Montana Senate Conservation HOTLIST Week 10: March 11, 2019

Please Support:

SB 24, Increase optional light motor vehicle registration fee for parks and recreation, Sen. Terry Gauthier (R-Helena) In First House-Out of Committee, 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 173, Revise laws related to electric vehicle charging stations, Sen. Terry Gauthier (R-Helena), S-Highways and Transportation, Support. SB 173 enacts a $25 fine and allows for towing of a non-electric vehicle if 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 189, Establish a carbon tax and distribute revenue, Sen. Barrett (D-Missoula) S-Energy, Support. 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, MEIC, 406-443-2520, mgilbert@meic.org.

SB 245, Establish commercial property assessed clean energy program, Sen. Mary McNally (D-Billings) S-Energy and Telecommunications, Hearing S-Energy and Telecommunications 3/12/19 Support. Montana businesses and organizations often face high utility bills due to old or inefficient structures in need of efficiency upgrades but the upfront cost of these upgrades can pose a financial challenge. SB 245 offers a Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) program to overcome this financing gap, generating economic development and jobs and saving money in the long run. Using C-PACE, property owners can make energy and water efficiency upgrades to their properties using 100% upfront financing from private capital lenders who opt-in to the program. CPACE financing uses the same system we use to finance streetlights, sidewalks, parks – as an assessment on the annual property tax bill. The program allows finance terms for up to 20 years, so property owners are cash flow positive from the start. This program is voluntary – counties, capital lenders and contractors can choose whether or not they wish to participate. The program administrator will be the Montana Facility Finance Authority. Contact Cody Ferguson, NPRC, 509.845.9309, cody@northernplains.org.

Please Oppose:

SB 278, Revise cost-recovery and transfer laws for certain energy resources, Sen. Tom Richmond (R-Billings), Oppose. This is a bait and switch bill that would turn utility regulation on its head and result in skyrocketing electricity rates for 350,000 NorthWestern Energy electricity customers. The bill requires the MT Public Service Commission to approve any and all costs that NorthWestern Energy demands for its existing ownership of the Colstrip plant as well as any additional ownership or investments in the plant. Contact Anne Hedges, Montana Environmental Information Center, 406.461.9546, ahedges@meic.org OR Cody Ferguson, Northern Plains Resource Council, 509.845.9309, cody@northernplains.org.
HB 265, Revise laws related to approval of FWP easements, Rep. Kerry White (R-Bozeman); S-Fish & Game 3/14/19, Oppose. HB 265 would add an unnecessary layer of government to conservation easements for fish and wildlife habitat conservation and public hunting access. It would require state Land Board approval for conservation easements under the Montana Fish, Wildlife and Parks Habitat Montana program. It would nullify a 2018 state Supreme Court ruling that found easements were not intended to go through the Land Board, and are final, once approved by the state Fish and Wildlife Commission. Contact Nick Gevock, Montana Wildlife Federation, 406.533.9432, ngevock@mtwf.org.

HB 279, Allow for wolf trapper expense reimbursement, Rep. Bob Brown (R-Thompson Falls), Oppose. HB 279 would allow an Idaho-based group to pay trappers for wolves killed. It amounts to a bounty on wolves, and would violate Montana’s long standing tradition of not paying people for the killing of game animals. Montana has a healthy ethical, fair chase hunting and trapping heritage and that includes gray wolves and bounties are unnecessary to meet our wildlife management objectives. Contact Nick Gevock, Montana Wildlife Federation, 406.533.9432, ngevock@mtwf.org.

HB 292, Extend coal board funding, Rep. Barry Usher (R-Billings), Hearing S-Taxation 3/14, Oppose. This would extend the increased share of revenue going to the coal board to 2023. The money could be used by local governments to deal with the impacts caused by increased or decreased coal production. Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406.461.9546, ahedges@meic.org OR Cody Ferguson, Northern Plains Resource Council, 509.845.9309, cody@northernplains.org.

HB 332, Require county approval to relocate bison, Rep. Joshua Kassmier (R-Fort Benton); Referred to S-Agriculture, Livestock & Irrigation; Oppose. This bill would require approval by a board of county commissioners prior to wild bison or wild buffalo being released into a county. This erodes FWP authority over wildlife, and the bill is written so that prohibiting bison in a county could be enforced by a county growth policy. This would be the only instance when a growth policy has regulatory power. The bill also requires transferred bison to be certified as brucellosis free. Contact Amy Seaman, Montana Audubon, 406-210-9449, aseaman@mtaudubon.org

HB 441, Repeal timber conservation license in lieu of sale, Rep. Kerry White (R-Bozeman), S-Natural Resources, Oppose. This bill repeals section 77-5-208 of the Montana Code, the section that allows the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation to offer conservation licenses in lieu of timber sales. Passed the House (70-29) This bill is being transmitted to the Senate. Contact Amy Seaman, Montana Audubon, 406-210-9449, aseaman@mtaudubon.org

HJ 4, Resolution to congress to streamline/take control of the exportation of coal, Rep. Read (R-Ronan) Oppose. HJ 4 would send a message from the Montana legislature to the federal government to act against the state of Washington for denying a permit to the Millennium Bulk Terminal Port Facility. The Millennium Terminal would allow for a massive increase of coal exports from Montana which would mean hundreds of additional coal trains travelling through Montana cities and towns bringing traffic, noise, and increased danger of derailment all while undermining vital work to move away from energy sources that amplify climate change. Contact Cody Ferguson, NPRC, 509.845.9309; or Derf Johnson, MEIC, 406.443.2520.

The Weekly Hotlist is published as an educational service to lawmakers and citizens by the Conservation Working Group, comprised of the organizations listed below. Contact Alex Rich, Montana Conservation Voters at 406.254.1593 ext. 2.