

Montana Conservation Voters

EXHIBIT 13
DATE 3.21.05
HB 790

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I'm Jeanne-Marie Souvigney with Montana Conservation Voters, and I'm here in support of HB 790.

Many conservation groups endorsed two coal bed methane bills that were presented this session; one of those bills, SB 336, proposed what many of us considered a fairer process for addressing impacts to surface owners from CBM development, and was identified as a priority bill for the conservation community in its Common Sense Conservation Agenda, which is a collaborative legislative effort of Montana's conservation interests.

While that bill was not successful, there were many legislators – including some who did not support that bill or another CBM bill introduced in the Senate (SB 258) - who nonetheless acknowledged that there ARE significant concerns related to coal bed methane development that deserve further investigation. This interim study is a compromise attempt to address those concerns. We support HB 790, and thank the sponsors, especially Sen. Roush and Rep. Peterson, for bringing it forward.

As a former 6-year member of the Environmental Quality Council, I also support putting this study under the purview of the EQC. The EQC is bipartisan, and includes legislators and members of the public. One caution I would raise is that the more you dictate through legislation the makeup of the subcommittee, the greater the potential that you create a subcommittee that is not bipartisan or that does not reflect the spirit and intent of the EQC. Some people on EQC who could be very valuable members of this subcommittee might be precluded, as well as certain members of the public.

I expect the EQC should be able to offer a very thoughtful and fair approach to the study so that the 2007 legislature can feel confident that the analysis that will be presented is balanced and thorough. I urge your support.

Thank you.

