



ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COUNCIL 69th Montana Legislature

SENATE MEMBERS

Willis Curdy
John Esp
Pat Flowers
Wylie Galt
Forrest Mandeville
Tony Tezak

HOUSE MEMBERS

Paul Fielder
Tom France
Steve Gist
Jedediah Hinkle
Shannon Maness
Joshua Seckinger

PUBLIC MEMBERS

Christian Bray
Jim Keane
Mike Mershon
Jon Metropoulos
Brian Yablonski

COMMITTEE STAFF

Joseph Carroll – Legal Staff
Jason Mohr - Environmental Analyst
Jacelyn Sterling - Secretary

MINUTES LOG

January 14, 2026
Capitol Room 317 and Zoom
Helena, Montana

Please note: This document is a Minutes Log and provides annotation of the time elapsed between the beginning of the meeting and the time at which the item was presented or discussed, a motion was made, or a vote was taken. The narrative presented here is provided only as a guide to the audio or video recording of the meeting. The official discussion, motion, or vote is available on the audio or video archive of this meeting. The Legislature does not prepare a transcript of the meeting activities. The time designation may be used to locate the referenced discussion on the audio or video recording of this meeting.

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MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rep. Paul Fielder, Presiding Officer (R)
Sen. Willis Curdy, Vice Presiding Officer (D)
Sen. Pat Flowers (D)
Rep. Tom France (D)
Sen. Wylie Galt (R)
Steve Gist (R)
Rep. Jedediah Hinkle (R)
Jim Keane, Public Member
Sen. Forrest Mandeville (R)
Rep. Shannon Maness (R)
Mike Mershon, Public Member
Rep. Joshua Seckinger (D)
Sen. Tony Tezak (R)
Brian Yablonski, Public Member

MEMBERS EXCUSED:

Christian Bray, Public Member
Jon Metropoulos, Public Member
Sen. John Esp (R)

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT:

Joseph Carroll, Legal Staff
Jason Mohr, Environmental Analyst
Jacelyn Sterling, Secretary

AGENDA ([Attachment 1](#))

VISITORS' LIST ([Attachment 2](#))

CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

08:02:51 Rep. Steve Gist called the meeting to order at 8:02 AM. The committee secretary took roll.
Rep. Steve Gist took over as Presiding Officer for remainder of the meeting.

**HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 62 (STUDY OF WILDFIRE PREVENTION / RESILIENCE):
WILDFIRE IMPACTS AND COSTS FOR COMMUNITIES**

08:04:50 Jason Mohr, Legislative Environmental Analyst, Legislative Services Division (LSD)

[EXHIBIT 1](#)

08:05:40 Sen. John Esp joined the meeting.

08:06:58 Ryan Handy, Wildfire and Land Use Planning Specialist, Headwaters Economics

[EXHIBIT 2](#)

08:18:36 Brad White, Chief, Grand Co. Fire District, Colorado

[EXHIBIT 3](#)

08:18:50 Christian Bray and Jon Metropoulos joined the meeting.

Public Comment

08:34:15 Bob Biskupiak, FireSafe Montana

[EXHIBIT 4](#)

08:36:50 Ray Prill, FireSafe Montana

[EXHIBIT 5](#)

[EXHIBIT 6](#)

[EXHIBIT 7](#)

08:39:50 Lois Olsen, President of the Board, Tri County FireSafe Working Group

08:42:10 Peter Kolb, Montana Forest Owners Association

[EXHIBIT 8](#)

Committee Discussion / Questions

08:46:42 Jim Keane

08:48:19 Brad White, Grand Co.

08:48:39 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy

08:50:29 Brad White, Grand Co.

08:53:20 Rep. Shannon Maness
08:53:45 Ryan Handy, Headwaters Economics
08:55:19 Brian Yablonski
08:56:53 Ryan Handy, Headwaters Economics
08:58:54 Brian Yablonski
08:59:23 Bob Biskupiak, FireSafe Montana
09:00:55 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
09:04:00 Bob Biskupiak, FireSafe Montana
09:05:28 Sen. John Esp
09:07:56 Bob Biskupiak, FireSafe Montana
09:08:24 Scott Tuxbury, FireSafe Montana
09:10:04 Sen. John Esp
09:10:22 Presiding Officer Steve Gist
09:10:42 Sen. John Esp
09:10:56 Sen. Pat Flowers
09:11:22 Brad White, Grand Co.
09:14:18 Sen. Pat Flowers
09:15:34 Ryan Handy, Headwaters Economics
09:17:51 Sen. Tony Tezak
09:18:26 Brad White, Grand Co.
09:19:52 Jim Keane
09:20:36 Presiding Officer Steve Gist
09:20:47 Rep. Tom France
09:23:16 Ryan Handy, Headwaters Economics
09:23:35 Presiding Officer Steve Gist

