



WATER POLICY INTERIM COMMITTEE

69th Montana Legislature

SENATE MEMBERS

Willis Curdy
Wylie Galt
Bruce "Butch" Gillespie
Bob Phalen

HOUSE MEMBERS

Jill Cohenour
Jamie Isaly
Tom Millett
Russ Miner
Tracy Sharp

COMMITTEE STAFF

Toni Henneman - Deputy Research Director
Maddelyn Pennington - Secretary
Alexis Sandru - Legal Staff

MINUTES LOG

January 12, 2026
Room 137 & 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:

Sen. Wylie Galt, Presiding Officer (R)
Rep. Jill Cohenour, Vice Presiding Officer (D)
Sen. Willis Curdy (D)
Sen. Bruce "Butch" Gillespie (R)
Rep. Jamie Isaly (D)
Rep. Tom Millett (R)
Rep. Russ Miner (R)
Sen. Bob Phalen (R)
Rep. Tracy Sharp (R)

MEMBERS EXCUSED:

MEMBERS ABSENT:

STAFF PRESENT:

Toni Henneman, Deputy Research Director, Lead Staff
Jacelyn Sterling, Secretary
Alexis Sandru, Legal Staff

AGENDA ([Attachment 1](#))

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

CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

09:00:10 Presiding Officer Wylie Galt, called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. The committee secretary took roll.

Meeting Overview

09:00:40 Toni Henneman, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)

[EXHIBIT 1](#)

[EXHIBIT 2](#)

MEMBER TOPIC: EXEMPT GROUNDWATER WELLS

Litigation Update

09:04:02 Alexis Sandru, Legal Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)

[EXHIBIT 3](#)

MEMBER TOPIC: EXEMPT GROUNDWATER WELLS

Review of Other 2025 Water-Related Bills

09:07:39 Anna Pakenham Stevenson, Water Resource Division Administrator, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)

[EXHIBIT 4](#)

Committee Questions / Discussion

09:22:15 Sen. Willis Curdy

09:23:20 Anna Pakenham Stevenson, DNRC

09:23:54 Nate Ward, Water Rights Bureau Chief, DNRC

MEMBER TOPIC: EXEMPT GROUNDWATER WELLS

Idaho History of Exempt Wells and Review of S1083

09:24:53 Shelley Keen, Deputy Director, Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR)

[EXHIBIT 5](#)

09:47:40 Paul Arrington, Executive Director, Idaho Water Users Association (IWUA)

[EXHIBIT 6](#)

[EXHIBIT 7](#)

10:19:13 Shelley Keen, IDWR
(See EXHIBIT 5 Page 16)

Public Comment / Questions to Idaho Water Resource Division

10:24:51 Raylee Honeycutt, Montana Stock Growers Association

10:25:57 Paul Arrington, IWUA

10:27:16 Shelley Keen, IDWR
10:29:23 Hertha Lund, Montana Senior Water Rights Coalition
10:31:51 Shelley Keen, IDWR
10:32:33 Paul Arrington, IWUA
10:32:48 Adrienne Cotton, Montana Building Industry Association
10:33:26 Clayton Elliott, Montana Trout Unlimited (MTU)
10:35:58 Shelley Keen, IDWR
10:39:53 Paul Arrington, IWUA
10:44:11 Clayton Elliott, MTU
10:44:52 Shelley Keen, IDWR
10:46:41 John Tubs, Upper Missouri Water Kepper
10:50:02 Paul Arrington, IWUA
10:53:30 Shelley Keen, IDWR
10:54:24 Greg Thomas, Bozeman
10:57:20 Paul Arrington, IWUA
10:57:58 Shelley Keen, IDWR
11:00:38 Jennifer Miller, East Helena
11:06:11 Breeann Jonson, Water Rights Attorney, Bozeman
11:08:39 Paul Arrington, IWUA

Committee Questions / Discussion to Idaho Water Resource Division

11:13:16 Rep. Tracy Sharp
11:15:39 Shelley Keen, IDWR
11:16:15 Vice Presiding Officer Jill Cohenour
11:16:40 Shelley Keen, IDWR
11:18:53 Vice Presiding Officer Jill Cohenour
11:19:42 Paul Arrington, IWUA
11:21:10 Presiding Officer Wylie Galt
11:21:22 Shelley Keen, IDWR

Public Comment

11:22:14 Daniella Bowen, Helena
11:24:58 Mary Heinemann, Townsend
11:28:37 Scott Mara, Great Falls
11:32:50 Peter Scott, Bozeman
11:36:05 Ronda Wiggers, Montana Water Well Drillers Association
11:41:28 Cayton Elliott, Montana Trout Unlimited
11:45:51 Raylee Honeycutt, Montana Stock Growers Association
11:48:34 Sen. Mary Ann Dunwell, SD 42
11:51:40 Carol Rash, Park City

Committee Questions / Discussion

11:54:55 Sen. Willis Curdy
11:55:51 Alexis Sandru, Legal Staff, LSD
11:57:06 Sen. Bob Phalen
11:57:46 Ronda Wiggers, Montana Water Well Drillers Association
11:59:55 Presiding Officer Wylie Galt
12:00:37 Anna Pakenham Stevenson, DNRC
12:02:40 Sen. Willis Curdy
12:03:14 Anna Pakenham Stevenson, DNRC
12:05:38 Presiding Officer Wylie Galt

AGENCY UPDATE & MONITORING

Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)

12:06:10 Toni Henneman, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)
[EXHIBIT 8](#)
12:07:57 Erin Weisgerber, Deputy Director, DNRC

Public Comment

12:12:23 Rayelynn Brandl, Executive Director, Montana Association of Conservation Districts

