

Montana Senate Conservation Hotlist: Week of March 17, 2025

	SUPPORT	OPPOSE
HB 136	✓	
HB 146	✓	
HB 270	✓	
HB 271	✓	
HB 283	✓	
SJ 11	✓	
SJ 12	✓	
SJ 19	✓	
HB 122		X
HB 176		X
HB 258		X
HB 259		X
SB 307		X
SB 358		X
SB 385		X

PLEASE SUPPORT:

HB 136—Revise property insurance laws relating to preventative measures to reduce damage, Rep. Steve Fitzpatrick (R-Great Falls), Third Reading, 3/17, Support. HB 136 would provide insurance premium reductions to property owners for demonstrable mitigation measures to prevent wildfire or other disaster damages. This bill supports proactive climate resilient policy. Contact: Ben Catton, MEIC, 307-920-1843, bcatton@meic.org.

HB 146—Revising hunting license fees for cranes and swans, Rep. Gary Parry (R-Colstrip), Awaiting E.A., Senate Fish & Game, 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.

HB 270—Revise Remedies to MEPA, Rep. Katie Zolnikov (R-Billings), Hearing, House Natural Resources, 3/19, Support. This bill would remove the language in MEPA that the MT Supreme Court found to be unconstitutional because it prevented the state from considering impacts to the climate in environmental analyses. HB 270 also clarifies the remedy provisions of MEPA. Contact: Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org.

HB 271—Provide that there is a limited executive privilege to the public records act, Rep. Ed Stafman (D-Bozeman), Awaiting E.A., House Judiciary, Support. This bill would both confirm that the Governor is subject to Montana's right to know laws, and assure that the public has continued access to documents and information generated by the governor's office. Contact: Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org.

HB 283—Revise laws for hunting licenses lotteries, Rep. Tyson Running Wolf (D-Browning), Hearing, Senate Fish & Game, 3/20, Support. Montana law allows the Fish and Wildlife Commission to issue elk, mule deer, sheep, moose and goat tags to conservation organizations in order to conduct fundraisers that ultimately support wildlife management of these species. While tags for elk,

mule deer and goat may be either auctioned or raffled (lottery), current law limits sheep and moose tags to an auction. HB 283 adds the option of a lottery for these tags. Contact: Matt Leow, MT Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, 406-370-3183, matt@tenaciouscampaigns.com.

SJ 11—Interim study on farmer's markets and food systems, Sen. Bruce Gillespie (R-Ethridge), Passed 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), Passed 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, or Makenna Sellers, Montana Renewable Energy Association, 406-850-4491, makenna@montanarenewables.org.

SJ 19—Joint resolution to study public transportation, Sen. Andrea Olsen (D-Missoula), Hearing, Senate Highways & Transportation, 3/17, 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.

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PLEASE OPPOSE:

HB 122—Revise right-of-way laws, Rep. Larry Brewster (R-Billings), Hearing, Senate Energy, Technology and Federal Relations, 3/20, 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. This bill will impact areas with current low quotas like the wolf management units near Yellowstone. Contact: Peter Dudley, MT Audubon, 406-443-3949, peter@mtaudubon.org.

HB 258—Requiring the extension of wolf hunting season, Rep. Paul Fielder (R-Thompson Falls), Hearing, Senate Fish & Game, 3/18, 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. The 15-mile buffer amended into the bill is marginal and does not adequately protect Yellowstone wolves. Contact: Peter Dudley, MT Audubon, 406-443-3949, peter@mtaudubon.org.

HB 259—Revise fish and wildlife commission techniques for gray wolf management, Rep. Paul Fielder (R-Thompson Falls), Hearing, Senate Fish & Game, 3/18, Oppose. This bill requires the FWP commission to allow night vision and thermal scopes to be used during the wolf hunting season. Proponents argue that this clarifies the definition of night vision to include thermal scopes, but most importantly, it changes "may" to "shall." Contact: Peter Dudley, MT Audubon, 406-443-3949, peter@mtaudubon.org.

SB 307—Reallocate Montana marijuana tax revenue, Sen. Tom McGillvray (R-Billings), Passed Senate Business, Labor and Economic Affairs, Oppose. SB 307 would strip vital funding from programs like Habitat Montana, state parks, trails, and nongame wildlife conservation (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: Kearnstyn Cook, MCV, 406-426-2422, kearnstyn@mtvoters.org, or Noah Marion, Wild Montana, 406-624-9622, nmarion@wildmontana.org.

SB 358—Revise exempt water right laws, Sen. Wylie Galt (R-Martinsdale), Awaiting E.A., Senate Natural Resources, Oppose. SB 358 requires metering and reporting for new wells, creates a petition for ground water analysis, and closes high density, high growth aquifers to new exempt wells—with exceptions that undermine the purpose of the closure areas. SB 358 also increases exempt water appropriations for new subdivisions outside of the controlled groundwater areas. Contact: Laura Collins, MEIC, (406) 443-2520, lcollins@meic.org.

SB 385—Create a general claims court, Sen. Tom McGillvray (R-Billings), Hearing, Senate Finance and Claims, 3/18, 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.

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 Kearnstyn 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