

Montana Conservation Community
Legislative Hotlist, Senate
Week 5: Feb. 10 — Feb. 16, 2009

Please Support:

SB 49, Energy efficiency standards for construction of state buildings, Sen. Dave Wanzenried (D-Missoula). This bill would require minimum energy efficiency standard for new state buildings and state buildings undergoing major renovations. The requirement would be that these buildings exceed the energy efficiency code by 20%. Passed committee 9-2; pending floor vote. Contact Matt Leow, Northern Plains Resource Council, 406.396.1766, matt@northernplains.org.

SB 129, Authorize voluntary wildfire mitigation conservation easements on wildland-urban interface, Sen. Dave Lewis (R-Helena). This bill sets up a voluntary program that gives landowners incentives to put fewer homes at risk in the wildland-urban interface. Participating landowners get a tax benefit for putting their property in a conservation easement restricts where they can build. (Any buildings must be consistent with local fire protection priorities). Taxation, pending committee vote. Contact Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon, 406.431-9157, jellis@mtaudubon.org.

SB 200, Restrict phosphorus cleaning products in certain areas, Sen. Ron Erickson, (D-Missoula). Phosphorus is a naturally occurring element, and an important nutrient for a healthy ecosystem. But too much phosphorus in our rivers and streams results in heavy algal blooms that harm water quality. This bill bans phosphorus-containing household cleaning products in the Clark Fork River basin, and sets up a framework for other counties voluntarily, or when DEQ releases water quality nutrient criteria standards. Natural Resources, pending committee vote. Contact Brianna Randall, Clark Fork Coalition, 406.370.5289, brianna@clarkfork.org.

SB 301, Tax credit for alternative energy capital investment, Sen. Mike Cooney (D-Helena). This bill increases the state's tax credit for home and small business owners for the installation of energy efficiency and alternative energy systems. Taxation, 02/10/2009, 8am, Rm 405. Contact Linda Gryczan, NCAT, 406.431.3635.

SB343, Regulation of zebra mussel and other invasive species, Sen. Jackson (R-Kalispell). This bill creates framework state agencies to work together to prevent and manage invasive species, focusing on thwarting the spread of aquatic non-natives, like the zebra mussel. Agriculture, 02/10/2009, 3pm, Rm 335. Contact Janet Ellis, Montana Audubon, 406.431-9157, jellis@mtaudubon.org or Brianna Randall, Clark Fork Coalition, 406.370.5289.

SB 370, Establishes opencut fund and annual fee, Sen. Gary Perry (R-Manhattan). This bill collects a fee from non-governmental gravel producers to help offset the regulatory costs. Natural Resources, 02/11/2009, 3pm, Rm 422. Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406.461.9546, ahedges@meic.org

Please Oppose:

SB 257, Revise definition of renewable energy resource, Sen. Keane (D-Butte). This bill undermines Renewable Energy Standard (SB 415, Tester, 2005), allowing the owners of large hydroelectric dams to retroactively count routine upgrades toward the requirements of the act, decreasing statewide incentives to develop new renewable sources. In addition, this bill would constitute a significant financial give away to PPL. Energy, pending committee vote. Contact Matt Leow, Northern Plains, 406.393.1766, matt@northernplains.org.

SB 288, Require bond for challenge to natural resource development, Sen. Hinkle (R-Thompson Falls). This bill further weakens the ability of Montanans to protect private property from industrial activities that are not following the law. It raises the amount of a bond that the public would have to post to protest a permit issued and eliminates the courts ability to waive the bond "in the interest of justice." Judiciary, pending committee vote. Contact Anne Hedges, MEIC, 406.461.9546, ahedges@meic.org

SB 292, Revise coal severance tax, Sen Gebhardt (R-Roundup). This bill revises the coal severance tax to reclassify auger mining as underground mining rather than strip mining, thereby reducing the taxable rate. This would result in a reduction in potential coal tax revenues to the state. Taxation, pending committee vote, Rm 405. Contact Northern Plains, 406.393.1766, matt@northernplains.org.

SB 305, Revise subdivision and platting act, Sen. Tutvedt (R-Kalispell). This bill undermines the ability of local governments to deny or condition subdivisions that will have an adverse impact on water, local services, public health, wildlife, agriculture, and the environment. It does this by moving the burden of proof from the subdivider to the public, and requires that a governing body approve a subdivision if they cannot make a decision within the existing timeframe. Local Government, pending committee vote. Contact Tim Davis, Montana Smart Growth Coalition, 406-449-6086 or smartgrowth@mcn.net.

SB 314, Clarify definitions for stream access laws--define natural, natural water body, Sen. Laible (R-Darby). This bill limits the application of Montana's stream access law, thereby eliminating public access on hundreds of miles of streams across the state. The bill says that if irrigation water is diverted from a stream, that stream is no longer "natural" and not subject to Montana's stream access laws. This law of course, would allow landowners to lock out fishermen and boaters by declaring the stretch of river through their property un-natural. Hearing Pending. Contact Mark Agenes, Montana Trout Unlimited, 406.544.9265, mark@montanatu.org.

SB 360, Revise major facility siting act, Sen. Keane (D-Butte). Natural Resources, 02/13/2009, 3pm, Rm 422. Contact Matt Leow, Northern Plains, 406.393.1766, matt@northernplains.org.

This hotlist is compiled by Montana Conservation Voters (contact Sarah Cobler, 581.2284 or sarah@mtvoters.org) as an educational service to lawmakers and citizens, weekly tracking key conservation-related legislative actions.