing in Senate Fish & Game, 2/25, 3pm, Support. HB 146 creates a separate license fee for Sandhill Crane and Swans at \$10 for residents and \$75 for non-residents. Funds raised go towards the protection, conservation and enhancement of wetlands in Montana. Contact: Peter Dudley, MT Audubon, 406-443-3949, peter@mtaudubon.org.

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). Awaiting E.A., Senate Administration, 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: Kearnstyn Cook, MCV, 406-426-2422, kearnstyn@mtvoters.org.

SB 224—Create Indigenous Peoples' Day, Sen. Shane Morigeau (D-Missoula). Passed 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 266 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 and reduce transportation needs caused by sprawl. 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). Awaiting E.A., Senate Energy, 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.

SB 391—Revise opencut notification laws, Sen. Shane Morigeau (D-Missoula). Hearing, Senate Natural Resources 2/26, Support. SB 391 would increase public

participation requirements in the opencut mining law that governs gravel mining. In 2021, the Montana legislature dramatically limited and eliminated public participation in opencut permitting. This bill would provide the public with a 30 day comment period for every mine proposal, require the state to respond to comments, and would increase the ability of communities to request a public hearing before the DEQ issues a permit. Contact: Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.org.

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PLEASE SUPPORT:

SB 406—Establishing utility energy conservation efficiency standards, Sen. Chris Pope (D-Bozeman), Awaiting Committee Assignment, Support. SB 406 establishes minimum energy conservation and efficiency requirements for Montana's Investor Owned Utilities (IOUs) to achieve at least 1% annual energy savings and plan for achieving all cost-effective energy conservation programs on the utility's system. The cleanest, most cost-effective energy available is energy saved through conservation and efficiency measures, but IOUs otherwise experience a financial disincentive to pursue these measures due to the connection between electricity sales and company earnings. Contact: Nick Fitzmaurice, MEIC, 406-534-9307, nfitzmaurice@meic.org.

SB 408—Provide that legislative drafts are public records, Sen. Daniel Zolnikov (R-Billings), Awaiting Committee Assignment, Support. SB 408 would clarify that "junque files" associated with legislation are considered public records. Junque files—generated by legislative services—are associated with the drafting of legislation. This bill would confirm that junque files are subject to Montana's right to know laws and assure that the public has continued access to documents and information generated by Legislative Services. Contact: Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org.

SJ 11—Interim study on farmer's markets and food systems, Sen. Bruce Gillespie (R-Ethridge), Passed as Amended Senate Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, 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), Hearing, Senate Energy, Technology, & Federal Relations, 2/25, 3pm, 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.

SJ 19—Joint resolution to study public transportation, Sen. Andrea Olsen (D-Missoula), Awaiting Committee Assignment, Support. SJ 19 would task a legislative interim committee to study ways to improve public transit services in Montana, including exploring the establishment of a passenger transportation commission. Contact: Nick Fitzmaurice, MEIC, 406-534-9307, nfitzmaurice@meic.org.

PLEASE OPPOSE:

HB 122—Revise right-of-way laws, Rep. Larry Brewster (R-Billings), Awaiting Hearing, Senate Energy, Technology, & Federal Relations, Oppose. HB 122 authorizes gas utilities to install pipeline infrastructure in the public right-of-ways (ROWs) of Montana's roads, streets, and highways. Gas utilities already can and do use public ROWs for this infrastructure by negotiating franchise agreements on a jurisdiction-by-jurisdiction basis. This bill threatens to override jurisdictional control and oversight for this process, allowing utilities to cut corners for installing future pipeline infrastructure that's environmentally damaging and threatens public safety. Contact: Nick Fitzmaurice, MEIC, 406-534-9307, nfitzmaurice@meic.org, or Gusty Catherin-Sauer, NPRC, 406-869-1911, gusty@northernplains.org.

HB 176—Require unlimited wolf hunting quota when population is at or above 550 wolves, Rep. Shannon Maness (R-Dillon), Awaiting E.A., Senate Fish & Game, Oppose. HB 176 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 Kearnstyn Cook, MCV, 406-426-2422, kearnstyn@mtvoters.org.

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PLEASE OPPOSE:

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. This bill 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 283—Generally revise laws relating to wind generation facilities, Sen. Bob Phalen (R-Glendive), Awaiting E.A., Senate Energy, Technology, & Federal Relations, 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.

SB 301—Generally revise utility line and facility laws, Sen. Daniel Zolnikov (R-Billings), Awaiting E.A., Senate Energy Technology & Federal Relations, 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. This bill 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.

SB 307—Reallocate Montana marijuana tax revenue, Sen. Tom McGillvray (R-Billings), Hearing, Senate Business, Labor and Economic Affairs, 2/27, 7am, Oppose. SB 307 would strip vital funding from programs like Habitat Montana, state parks, trails, and nongame wildlife conservation (more specifically, an estimated loss of \$21 million for Habitat Montana and \$12.6 million for other critical environmental programs over the next two years). With over \$1 billion proposed for spending increases and tax cuts in the governor's budget, there is ample funding to support the conservation of our state's public lands and wildlife. Contact: Kearstyn Cook, MCV, 406-426-2422, kearstyn@mtvoters.org, or Noah Marion, Wild Montana, 406-624-9622, nmarion@wildmontana.org.

SB 349—Declare authority over existing fossil-fuel fired electric generating units, Sen. Jeremy Trebas (R-Great Falls), Hearing, Senate Natural Resources, 2/26, 3pm, Oppose. SB 349 violates federal law by trying to take authority over air and water pollution that Congress granted to the EPA and give it to DEQ, but only for fossil fuel power plants (coal, methane gas, and oil). This bill assumes all EPA regulations for air and water pollution for fossil fuel plants are unnecessary and the state can craft new regulations without the funding or the expertise to set health-based standards. Contact: Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.org,

SB 368—Allow correction of minor maintenance items at mines, Sen. Sue Vinton (R-Billings), Hearing, Senate Natural Resources, 2/24, 3pm, Oppose. SB 368 inserts a sweeping definition of "minor maintenance item," which provides too much discretion to DEQ on determining whether an enforcement action is merited. This bill will lead to lax environmental enforcement, as it authorizes the DEQ to categorize certain coal mine permit violations as "minor maintenance items," and to forego normal compliance requirements. Contact: Caroline Canarios, NPRC, 406-248-1154, caroline@northernplains.org or Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org.

SB 385— Create a general claims court, Sen. Tom McGillvray, Hearing, Senate Judiciary, 2/28, 8am, Oppose. SB 385 would create a special court, composed entirely of individuals appointed by the governor, for the purposes of hearing constitutional challenges to state actions and certain petitions for judicial review of administrative decisions. This bill would inject partisanship into important constitutional decisions by allowing for a governor's hand-picked judges to decide major cases, rather than the Montana Supreme Court (which is elected by the people). This bill would also cost the state additional funds by having to create an entirely new court. Contact: Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org

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SJ 14—Resolution to release federal wilderness study areas, Sen. Tony Tezak (R-Ennis), Awaiting Hearing, Senate Energy Technology & Federal Relations, Oppose. SJ 14 calls on Congress to remove protection from every single Wilderness Study Area in Montana. The bill also calls on Congress to strip protection from all the state's inventoried roadless areas. Contact: Kearsyn Cook, MCV, 406-426-2422, kearsyn@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 Kearsyn 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