

Montana Senate Conservation Hotlist: Week of March 31, 2025

	SUPPORT	OPPOSE
HB 264	✓	
HB 271	✓	
HB 760	✓	
HB 763	✓	
HJ 15	✓	
SB 541	✓	
SJ 19	✓	
SJ 21	✓	
HB 122		X
HB 176		X
HB 258		X
HB 259		X
HB 270		X
HB 285		X
HB 291		X
HB 490		X
HB 554		X
HB 587		X
HB 623		X
HB 664		X
HB 685		X
HB 696		X
HB 714		X
HJ 12		X
SB 307		X
SB 358		X
SB 543		X
SJ 14		X

PLEASE SUPPORT:

HB 264—Generally revise wildlife location data subject to public information requests, Rep. Jonathan Karlen (D-Missoula), Awaiting E.A., Senate Fish and Game, Support. HB 264 would establish a prohibition on sharing wildlife location data and telemetry frequencies. It also provides an exception to allow the department to share location data with research partners and other government agencies through data-sharing agreements. Contact: Matt Leow, MT Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, 406-370-3183, matt@tenaciouscampaigns.com.

HB 271—Provide that there is a limited executive privilege to the public records act, Rep. Ed Stafman (D-Bozeman), Awaiting E.A., Senate Judiciary, Support. HB 271 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 760—Establish solar consumer protection laws, Rep. George Nikolakakos (R-Great Falls), Hearing, Senate Energy, 4/1, Support. HB 760 keeps bad actors out of Montana related to solar sales. It codifies consumers' right to cancel a door-to-door solar contract within three business days of signing. Contact: Makenna Sellers, MREA, 406-850-4491, makenna@montanarenewables.org.

HB 763—Generally revise laws related to the block management program, Rep. Josh Seckinger (D-Bozeman), Hearing, Senate Fish & Game, 4/3, Support. HB 763 clarifies and simplifies how access-only Block Management agreements are handled. The bill will help unlock more public land hunting by making it easier for willing landowners to participate in Block Management to provide public access to hunt our public lands. Contact: Matt Leow, MT Backcountry Hunters & Anglers, 406-370-3183, matt@tenaciouscampaigns.com.

HJ 15—Resolution supporting increased transmission capacity in Montana, Sen. Greg Kmetz (R-Miles City), Awaiting Hearing, Senate Energy, 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: Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.org, or Makenna Sellers, MREA, 406-850-4491, makenna@montanarenewables.org.

SB 541 — Create a pollinator health task force, Sen. Andrea Olsen (D-Missoula), Awaiting Hearing, Senate Agriculture, Support. SB 541 would create a 14 member pollinator health task force with representation from relevant state agencies, private industries, tribal governments, and more. The task force's responsibilities would be coordination of research, education, and recommendations to industry, legislators, and state agencies. Contact: Ben Catton, MEIC, 307-920-1843, [bcattton@meic.org](mailto:bcatton@meic.org).

SJ 19—Joint resolution to study public transportation, Sen. Andrea Olsen (D-Missoula), Second Reading, 3/31, 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.

SJ 21—Interim study on interstate power grid development, Sen. Daniel Zolnikov (R-Billings), Awaiting Hearing, Senate Energy, Support. SJ 21 would establish an interim study to evaluate potential benefits, legal considerations, and implementation strategies for entering into an interstate transmission development compact for streamlining interstate electric transmission

development for the benefit of Montana's energy system reliability and affordability. Contact: Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.org.

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PLEASE OPPOSE:

HB 122—Revise right-of-way laws, Rep. Larry Brewster (R-Billings), Passed Senate Energy, Oppose. HB 122 gives gas utilities default authorization 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: Gusty Catherin-Sauer, NPRC, 406-869-1911, gusty@northernplains.org, or Nick Fitzmaurice, MEIC, 406-534-9307, nfitzmaurice@meic.org.

HB 176—Require unlimited wolf hunting quota when population is at or above 550 wolves, Rep. Shannon Maness (R-Dillon), Third Reading, 3/31, Oppose. HB 176 requires an unlimited statewide quota on wolves while the population estimate remains greater than or equal to 550 wolves. Despite having a carve out for rule making authority to limit quotas near Yellowstone, this bill does not adequately address the economic impacts to local wildlife businesses. This bill could lead to the extermination of wolves in areas with small populations. 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), Third Reading, 3/31, 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), Third Reading, 3/31, Oppose. HB 259 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.

HB 270—Revise Remedies to MEPA, Rep. Katie Zolnikov (R-Billings), Passed Senate Natural Resources, Oppose. HB 270 incorporates the harmful language in both SB 221 and HB 285. It fundamentally undermines the state's ability to analyze impacts of a project, consider economic or technical information, or consider reasonably foreseeable impacts that would be caused by projects. Contact: Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org.

HB 285—Generally Revise Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA), Rep. Brandon Ler (R-Savage), Passed Senate Natural Resources, Oppose. HB 285 would repeal language that recognizes that MEPA implements the right to a clean and healthful environment pursuant to the Montana Constitution. It would also repeal language that says that MEPA is supposed to prevent harm, require consideration of long-term productivity of the land and long term impacts from projects, and language that empowers MEPA to help protect against the decline of Montana's environment. Contact: Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org, or Caroline Canarios, NPRC, 406-248-1154, caroline@northernplains.org.

