



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

Jim Keane
Mike Mershon
Jon Metropoulos
Richard Roth
Brian Yablonski

COMMITTEE STAFF

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

MINUTES LOG

October 23, 2025
Capital 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.

Access to an electronic copy of these minutes and the audio or video recording is provided from the Legislative Branch home page at <https://leg.mt.gov>. From the home page, select the "Committees" drop down menu at the top, then select Administrative or Interim, and the appropriate committee. The written minutes log can be located by expanding the accordion menu for the date of the meeting. Links to the audio/video files can be located by selecting the Video/Audio button on the same page, then the "past/current recordings" button. From there, use the calendar to select the date of the meeting you wish to view/listen to. The written Minutes Log, along with links to the audio and video recordings, is listed by meeting date on the interim committee's web page. Each of the Exhibits is linked and can be viewed by clicking on the Exhibit of interest. All Exhibits are public information and may be printed. Please contact the Legislative Services Division at 406-444-3064 for more information.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Rep. Paul Fielder, Presiding Officer (R)
Sen. Willis Curdy, Vice Presiding Officer (D)
Sen. Pat Flowers (D)
Rep. Steve Gist (R)
Rep. Jedediah Hinkle (R)
Rep. Shannon Maness (R)
Mike Mershon, Public Member
Jon Metropoulos, Public Member
Richard Roth, Governor's Designated Representative
Sen. Tony Tezak (R)
Brian Yablonski, Public Member

MEMBERS EXCUSED:

Sen. John Esp (R)
Sen. Wylie Galt (R)
Sen. Forrest Mandeville (R)
Rep. Tom France (D)
Rep. Joshua Seckinger (D)
Jim Keane, Public Member

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT:

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

AGENDA [\(Attachment 1\)](#)

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

CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

08:02:00 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder called the meeting to order at 8:02 AM. The committee secretary took roll.

OPENING REMARKS

08:03:42 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

UPDATES ON RELEVANT COMMITTEE MEETINGS

08:05:44 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
08:06:28 Sen. John Esp joined the meeting.
08:06:44 Jim Keane joined the meeting.
08:10:15 Rep. Joshua Seckinger joined the meeting.

STATUS OF MONTANA TUNNELS MINE, DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY (DEQ)

08:11:24 Sonja Nowakowski, Director, DEQ

[EXHIBIT 1](#)

[EXHIBIT 2](#)

Public Comment

08:19:20 Mary Mooney, Mooney Group

[EXHIBIT 3](#)

08:26:38 Terri Kunz, Jefferson County Treasurer

08:28:56 Matt Vincent, Executive Director, Montana Mining Association

08:36:12 Cory Kirtsch, Jefferson County

Committee Questions / Discussion

08:37:08 Sen. Tony Tezak

08:37:31 Mary Mooney, Mooney Group

08:39:42 Jim Keane

Motion

08:40:34 Jim Keane made a motion to send a committee letter to Patrick Imeson requesting the release of Tunnel Mine ownership. Stating Patrick Imeson falls under statutory bad actor language.

Discussion on the Motion / Vote and the Intention of the Letter

08:42:49 Jon Metropoulos
08:43:04 Mary Mooney, Mooney Group
08:43:56 Jon Metropoulos
08:44:47 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
08:45:34 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
08:46:32 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
08:46:44 Sen. Tony Tezak
08:47:27 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
08:47:54 Rep. Steve Gist
08:48:38 Sen. Pat Flowers
08:49:41 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
08:50:00 Sen. John Esp
08:50:15 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

Vote

08:50:32 Carried unanimously by voice vote.
[Proxies](#)

Committee Questions / Discussion

08:51:36 Jim Keane, requested the letter note the council voted unanimously, and the letter be posted and be available online once approved.
08:52:55 Sen. Pat Flowers
08:53:50 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
08:54:11 Sen. Pat Flowers

STATUS OF REMEDIATION AT ZORTMAN-LANDUSKY MINE

08:54:50 Sonja Nowakowski, Director, DEQ
[EXHIBIT 4](#)
[EXHIBIT 5](#)

Public Comment

09:00:30 Cesar Hernandez, Cabinet Resource Group

Committee Questions / Discussion

09:03:16 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder
09:03:52 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy

09:04:10 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
09:04:44 Jon Metropoulos

Motion

09:04:58 Jon Metropoulos moved to send a committee letter to Sonya German encouraging continued good cooperation with Department of Environmental Quality regarding funding for the Zortman mine.

