

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 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 the EQC office. Participation in EQC activities provides interested persons with the opportunity to:

- ▶ access information on the state's natural resources;
- ▶ 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 three terms.

Senate Members

Lane Larson, (D-Billings)
Greg Lind (D-Missoula)
Dan McGee (R-Laurel)
Jim Shockley (R-Victor)
Robert Story (R-Park City)
Mike Wheat (D-Bozeman)

House Members

Debby Barrett, Co-Chair (R-Dillon)
Norma Bixby (D-Lame Deer)
Sue Dickenson (D-Great Falls)
Chris Harris, Co-Chair (D-Bozeman)
Walter McNutt (R-Sidney)
Jim Peterson (R-Buffalo)

Public Members

Brian Cebull (Billings)
Kris Kok (Missoula)
Buzz Mattelin (Culbertson)
Doug McRae (Forsyth)

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 . . . Todd Everts
Research Analyst Casey Barrs
Research Analyst Krista Lee Evans
Research Analyst Joe Kolman
Research and Publications Maureen Theisen

2005-06 EQC activities

Agency Oversight Subcommittee

Although the EQC bases its work plan in large part on the topical interests assigned by the Legislature, its foundation is built on its **statutory duties** detailed in MEPA and in other sections of the law. In recent interims, these duties have been assigned to a subcommittee and include monitoring environmental trends, assisting in MEPA implementation, and reviewing proposed agency rules and legislation.

This interim, the EQC appointed the Agency Oversight Subcommittee to execute its statutory responsibilities. The subcommittee will also complete an **inventory of Montana superfund sites** and study the impacts to communities directly impacted by the sites as requested in House Joint Resolution No. 34.

Split Estates - Coal Bed Methane Subcommittee

In 2001-02, the EQC monitored the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement on coal bed methane development in the Powder River Basin in southeastern Montana. In the 2005-06 interim, the EQC is revisiting the issue of **coal bed methane and oil and gas development**, this time focusing

on the issues of split estates—the challenges that arise when the surface owner of a property is different from the owner of the mineral rights on the property, reclamation of land affected by coal bed methane development, and bonding.

The generating legislation for the study, House Bill No. 790,* outlined a selection process for a subcommittee composed of six EQC members and six applicants to complete the study's tasks. The subcommittee held its inaugural meeting in Havre in August 2005. It will continue to host meetings and hearings around Montana in order to gather the best information for developing policy for the 2007 legislative session.

* Four coal bed methane bills failed in the 2005 Legislature: Senate Bill No. 258, Senate Bill No. 336, House Bill No. 491, and House Bill No. 744.

Study Subcommittee

Study at the request of the EQC: The Department of Natural Resources and Conservation (DNRC) is responsible for the administration of state trust lands (lands given to the states by the U.S. Congress to financially support public schools) and for the money received from the sale and use of trust lands. Historically, the Legislature has allowed the DNRC to **keep a percentage of the fees assessed on lands that it administers** to cover its related expenses. The legality of this process has been challenged by the University System and other entities. The EQC agreed to review the issue.

House Joint Resolution No. 33: The DNRC estimates that directly selling logs from state lands will increase funding to the school trust by 30% over the current method of selling timber. The 2005 Legislature passed a study

resolution to determine if **authorizing the direct sale of timber** is in the state's best interest. This interim, the DNRC will lead a meeting of interested parties to work with LEPO staff to complete the study and present the findings to the EQC.

House Joint Resolution No. 10: Dangerous fire conditions have focused attention on the policy issues related to fire safety and funding for fire fighting. In 2004, the Legislative Audit Division released the results of a performance audit on wildland fire administration, a portion of which concluded that Montana's statutes on this topic are outdated or incomplete. The Legislative Services Division is staffing a work group to **evaluate the laws that address wildland fire** and will make recommendations based on this evaluation to the Study Subcommittee.

Water policy duties: During a general reorganization of legislative committees in 1995, the EQC inherited the statutory obligations of a then-existing Water Policy Committee. These obligations include both a **broad general oversight role and several program-specific roles**, such as advising the Legislature on national developments that affect Montana's water resources and commenting on the State Water Plan. The Study Subcommittee will be assuming these responsibilities for the 2005-06 interim.

For more information, please contact the EQC:
State Capitol, Room 171
P.O. Box 201704
Helena, MT 59620-1704
406 444-3742
<http://www.leg.mt.gov/eqc>

