Montana House Conservation HOTLIST Week 12: March 25th, 2019

Please Support:
SB 24, Increase optional light motor vehicle registration fee for parks and recreation, Sen. Terry Gauthier (R-Helena), H-Fish, Wildlife & Parks 3/28/2019 3 pm, 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 191, Allow counties to establish a coal trust fund, Sen. Duane Ankney (R-Colstrip), H-Energy, Support. The bill would allow counties to set aside revenue from coal extraction to help cover eventual costs of transition. Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406.461.9546, ahedgeps@meic.org OR Cody Ferguson, Northern Plains Resource Council, 509.845.9309, cody@northernplains.org.

HB 517, Establish trapper education program, Rep. Bridget Smith (D-Wolf Point), H-FWP, Support. HB 517 mandates trapper education for all trappers. An educated trapper is more responsible towards wildlife and more respectful of other public land users. Contact Betsy Bradborg, Sierra Club, 406-437-1762, betsy@sbslink.com.

HB 691, Eliminate oil and gas tax holiday, Rep. Tom Woods (D-Bozeman), H-Taxation 3/26/2019, Support. This bill would eliminate the current oil and gas "tax holiday" that exists in Montana law for wells drilled after December 31, 2019 and commit the revenue generated from the increased provide assistance to communities impacted by oil and gas development and create a renewable resources trust fund to promote renewable resources and hunting and fishing access. This tax holiday was created by the legislature in 1999. It lowers taxation for new oil and gas wells during their first year--their most productive and profitable period--costing the state tens of millions of dollars a year in lost revenue and having limited or no effect on the development decisions of oil and gas companies who follow the resource regardless of state taxes which are only a small fraction of their costs. Contact Cody Ferguson, NPRC, 509.845.9309, cody@northernplains.org.

HJ 38, Interim study of bonding and decommissioning for energy resources, Rep. Daniel Zolnikov (R-Billings), H-Energy 3/25, Support. HJ 38 calls for a study of existing laws related to bonding, decommissioning, and reclamation for power plants in Montana of all fuel types. Contact Brian Fadie, MEIC, 406.443.2520, bfadie@meic.org.

Please Oppose:
SB 48, Revise variances to water quality standard, Sen. Tom Richmond (R-Billings), H-Natural Resource, Oppose. SB 48 would allow DEQ to write rules and grant variances to polluters that are not complying with water quality standards. Although the bill was drastically amended in Senate Natural Resources, it’s still missing important side-boards that would guarantee the public has meaningful input into the rules or the issuance of the variances by DEQ. Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406.461.9546, ahedgeps@meic.org or Andrew Gorder, Clark Fork Coalition, andrew@clarkfork.org. 542-0539 ext. 202.

SB 68, Remove residency requirements for aerial hunting permits, Sen. Bruce Gillespie (R-Etheridge), H-FWP, Oppose. This bill removes the residency requirement for pilot participation in the state’s aerial predator control program. This program licenses between 16-24 pilots a year. This bill was amended to make sure animals not classified as predators, like grizzly bears and wolves are not affected. Contact Betsy Bradborg, Sierra Club, 406-437-1762, betsy@sbslink.com.

SB 93, Require decommissioning and bonding for certain solar, Sen. Tom Richmond (R-Billings) H-Energy, Oppose. SB 93 only requires solar power plants to post decommissioning bonds, not coal or gas power plants. Last session a bill passed that only targeted wind energy with this requirement. Now this bill only targets solar. Yet coal and gas power plants, which create far more pollution, do not have this.
requirement. SB 93 does not actually accomplish the intended goal of seeing power plants decommissioned and the sites reclaimed. Coal and gas plants must be included. Contact Brian Fadie, MEIC, 406.443.2520, bfadie@meic.org.

SB 199, Prohibit PSC from altering certain contract lengths, Sen. Tom Richmond (R-Billings), H-Energy, Oppose. This is another bait-and-switch bill that would allow NorthWestern Energy to overcharge its customers without PSC oversight. The bill is stated to be about contract lengths with small scale renewable developers but explicitly excludes them. It is really a ploy to force the PSC to pass along NorthWestern’s imprudent costs of any of its power plants, including but not limited to the Colstrip plant. Contact Brian Fadie, Montana Environmental Information Center, 406.210.7591, bfadie@meic.org.

SB 252, Revise Major Facility Siting Act Amendment Process, Sen. Duane Ankney (R-Colstrip), H-Energy, Oppose. This bill would allow the owners of the Colstrip plant to avoid going through a public process and obtain coal from a mine other than the neighboring Rosebud mine, thereby increasing costs, decreasing revenue to the state of Montana and its workers, and importing coal from Wyoming. Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406.461.9546, ahedges@meic.org.

SB 299, Generally revise laws related to sage grouse conservation, Sen. Mike Lang (R-Malta), H-Natural Resources 3/25, Oppose. SB 299 represents the first major legislative attempts to gut the sage-grouse Stewardship Act. This bill would exempt certain current land-uses from provisions of the plan, lower the bar for mitigation plan approval, reduce the mitigation value of conservation easements and add a number of oversight team reporting requirements. The bill requires the program to balance economic incentives with conserving sage-grouse for each independent project, losing focus of the big picture - balancing sage-grouse conservation with the state-wide socioeconomic impact of a potential Endangered Species Listing. Contact Amy Seaman, MT Audubon, 406.210.9449, aseaman@mtaudubon.org or Whitney Tawney, Montana Conservation Voters, whitney@mtvoter.org, (406) 234-1593.

HB 144, Eliminate certain tax credits, Rep. Alan Redfield (R-Livingston), House Floor 3/25, Oppose. HB 144 would harm solar jobs and deter local investment by thousands of Montanans by eliminating tax incentives for rooftop solar systems. Instead of seeking to help these new jobs and businesses grow, this bill bluntly targets net metering tax credits for elimination. When the Republican controlled legislature first passed net metering in 1999, it found that “it is in the public interest to promote net metering because it encourages private investment in renewable energy resources, stimulates Montana’s economic growth, and enhances the continued diversification of the energy resources used in Montana.” The elimination of these tax credits would do the exact opposite. Contact Andrew Valainis, Montana Renewable Energy Association, andrew@montanarenewables.org, 406.214.9405.

HB 722, Allow transfer of hard rock mining permit, Rep. Steve Gunderson (R-Libby), H-Natural Resources 3/25, Oppose. Allows the Department of Environmental Quality to use remediation bonds at hardrock mines to be used for things other than remediation. The bill says that DEQ can use remediation bonds for "maintenance, monitoring, and other actions," rather than requiring increased bonds to cover those ongoing activities at the mine. This bill will deplete funding available for actual remediation work. Contact Derf Johnson, MEIC, djohnson@meic.org, 406.581.4634.