Montana Senate Conservation HOTLIST Week 6: February 11th, 2019

Please Support:

SB 24, Increase optional light motor vehicle registration fee for parks and recreation, Sen. Terry Gauthier (R-Helena) Senate Fish and Game Committee, 2nd Reading 2/12/2019; Support. This bill would increase funding for trails and outdoor recreation by increasing the voluntary motor vehicle registration donation from six to nine dollars to generate an additional estimated $1.8 million for trails, State Parks, and fishing access sites. Contact Noah Marion, Montana Wilderness Association, 406.624.9622, nmarion@wildmontana.org.

SB 97, Generally revising laws related to common carrier pipelines, Sen. Frank Smith (D-Poplar); Senate Natural Resources; Support. Requires pipeline permit applicants to complete construction within seven years of their application approval. Applicants who fail to meet this deadline will have to reapply. It will also require that agencies evaluate the impacts to cultural resources, such as important Native American sites, when conducting an environmental impact statement for a pipeline application. SB 97 also requires installation of shut-off valves to protect critical freshwater resources, leak detection equipment to improve response times for pipeline bursts, and siting requirements to avoid “sensitive” areas. Contact Derf Johnson, Montana Environmental Information Center, 406.581.4634, djohnson@meic.org.

SB 173, Revise laws related to electric vehicle charging stations, Sen. Terry Gauthier (R-Helena), Senate Highways and Transportation, 2nd Reading; Support. SB 173 enacts a $25 fine and allows for towing of a non-electric vehicle if it's parked in an electric vehicle charging station parking spot. A charging station is a significant investment for a business owner, often designed to help attract customers. This bill creates a deterrence to the blocking of that investment and the adoption of electric vehicles. Contact Brian Fadie, Montana Environmental Information Center, 406-210-7591, bfadie@meic.org.

SB 188, Revise electricity supply resource planning and acquisition. Sen. Sue Malek (D-Missoula), Senate Energy and Telecommunications. Support. This bill protects utility customers by reducing the likelihood of for-profit utilities making unnecessary investments. It makes the long-term electricity resource planning process open to all parties (not just those invited by the utility), it requires a competitive bidding process for new resources, and it requires a draft and public comment on Requests for Proposals for new resources. This increased transparency will protect customers from for-profit utilities making investments that help the company's bottom line more than consumers. Contact Brian Fadie, Montana Environmental Information Center, 406-210-7591, bfadie@meic.org.

SB 189, Establish a carbon tax and distribute revenue, Sen. Barrett (D-Missoula) S-Energy. SB 189 would establish a tax on greenhouse gas emissions from electric generation facilities. The bill also directs the Montana Board of Environmental Review to adopt rules governing emission reporting, a carbon offset program, and carbon fees to fund the state program. The bill also institutes a $10 carbon tax less any carbon offsets that are authorized by rule. Sources can reduce their carbon emissions obligations by 50% using carbon offsets. Contact Malcolm Gilbert, Montana Environmental Information Center, 406-443-2520, mgilbert@meic.org.
SB 190, Establish targets, reporting, and monitoring for CO2 emissions, Sen. Phillips (D-Bozeman)
S-Energy, SB 190 would require the state to develop a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions below 2010 levels by the following time frame: 25% reduction by 2022; 50% reduction by 2030; and 100% reduction by 2050. The state must also develop a monitoring and reporting program and track progress toward the reduction goals. Contact Malcolm Gilbert, Montana Environmental Information Center, 406-443-2520, mgilbert@meic.org.

Please Oppose:
SJ 6, Resolution delisting grizzly bears from Endangered Species Act, Sen. Mike Cuffe (R - Eureka), S - Fish and Game; Hearing 2/14/2019 3pm Rm. 317; Oppose. This resolution calls for the delisting from the federal Endangered Species Act of grizzly bears throughout all of Montana. Grizzly bear recovery has come a long way, but several recovery areas within Montana are well below the targeted population for recovery, and some have no confirmed grizzly bears. It calls on Congress to bypass the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and make the boundary of Montana a distinct grizzly population regardless of science about connectivity of bear populations. SJ 6 is premature and sends the message that Montana isn’t ready for long-term grizzly conservation and management. Contact Nick Gevock, Montana Wildlife Federation, 406.533.9432, ngevock@mtwf.org.

SB 48, Revise variances to water quality standard, Sen. Tom Richmond (R-Billings), S-Natural Resources, Hearing 2/13/2019 3pm Rm. 303; Oppose. SB 48 would allow for the Montana DEQ to adopt rules and issue "variances" from water quality standards to polluters. DEQ claims that this bill is simply implementing federal clean water act regulations. However, the bill goes much farther than federal water quality regulations. There are important differences between SB 48 and the federal Clean Water Act and implementing regulations (some of which are currently before a federal district court in Montana). There are also serious legal conflicts between SB 48 and the Montana constitution. SB 48 allows for water pollution dischargers to receive variances years before they are required to produce and implement pollution reduction plan. A variance can be issued when a polluter can not "reasonably be expected to meet the standard ...." This is a new, undefined, and arbitrary standard conflicts with federal law. Essentially, SB 48 contains provisions that will dramatically weaken Montana's water quality protections and open the door for abuse. Contact Anne Hedges, Montana Environmental Information Center, 406.461.9546. ahedges@meic.org.