Committee Questions / Discussion

12:13:46 None

12:14:23 **Recessed**

13:17:48 **Reconvened**

AGENCY UPDATE & MONITORING

13:17:57 Sonja Nowakowski, Director, Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)
[EXHIBIT 9](#)
13:25:55 Christy Clark, Director, Fish Wildlife and Parks (FWP)

Public Comment

13:30:35 Clayton Elliott, Montana Trout Unlimited

Committee Questions / Discussion

13:32:21 Sen. Bob Phalen
13:32:33 Sonja Nowakowski, DEQ

RULE REVIEW

13:33:14 Alexis Sandru, Legal Staff, Legislative Services Division

WATER RIGHTS ADJUDICATION UPDATE (85-2-281, MCA)

13:35:14 Todd Netto, Bureau Chief, Adjudication Enforcement & Distribution Bureau,
Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)

[EXHIBIT 10](#)

13:44:10 Stephen Brown, Chief Water Judge, Water Court

[EXHIBIT 11](#)

Public Comment

14:03:06 Clayton Elliott, Montana Trout Unlimited

14:07:38 Raylee Honeycutt, Montana Stock Growers Association

Committee Questions / Discussion

14:08:25 Rep. Tracy Sharp

14:12:05 Judge Stephen Brown

14:14:21 Vice Presiding Officer Jill Cohenour

14:17:45 Judge Stephen Brown

14:18:41 Presiding Officer Wylie Galt

14:19:09 Judge Stephen Brown

HJ 74 STUDY: WATER REUSE AND STORAGE

14:21:34 Toni Henneman, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)

14:23:15 Trevor Watson, Deputy Division Administrator, Acting State Water Project
Bureau Chief, Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)

[EXHIBIT 12](#)

[EXHIBIT 13](#)

14:41:18 Ginnette Abdo, Program Manager, Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology

[EXHIBIT 14](#)

[EXHIBIT 15](#)

[EXHIBIT 16](#)

Public Comment

15:01:03 Greyson Gee, Rainmaker Technology Cooperation

Committee Questions / Discussion

15:03:59 Sen. Willis Curdy

15:08:13 Trevor Watson, DNRC

15:09:19 Sen. Bruce "Butch" Gillespie

15:09:56 Trevor Watson, DNRC

15:11:51 **Recessed**

15:18:50 **Reconvened**

DATA CENTER WATER USE

15:19:00 Pace Ralli, Vice President Project Development, Beowulf Electricity and Data
15:25:31 Rob Corbin, Senior Vice President Energy Development, Sabey Data Centers

Public Comment

15:31:34 Matt Elsasser, Upper Missouri Water Keepers
15:32:51 Ben Catton, Montana Environmental Information Center
15:36:24 Clayton Elliott, Montana Trout Unlimited
15:40:48 Rep. Jane Gillette, HD 77

Committee Questions / Discussion

15:44:53 Vice Presiding Officer Jill Cohenour
15:47:51 Pace Ralli, Beowulf Electricity and Data
15:48:20 Rob Corbin, Sabey Data Centers
15:49:37 Vice Presiding Officer Jill Cohenour
15:50:25 Sen. Willis Curdy
15:51:32 Lyndsey Krywaruchka, Water Quality Division Administrator, Department of
Environmental Quality (DEQ)
15:52:12 Eric Sivers, Water Quality Analyst, DEQ
15:53:37 Sen. Willis Curdy
15:54:16 Anna Pakenham Stevenson, Water Resource Division Administrator, Department
of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC)
15:56:51 Sen. Willis Curdy
15:57:04 Anna Pakenham Stevenson, DNRC
15:57:34 Rep. Tracy Sharp
16:02:48 Ron Corbin, Sabey Data Centers
16:04:27 Sen. Bob Phalen
16:06:29 Pace Ralli, Beowulf Electricity and Data
16:06:56 Rep. Jamie Isaly
16:07:16 Pace Ralli, Beowulf Electricity and Data
16:08:01 Rep. Jamie Isaly
16:08:29 Rob Corbin, Sabey Data Centers
16:09:34 Rep. Tracy Sharp
16:09:58 Rob Corbin, Sabey Data Centers

COMMITTEE WORK SESSION

16:11:00 Toni Henneman, Lead Staff, Legislative Services Division (LSD)
[EXHIBIT 17](#)

16:18:40 Vice Presiding Officer Jill Cohenour
16:19:38 Presiding Officer Wylie Galt
16:20:13 Vice Presiding Officer Jill Cohenour
16:21:24 Presiding Officer Wylie Galt
16:21:32 Toni Henneman, LSD
16:21:57 Presiding Officer Wylie Galt
16:22:06 Rep. Tracy Sharp
16:22:38 Toni Henneman, LSD
16:23:39 Rep. Tracy Sharp
16:24:08 Toni Henneman, LSD
16:25:07 Vice Presiding Officer Jill Cohenour
16:26:16 Rep. Russ Miner
16:26:53 Vice Presiding Officer Jill Cohenour
16:27:37 Rep. Russ Miner
16:28:16 Alexis Sandru, Legal Staff, LSD
16:28:38 Rep. Tom Millett
16:29:50 Vice Presiding Officer Jill Cohenour
16:31:07 Sen. Willis Curdy
16:32:24 Vice Presiding Officer Jill Cohenour
16:33:10 Sen. Bob Phalen
16:33:56 Rep. Tracy Sharp
16:35:00 Presiding Officer Wylie Galt
16:35:01 Toni Henneman, LSD
16:37:17 Sen. Bob Phalen
16:37:24 Toni Henneman, LSD

PUBLIC COMMENT ON ANY ITEM IN WPIC'S SUBJECT MATTER

16:38:18 Sharron Mason

[EXHIBIT 18](#)

ADJOURNMENT

Adjournment: 16:38:56