Vote

09:06:26 Carried unanimously by voice vote.
[Proxies](#)

Committee Questions / Discussion

09:06:54 Presiding Officer Fielder requested the letter include a note of the unanimous vote from the council
09:07:28 Jim Keane
09:07:47 Rep. Joshua Seckinger
09:08:44 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ

**DIRECTORS' REPORTS: ANNUAL AGENCY PLAN (2-12-104, MCA), ANNUAL AGENCY PERFORMANCE REPORT (2-12-105, MCA), ADDITIONAL TOPICS
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY (DEQ)**

09:09:09 Sonja Nowakowski, Director, DEQ
09:09:47 James Fahr, Deputy Director, DEQ
[EXHIBIT 6](#)
[EXHIBIT 7](#)
09:20:54 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
[EXHIBIT 8](#)

Public Comment

09:27:32 Matt Elsaesser, Deputy Director, Missouri Water Keeper

Committee Questions / Discussion

09:29:39 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
09:31:37 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
09:32:18 Sen. Pat Flowers
09:33:14 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
09:33:37 Rep. Joshua Seckinger
09:35:01 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
09:39:00 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
09:39:34 Sen. John Esp
09:40:01 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
09:40:12 Sen. John Esp

09:41:57 Sen. Tony Tezak
09:42:07 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ
09:42:25 Rep. Joshua Seckinger
09:42:45 Dir. Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ

AIR QUALITY MONITORING

09:43:41 Sonja Nowakowski, Director, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
09:44:27 Bo Wilkins, Air Quality Bureau Chief, DEQ

[EXHIBIT 9](#)

[EXHIBIT 10](#)

Public Comment

09:55:17 Cesar Hernandez, Cabinet Resource Group
09:55:52 Bo Wilkins, DEQ
09:56:26 Michele Dieterich

Committee Questions / Discussion

10:00:50 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder
10:01:07 Sen. Pat Flowers
10:01:58 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder
(See Exhibit 10)
10:05:36 Rep. Steve Gist
10:05:45 Michele Dieterich
10:07:21 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
10:07:46 Michele Dieterich
10:08:08 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
10:08:55 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder
10:09:15 Brian Yablonski
10:11:35 Bo Wilkins, DEQ

RARE EARTH ELEMENTS / CRITICAL MINERALS IN MONTANA

10:12:58 Matt Vincent, Executive Director, Montana Mining Association (MMA)

[EXHIBIT 11](#)

Public Comment

10:37:57 Cesar Hernandez, Cabinet Resource Group
10:39:44 Sonja Nowakowski, Director, Department of Environmental Quality

Committee Questions / Discussion

10:40:55 Rep. Jedediah Hinkle
10:44:02 Matt Vincent, MMA

10:46:26 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

RARE EARTH ELEMENTS / CRITICAL MINERALS IN MONTANA - CONTINUED

10:47:03 John Metesh, Executive Director, Critical Minerals Initiatives, Montana Tech

Public Comment

10:52:27 None

Committee Questions / Discussion

10:52:45 Rep. Shannon Maness

10:53:08 Matt Vincent, MMA

10:54:01 Jim Keane

10:56:16 John Metesh, Montana Tech

10:56:30 Sen. Tony Tezak

10:56:44 Matt Vincent, MMA

Motion

10:58:09 Sen. Tony Tezak moved the committee work with Matt Vincent from Montana Mining Association to draft a letter to the Administration of Federal Programs to ensure funding back to Montana.

Discussion on the Motion

10:59:28 Matt Vincent, MMA

11:00:11 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

11:00:18 Jason Mohr, Legislative Environmental Analyst, Legislative Services Division

11:01:05 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

Vote

11:01:24 Carried unanimously by voice vote.

[Proxies](#)

[Sen. Esp Proxy](#)

Committee Discussion – Point of Order

11:03:24 Sen. Pat Flowers

11:03:53 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

[EXHIBIT 12](#)

11:05:36 Sen. Pat Flowers

11:06:07 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

WOLF MANAGEMENT: HUNTING SEASON, FEDERAL COURT RULING, ANNUAL REPORT (87-1-901, MCA)

11:06:46 Ken McDonald, Chief, Wildlife Division, Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP)
[EXHIBIT 13](#)

11:16:16 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

11:16:26 Ken McDonald

11:21:52 Alex Scolavino, Legal Counsel, FWP

Public Comment

11:53:05 Mark Cook, Montana Rocky Wolves
[EXHIBIT 14](#)

11:55:42 Art Comptom, Footloose Montana

11:58:17 Ceaser Hernandez

11:59:28 Gale Richardson, Bozeman

12:02:14 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder addressed public comments.

