

## What is the EQC?

The Environmental Quality Council (EQC) is a state legislative committee created by the 1971 Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). As outlined in MEPA, the EQC's purpose is to encourage conditions under which people can coexist with nature in "productive harmony". The committee fulfills this purpose by assisting the Legislature in the development of natural resource and environmental policy, by conducting studies on related issues, and by serving in an advisory capacity to the state's executive branch natural resource programs.

### How can the public become involved?

Members of the public can become involved in the activities of the EQC by attending committee meetings or by contacting committee members or the EQC office. Participation in EQC activities provides interested persons with the opportunity to:

- access information on the state's natural resources and assist in the oversight of the state's natural resource programs;
- become involved in the creation and resolution of complex policy issues; and
- promote governmental accountability.

The EQC deals with some of the most complex and divisive issues in the state. It welcomes your involvement in the discussion and resolution of these issues.

### Who is on the EQC?

The EQC has 17 members: 6 state senators; 6 state representatives; 4 members of the public; and 1 nonvoting member who represents the Governor. The EQC is bipartisan. The House,

Senate, and public members are all chosen by the majority and minority leaders of each house.

EQC members serve 2-year terms. Members may serve no more than 3 terms.

#### Senate Members

John Brenden (R-Scobey)  
Bradley Maxon Hamlett (D-Cascade)  
Jim Keane (D-Butte), Presiding Officer  
Rick Ripley (R-Wolf Creek)  
Chas Vincent (R-Libby)  
Gene Vuckovich (D-Anaconda)

#### House Members

Duane Ankney (R-Colstrip), Vice Presiding Officer  
Jerry Bennett (R-Libby)  
Bill McChesney (D-Miles City)  
Michele Reinhart (D-Missoula)  
Cary Smith (R-Billings)  
Kathleen Williams (D-Bozeman)

#### Public Members

Dexter Busby (Great Falls)  
Diane Conradi (Whitefish)  
Mary Fitzpatrick (Billings)  
John Youngberg (Belgrade)

#### Governor's Representative

Mike Volesky

### Who staffs the EQC?

The Legislative Environmental Policy Office (LEPO) staff, under the supervision of the Legislative Environmental Analyst, assists EQC members in completing their duties. Staff responsibilities include conducting studies, writing reports, reviewing natural resource agency actions, organizing public meetings, drafting legislation, and serving as committee staff to several legislative committees during legislative sessions.

The LEPO staff acts as an impartial and nonpolitical source of information on

environmental matters for the EQC, the Legislature, and the public. Current staff are:

Legislative Environmental Analyst . . . . Joe Kolman  
Research Analyst . . . . . Jason Mohr  
Research Analyst . . . . . Sonja Nowakowski  
Research Analyst . . . . . Hope Stockwell  
Research and Publications . . . . . Maureen Theisen

### 2011-2012 EQC Activities

At the conclusion of each legislative session, the EQC meets to discuss its work for the coming 18 months based on studies recommended by the Legislature and assigned by the Legislative Council, ongoing duties established in law, carry-over issues from past interims, and topics of special interest to committee members. At its first meeting of the interim, the EQC decided to focus its work on these topics:

#### House Joint Resolution No. 32 (HJ 32): Study of state parks and recreation and heritage programs

The HJ 32 study originated from discussions between the legislative and executive branches about the management and funding of Montana's parks system and the importance of state parks and heritage sites to Montana communities. The resolution included a request for an interim committee to review past studies and legislative audits, evaluate and make recommendations on coordination with other government agencies, and study similar programs in the Rocky Mountain region.

After studying the information presented during the interim and hearing from interested parties, the Council will provide a summary of the

findings and potential legislation to the 2013 Legislature.

**House Bill No. 142 (HB 142): Review of statutorily required agency reports and advisory councils**

In the interest of promoting the best use of public resources, HB 142 requires all interim committees to review statutorily established advisory councils and agency reports and to make recommendations regarding their retention or elimination to the 2013 Legislature. The EQC has scheduled the review of eight advisory councils and more than a dozen statutorily required reports from the following agencies: the Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks (DFWP), the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), the Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC), the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Labor and Industry.

**Senate Joint Resolution No. 26 (SJ 26): Recommends that legislative and administrative committees monitor specific executive branch programs**

**Background:** The SJ 26 study resolution developed from House Appropriations Subcommittee discussions during the 2011 Session. The SJ 26 duties related to the EQC require the Council to monitor:

- the DFWP agency goals and objectives for the migratory bird program, the upland game bird program, and the brucellosis in elk study;
- the DEQ cleanup progress at the KRY site; and
- progress toward closing petroleum tank release sites.

LEPO staff is coordinating with the Legislative Finance Committee to ensure the Committee remains informed of the EQC's work.

**Agency Oversight and Statutory Duties**

Although the EQC bases its interim work in large part on the studies assigned by the Legislative Council, the foundation of its work are the statutory duties outlined in MEPA and in other sections of the law.

Specifically, the EQC will:

- conduct rule review for the DEQ, DNRC, and DFWP;
- monitor agency compliance and enforcement reporting; and
- review natural resource litigation.

**Other topics** that the EQC has asked or is statutorily required to keep informed about include:

- the progress of the water adjudication process initiated by House Bill No. 22 (2005);
- issues related to public uses and eminent domain and eminent domain-related litigation; and
- the solvency of the Petroleum Tank Release Fund.

For more information, please contact the EQC:

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