HB 291—Revise laws related to air quality standards, Rep. Greg Oblander (R-Billings), Passed Senate Natural Resources, Oppose. HB 291 would prevent the state or local air pollution control boards from adopting any air pollution standard or regulation unless the federal government requires the state to do so or does so first. This bill would prevent the state from regulating greenhouse gases, as the federal government currently has no air pollution emission limits on greenhouse gases. Contact: Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.org, or Caroline Canarios, NPRC, 406-248-1154, caroline@northernplains.org.

HB 490—Revise Civil Liability Laws for utilities causing wildfires, Rep. Amy Regier (R-Kalispell), Awaiting E.A., Senate Judiciary, Oppose. HB 490 would shield utilities from liability when they cause wildfires. Although amendments to this bill improved it, the standard of care provision is ambiguous and unimplementable. The fire mitigation plan also does not require the utility to mitigate its impact to the climate, which is creating more severe wildfires, and the approving authorities created to oversee the plan do not have wildfire expertise. Contact: Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.org.

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PLEASE OPPOSE:

HB 554—Remove FWP requirement to regulate wolves as furbearers or game animals, Rep. Brandon Ler (R-Savage), Hearing, Senate Fish & Game, 4/1, Oppose. Wolves were classified as a species in need of management after ESA delisting, with the intention that the department would reclassify the species as a furbearer or game animal at some point in the future. HB 554 removes language allowing FWP to make that determination and removes a barrier to classifying wolves as predators. Contact: Peter Dudley, MT Audubon, 406-443-3949, peter@mtaudubon.org.

HB 587—Revise mine reclamation laws, Rep. Gary Parry (R-Colstrip), Hearing, Senate Natural Resources, 3/31, 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 623—Revise laws related to nuclear energy, Rep. Gary Parry (R-Colstrip), Awaiting E.A., Senate Energy, 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. Nuclear remains the most expensive energy source available. Contact: Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.org.

HB 664—Repeal numeric nutrient standards, Rep. Bill Mercer (R-Billings), Hearing, Senate Natural Resources, 3/31, Oppose. HB 664 would repeal Montana’s water quality standards for nutrients and replace those with yet-to-be-determined and less protective narrative standards. The last attempt to replace the numeric standards with narrative standards led to a years-long saga that left us with a vague and indefensible rules package that was eventually withdrawn because it was so problematic. HB 664 pushes for standards less rooted in quantifiable, scientific data that would leave our fresh waters at risk. Contact: Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org, or Caroline Canarios, NPRC, 406-248-1154, caroline@northernplains.org.

HB 685—Feasibility allowance for nondegradation policy, Rep. Steve Fitzpatrick (R-Great Falls), Hearing, Senate Natural Resources, 3/31, Oppose. HB 685 would change Montana’s non-degradation policy, which is meant to “maintain and protect” Montana’s water quality. The bill would shift from what should be a “pollution prevention” approach to one of “pollution allowance,” through a “feasibility allowance” – an undefined term. Additionally, the most problematic section of the bill would remove the balancing of interests in Montana’s non-degradation policy, by eliminating the consideration of pollution and its impacts on the environment and society, and only considering the benefits of economic development. Contact: Caroline Canarios, NPRC, 406-248-1154, caroline@northernplains.org, or Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406-581-4634, djohnson@meic.org.

HB 696—Approve the siting of uranium conversion and enrichment facilities, Rep. Gary Parry (R-Colstrip), Awaiting E.A., Senate Energy, Oppose. HB 696 would give legislative approval for the siting of hazardous uranium conversion and enrichment facilities in Montana to process any uranium mined in Montana, the US, or anywhere in the world. This would promote the development of a harmful uranium extraction industry in Montana while positioning the state as a regional default for hazardous uranium processing, inviting the transportation of these radioactive materials throughout the state on our public roadways and rail system with risk of accidents and contamination. Contact: Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406-461-9546, ahedges@meic.org.

HB 714—Revise laws for divisions of land exempt from subdivision review, Rep. Larry Brewster (R-Billings), Passed House Local Government, Oppose. HB 714 prohibits local governments from denying family transfers unless an intent to evade subdivision review is proven with documented evidence, effectively removing the ability to deny family transfers, even when substantial evidence suggests evasion. HB 714 creates a massive expansion of the definition “immediate family” to include grandparents, grandchildren, and siblings. It is not unreasonable to assume that 20 to 30 lots could be created through a single family transfer application. Contact: Laura Collins, MEIC, 406-443-2520, lcollins@meic.org.

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PLEASE OPPOSE:

HJ 12—Resolution regarding electric vehicles, Rep. Randyn Gregg (R-White Sulphur Springs), Awaiting Hearing, Senate Energy, 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.

SB 307—Reallocate Montana marijuana tax revenue, Sen. Tom McGillyvray (R-Billings), Awaiting E.A., Senate Finance and Claims, 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: Kearstyn Cook, MCV, 406-426-2422, kearstyn@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), Passed 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. This bill 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 543—Revise judiciary laws, Sen. Wylie Galt (R-Martinsdale), Hearing, Senate Judiciary, 4/1, Oppose. SB 543 would allow for Montana Supreme Court judges to identify a party when they are running for a judicial position either on the ballot or during the nomination process. This 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 an extreme threat to the independent 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.

SJ 14—Resolution to release federal wilderness study areas, Sen. Tony Tezak (R-Ennis), Awaiting E.A., Senate Energy, 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: Kearstyn Cook, MCV, 406-426-2422, kearstyn@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 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