12:02:55 Brian Yablonski left the meeting.

12:03:05 Michelle Dieterich

12:04:18 Lizzy Pennock, Wild Earth Guardians

12:05:33 James Bell, Bozeman

12:06:52 Melissa Ftizgerald

12:08:06 Tessa Samuels

12:08:43 Cassandra Rideg

12:09:59 KC York, Trap Free Montana

12:12:24 Josh Schott, Team Wolf

12:13:56 Sylvia Borgonova, Missoula

12:14:55 Susan Bilo, Bozeman

12:15:54 Nastaran Rahn timer, England

Committee Questions / Discussion

12:17:01 Sen. Pat Flowers
[EXHIBIT 15](#)

12:20:02 Sen. Tony Tezak
(See Exhibit 15)

12:21:07 Rep. Joshua Seckinger

12:21:57 Alex Scolavino, FWP

12:22:15 Rep. Joshua Seckinger

12:22:37 Joseph Carroll, Legal Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)

12:23:28 Rep. Joshua Seckinger

12:25:22 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

12:29:26 Alex Scolavino, FWP

12:30:17 Mike Mershon
12:31:06 Ken McDonald, FWP
12:31:44 Mike Mershon
12:33:07 Ken McDonald, FWP

STATUS OF FISH WILDLIFE PARKS (FWP) LICENSE PROVIDERS

Presentation will be given at the January meeting.

12:34:49 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy, on behalf of Emily Cooper, Licensing Bureau Chief, FWP

[EXHIBIT 16](#)

12:36:24 **Recessed**

13:40:13 **Reconvened**

HOUSE BILL 70 (STUDY OF STATE FIRE SUPPRESSION)

13:41:52 Jason Mohr, Legislative Environmental Analyst, Legislative Services Division (LSD)

[EXHIBIT 17](#)

TECHNICAL ERROR

14:00:50 The meeting was temporarily recessed while issues were addressed.

HOUSE BILL 70 (STUDY OF STATE FIRE SUPPRESSION) - Continued

14:07:00 Jason Mohr, LSD
(See Exhibit 17)

Public Comment

14:18:47 None

Committee Questions / Discussion

14:19:10 Rep. Steve Gist

House Bill 70 (STUDY OF STATE FIRE SUPPRESSION) - LEGISLATIVE FISCAL DIVISION (LFD)

14:20:57 Alice Hecht, Fiscal Analyst, LFD

14:40:56 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

Committee Questions / Discussion

14:42:35 Rep. Joshua Seckinger

14:43:23 Jim Keane

14:43:59 Alice Hecht, LFD

**House Bill 70 (STUDY OF STATE FIRE SUPPRESSION)
WILDFIRE SEASON SUMMARY - DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCE AND
CONSERVATION (DNRC)**

14:44:39 Wyatt Frampton, Deputy Division Administrator, DNRC

Public Comment

14:54:27 None

Committee Questions / Discussion

14:54:43 Rep. Shannon Maness
14:56:12 Wyatt Frampton, DNRC
14:57:01 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder
14:57:14 Wyatt Frampton, DNRC
14:57:23 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
15:02:42 Wyatt Frampton, DNRC
15:04:03 Rep. Steve Gist
15:04:21 Wyatt Frampton, DNRC
15:05:36 Jim Keane
15:07:03 Wyatt Frampton, DNRC
15:08:30 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT AND RESOURCE RECOVERY PLAN (75-10-111, MCA)

15:09:46 Amy Steinmetz, Division Administrator, Waste Management and Remediation
Division, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

[EXHIBIT 18](#)

Committee Questions / Discussion

15:16:38 Mike Mershon
15:17:54 Amy Steinmetz, DEQ
15:18:33 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
15:20:29 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder
15:20:57 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
15:21:18 Amy Steinmetz, DEQ
15:21:47 Sen. John Esp
15:22:22 Rep. Joshua Seckinger
15:22:59 Amy Steinmetz, DEQ
15:23:47 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