09:24:21 **Recessed**
09:42:00 **Reconvened**

HOUSE BILL 70 STUDY OF STATE FIRE SUPPRESSION – PANEL

Agency and Law Enforcement Perspectives

09:42:14 Jason Mohr, Legislative Environmental Analyst, Legislative Services Division (LSD)
[EXHIBIT 9](#)
09:46:28 Jeff Burrows, Commissioner, Ravalli Co.
09:55:10 Rich Cowger, Fire Chief, Columbus Fire Rescue
10:03:12 Wyatt Frampton, Deputy Forestry Division Administrator, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
10:08:53 Steve Holton, Sheriff, Ravalli County
10:16:30 Jason Jarett, Galatian Co. Sherriff Office

- 10:19:06 Peter Kolb, Extension Forestry Specialist Montana State University (MSU)
[EXHIBIT 10](#)
[EXHIBIT 11](#)
[EXHIBIT 12](#)
- 10:41:38 Patrick Lonergan, Chief of Emergency Management and Fire, Gallatin Co.

Committee Discussion / Questions

- 10:43:58 Jim Keane
10:46:10 Wyatt Frampton, DNRC
10:46:17 Mike Mershon
10:46:59 Wyatt Frampton, DNRC
10:47:48 Brian Yablonski
10:50:57 Wyatt Frampton, DNRC
10:52:10 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
10:54:40 Rich Cowger, Columbus Fire Rescue
11:01:38 Peter Kolb, MSU
11:03:16 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
11:05:57 Rep. Paul Fielder
11:10:34 Peter Kolb, MSU
11:11:05 Rep. Jedediah Hinkle
11:18:23 Wyatt Frampton, DNRC
11:19:33 Presiding Officer Steve Gist
11:22:24 Rich Cowger, Columbus Fire Rescue

HOUSE BILL 70 STUDY OF STATE FIRE SUPPRESSION – PANEL

Private Sector Perspectives

- 11:25:25 Jason Mohr, LSD
11:25:51 Julia Altemus, Executive Director, Montana Wood Products Association (MWPA)
11:33:05 Kevin Erikson, Call When Needed Resources (CWN)
11:39:58 Jason Toddhunter, Regional Representative, Montana Logging Association (MLA)
11:45:06 Meranda Warren, Private Wildland Firefighting Contractor
[EXHIBIT 13](#)

Committee Discussion / Questions

- 11:56:17 Sen. Pat Flowers
11:59:03 Julia Altemus, MWPA
12:03:06 Sen. Pat Flowers
12:03:39 Presiding Officer Steve Gist
12:04:05 Jason Toddhunter, MLA
12:05:04 Kevin Eriksen, CWN

Public Comment

- 12:06:44 Charles Hammer
[EXHIBIT 15](#)
- 12:07:17 Brittany Peterson
[EXHIBIT 16](#)
- 12:07:36 Joe Kolman, Montana Electric Cooperatives Association
- 12:08:53 **Recessed**
- 13:07:04 **Reconvened**

COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

- 13:07:28 Rep. Tom France
[EXHIBIT 17](#)

Public Comment

- 13:10:18 None

Committee Discussion / Questions

- 13:10:45 Jon Metropoulos
- 13:11:00 Jason Mohr, Legislative Environmental Analyst, Legislative Services Division (LSD)
- 13:11:27 Rep. Paul Fielder
- 13:12:35 Jim Keane

Motion

- 13:13:07 Jim Keane moved the committee adopt the letter presented by Rep. Tom France and it be sent to Patrick Imeson of Tunnel Mines. The letter will also be presented to the court on February 4th during the DEQ hearing. The vote total will be noted on the letter.

Vote

- 13:14:59 Carried unanimously by voice vote.

DIRECTORS' REPORTS

- 13:17:57 Christy Clark, Director, Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP)
[EXHIBIT 18](#)
- 13:28:47 Erin Weisgerber, Deputy Director, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
- 13:33:25 Austin Bray, Director State and Federal Affairs, DNRC
- 13:44:06 Sonja Nowakowski, Director, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

Public Comment

13:55:20 None

Committee Discussion / Questions

13:55:39 Rep. Jedediah Hinkle
13:56:47 Christy Clark, FWP
13:57:08 Quentin Kujala, Chief, Conservation Policy, FWP
13:58:42 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
13:59:46 Quentin Kujala, FWP
14:00:17 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
14:01:47 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
14:02:44 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
14:03:20 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
14:03:40 Rep. Jedediah Hinkle
14:06:15 Quentin Kujala, FWP
14:06:58 Sen. Pat Flowers
14:09:12 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
14:09:41 Sen. John Esp
14:10:11 Mark Mershon
14:11:03 Quentin Kujala, FWP

GUIDANCE FOR GREENHOUSE GAS IMPACT ASSESSMENTS UNDER MONTANA ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY ACT (MEPA)

14:12:06 Sonja Nowakowski, Director, Department of Environmental Quality
[EXHIBIT 19](#)

