



Mr. Chair, Members of the Committee:

My name is Kathleen Williams. I am a member of the Montana League of Women Voters and Chair of their Natural Resources Subcommittee. We rise in support of SB415 to expand renewable power production and rural development in Montana.

The League is a non-partisan organization, open to both men and women, which carefully studies public policy issues at the national, state and local level. Only after we achieve consensus on proposed positions can we advocate for those positions.

Nationally, the League supports "predominant reliance on renewable resources," as well as "action by appropriate levels of government to encourage the use of renewable resources and energy conservation through funding for research and development, financial incentives, rate-setting policies and mandatory standards."

The Montana League of Women Voters studied energy issues in the 1970s and has continued to update and affirm its related positions. Specifically, the Montana League supports "a balanced approach to solving energy issues" and "policies which stimulate development and use of alternative and renewable energy sources."

This bill is very consistent with these important League positions and we urge favorable consideration of the bill.

In addition to our Energy policies, the League has been a pioneer in efforts to protect water quantity and quality. Both national and Montana Leagues specifically state support for maintenance of instream flows. We noted in our review of this bill, that smaller hydro developments were not required to meet the same flow-protection standards as larger developments. We feel it is likely smaller developments would likely occur on smaller streams, and that these streams deserve the same level of protection the bill affords to larger streams. With the state's focus on recovering its native fish species, and many of the remaining populations subsisting in small, high-gradient streams, any dewatering of these streams would be inconsistent with the state's interest in species recovery and maintenance of state management of species. Consistent with the national League support of instream flow protection efforts to maintain species populations and diversity, we urge you to consider the following amendment to the bill.

Section 3(6)(d) "water power, in the case of a hydroelectric project ~~with a nameplate rating of 1 megawatt or less, or a hydroelectric project that does not require a new appropriation, diversion, or impoundment of water and that has a nameplate rating of 10 megawatts or less;~~"

We believe this small change will enhance the likelihood this bill will achieve its advertised goals of increasing wind energy and rural development to the benefit of Montanans, without unexpected consequences of dewatering our mountain creeks. Thank you for your consideration.

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