ORPHAN SHARE FUNDS ANNUAL REPORT (75-10-743, MCA)

15:24:12 Amy Steinmetz, Division Administrator, Waste Management and Remediation
Division, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

[EXHIBIT 19](#)

Public Comment

15:29:36 None

Committee Questions / Discussion

15:29:44 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
15:30:33 Amy Steinmetz, DEQ
15:31:39 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
15:32:17 Sen. John Esp
15:33:00 Jim Keane

LIBBY ASBESTOS OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE (75-10-1601, MCA)

15:33:43 Amy Steinmetz, Waste Management and Remediation Division Administrator,
Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)

[EXHIBIT 20](#)

Public Comment

15:34:55 None

Committee Questions / Discussion

15:35:21 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder
15:36:11 Rep. Joshua Seckinger
15:36:15 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

15:37:02 **Recessed**

15:49:18 **Reconvened**

**SAGE GROUSE REPORTS - DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES AND
CONSERVATION (DNRC)**

15:49:50 Richard Roth, Governor's Designated Representative

15:50:33 Therese Hartman, Program Manager, Sage Grouse Habitat Conservation, DNRC

[EXHIBIT 21](#)

16:07:08 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

Public Comment

16:07:39 Peter Dudley, Montana Audubon

Committee Questions / Discussion

16:09:07 Richard Roth
16:09:31 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
16:10:38 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

SAGE GROUSE REPORTS - MONTANA FISH WILDLIFE AND PARKS (FWP)

16:11:08 Ken McDonald, Chief, Wildlife Division, FWP

[EXHIBIT 22](#)

Public Comment

16:15:00 None

Committee Questions / Discussion

16:15:23 Richard Roth
16:15:50 Ken McDonald, FWP
16:16:42 Rep. Shannon Maness
16:18:25 Ken McDonald, FWP
16:19:00 Sen. Pat Flowers
16:24:36 Ken McDonald, FWP
16:26:29 Vice Presiding Officer Willis Curdy
16:26:58 Ken McDonald, FWP
16:27:49 Mark Mershon
16:28:35 Ken McDonald, FWP
16:29:33 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

ENVIRONMENTAL INDICATORS

16:31:18 Jason Mohr, Legislative Environmental Analyst, Legislative Services Division (LSD)

Public Comment

16:35:31 None

Committee Questions / Discussion

16:35:52 Sen. Pat Flowers
16:36:11 Jason Mohr, LSD
16:36:34 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

PUBLIC COMMENT ON ANY ISSUE WITHIN THE JURISDICTION OF THE EQC

16:37:03 Peter Dudley, Montana Audubon
16:38:14 KC York, Trap Free Montana

ADMINISTRATIVE WORK SESSION

16:39:41 Jason Mohr, Legislative Environmental Analyst, Legislative Services Division (LSD)
16:42:16 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder
16:42:31 Joseph Carroll, Legal Staff, LSD
16:43:29 Sen. John Esp
16:44:02 Jon Metropoulos

16:44:46 Jason Mohr, LSD
16:45:49 Sen. Pat Flowers
16:46:07 Jacelyn Sterling, Committee Secretary, LSD
16:48:04 Sen. John Esp
16:48:30 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

Motion

16:48:42 Sen. Tezak moved that a committee letter be drafted working alongside Matt Vincent with the Montana Mining Association. The letter would be sent to the Administration and Federal Programs to ensure funding makes it to the state of Montana for critical mineral projects. The language will be detailed and clarified between Jason Mohr and Matt Vincent. A committee zoom meeting will be held to review the language and approve the letter before it is sent.

Discussion on the Motion

16:49:30 Jim Keane
16:49:36 Sen. Tony Tezak
16:49:38 Joseph Carroll, LSD
16:49:54 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder
16:50:19 Sen. John Esp
16:50:28 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder
16:50:51 Jason Mohr, LSD
16:51:06 Rep. Joshua Seckinger

Vote

16:51:20 Carried unanimously by voice vote.
[Proxies](#)

Committee Discussion, Closing Remarks

16:52:03 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder
16:52:12 Jason Mohr, LSD
16:52:17 Rep. Joshua Seckinger
16:52:54 Presiding Officer Paul Fielder

ADJOURNMENT

Adjournment: 16:53:26