Public Comment

14:20:32 None

Committee Discussion / Questions

14:20:56 Rep. Paul Fielder
14:21:26 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
14:21:49 Rep. Paul Fielder
14:21:54 Bo Wilkins, Air Quality Bureau Chief, DEQ
14:23:24 Rep. Paul Fielder
14:24:49 Presiding Officer Steve Gist
14:24:52 Jason Mohr, Environmental Analyst, Legislative Services Division
14:25:23 Rep. Paul Fielder

HUNTING, FISHING AND TRAPPING LICENSING AGENTS

14:26:09 Emily Cooper, Licensing Bureau Chief, Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP)

EXHIBIT 20

Public Comment

14:32:23 None

Committee Discussion / Questions

14:32:46 Rep. Jedediah Hinkle
14:33:05 Emily Cooper, FWP
14:33:45 Rep. Jedediah Hinkle
14:34:47 Rep. Shannon Maness
14:35:06 Emily Cooper, FWP
14:35:59 Rep. Shannon Maness
14:36:26 Rep. Joshua Seckinger
14:36:57 Sen. Pat Flowers
14:38:00 Emily Cooper, FWP
14:38:36 Rep. Tom France
14:38:51 Emily Cooper, FWP
14:39:29 Rep. Tom France
14:39:42 Rep. Joshua Seckinger
14:39:54 Emily Cooper, FWP
14:40:19 Rep. Joshua Seckinger

ELK & DEER MANAGEMENT

14:40:45 Quentin Kujala, Chief, Conservation Policy, Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP)

Public Comment

14:54:09 None

Committee Discussion / Questions

14:54:26 Rep. Shannon Maness
14:56:08 Quentin Kujala, FWP
14:56:48 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
14:57:06 Quentin Kujala, FWP
14:57:24 Sen. Pat Flowers
15:03:34 Quentin Kujala, FWP
15:04:49 Rep. Tom France
15:05:35 Quentin Kujala, FWP
15:06:43 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
15:07:05 Quentin Kujala, FWP

**ELK & DEER MANAGEMENT
Chronic Waste Disease (Cwd)**

15:08:12 Bevin McCormick, Wildlife Biologist, Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP)

Public Comment

15:19:15 None

Committee Discussion / Questions

15:19:35 Mike Mershon
15:20:25 Bevin McCormick, FWP
15:21:11 Rep. Paul Fielder
15:21:36 Bevin McCormick, FWP
15:22:07 Rep. Paul Fielder
15:22:44 Rep. Jedediah Hinkle
15:27:23 Bevin McCormick, FWP
15:28:17 Rep. Tom France
15:29:32 Bevin McCormick, FWP
15:31:00 Rep. Shannon Maness
15:32:01 Bevin McCormick, FWP

UPLAND GAME BIRD REPORT (87-1-250) - FISH WILDLIFE AND PARKS (FWP)

15:33:18 Ken Plourde, Wildlife Habitat Bureau Chief, FWP

[EXHIBIT 21](#)

Public Comment

15:43:27 None

Committee Discussion / Questions

15:43:34 None

FUTURE FISHERIES REPORT (87-1-272) - FISH WILDLIFE AND PARKS (FWP)

15:43:59 Adam Strainer, Fisheries Division Administrator, FWP

[EXHIBIT 22](#)

Public Comment

15:49:00 Clayton Elliott, Montana Trout Unlimited

Committee Discussion / Questions

15:50:53 None

PUBLIC COMMENT ON ANY ISSUE WITHIN THE JURISDICTION OF THE EQC

15:51:21 Raylynn Brandl, Conservation Districts

Committee Discussion / Questions

15:53:14 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy

ADMINISTRATIVE WORK SESSION

15:55:10 Rep. Tom France
15:58:48 Jason Mohr, Legislative Environmental Analyst, Legislative Services Division (LSD)
16:03:11 Presiding Officer Steve Gist
16:04:32 Jason Mohr, LSD
16:04:49 Presiding Officer Steve Gist
16:04:57 Rep. Tom France
16:05:36 Presiding Officer Steve Gist
16:06:07 Rep. Paul Fielder
16:06:52 Sen. John Esp
16:07:45 Rep. Tom France
16:08:02 Jason Mohr, LSD
16:08:34 Presiding Officer Steve Gist
16:08:53 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
16:09:54 Sen. Pat Flowers
16:10:07 Jason Mohr, LSD
16:10:43 Rep. Tom France
16:11:09 Presiding Officer Steve Gist
[EXHIBIT 23](#)
16:15:42 Sen. Forrest Mandeville
16:16:44 Presiding Officer Steve Gist
16:18:47 Sen. Pat Flowers
16:19:35 Rep. Jedediah Hinkle
16:19:48 Presiding Officer Steve Gist
16:20:42 Sen. Pat Flowers
16:21:17 Presiding Officer Steve Gist

Motion

16:21:35 Presiding Officer Steve Gist moved to adopt the work group plan for House Bill 70.

Vote

16:21:55 Carried unanimously by voice vote.

ADMINISTRATIVE WORK SESSION

Conclusion

16:22:15 Jason Mohr, LSD

16:23:01 Presiding Officer Steve Gist

ADJOURNMENT

Adjournment: 16:23:30