

Press Release

7/1/08

Contact: Sen. Jim Elliott, (406) 827-3671

Comments sought on water policy study

The Water Policy Interim Committee of the Legislature is seeking public comment on its draft report, the first of its kind issued in more than a decade.

The committee was created by the 2007 Legislature and charged with studying a wide range of water issues in order to guide Montana's water policy toward ensuring fair and reasonable use of Montana's water resources as demands on water increase while supplies remain the same or decrease.

This is the first time since 1995 that the Legislature has had an interim committee devoted to water policy.

Draft recommendations the committee seeks comment on include:

- * Providing funding for a statewide hydrogeologic study that would establish baseline data to be used in making water use decisions.
- * Changing the process for issuing new water permits to make it faster and easier to understand.
- * Establishing an expedited permit process for subdivisions that use public water systems instead of individual wells that are exempt from permitting requirements.
- * Creating a revolving loan program that would fund public water and sewer systems to reduce the number of individual wells and septic systems in subdivisions.
- * Protect senior water right holders with the timely enforcement of illegal water use and the resolution of water disputes.
- * Clarifying that local government may require public water and sewer systems in subdivisions.

The draft report, including draft legislation, is available for comment from July 1 through July 31. Comments will be compiled and presented to the WPIC at a meeting Aug. 12-13 in Helena. At that time, the committee will consider revisions to the report and any recommended legislation.

Final versions of the report and any legislation will be debated in September.

The full report: "Water – Montana's Treasure" is available online at: www.leg.mt.gov/water. The website includes all the information reviewed by the committee.

The public also may comment on a **draft case study report** conducted by the Montana Bureau of Mines and Geology. The 2007 Legislature directed the agency to study the extent to which ground water withdrawals may result in net depletion of surface water in a closed basin or in specific areas of a closed basin. The report is available on the WPIC web site.

Copies also may be obtained by calling (406) 444-3742.

Comments may be submitted by email to jkolman@mt.gov. Please put "water" in the subject line.

To submit comments by mail, send to: Joe Kolman, Legislative Environmental Policy Office, P.O. Box 201704, Helena, MT 59620-1704.

Sen. Jim Elliott, D-Trout Creek, chairs the committee. Other members are Sens. Larry Jent, D-Bozeman; Terry Murphy, R-Cardwell; and Gary Perry, R-Manhattan; and Reps. Scott Boggio, R-Red Lodge; Jill Cohenour, D-East Helena; Bill McChesney, D-Miles City; and Walter McNutt, R-Sidney.