

# MONTANA STATE AFL-CIO

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## Testimony Supporting HB 388

**Jim McGarvey, Executive Secretary, Montana State AFL-CIO**

Montana House Appropriations Committee

February 1, 2007

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee. For the record, my name is Jim McGarvey, and I am the Executive Secretary of the Montana State AFL-CIO, representing more than 30,000 union workers and their families across Montana.

I'm here today to urge you to vote for HB 388, which would provide additional state monies for reclamation and restoration projects in Montana.

Over the past 50 years, Montana has experienced an obvious decline in mining and large industrial activities. As these industries closed down, they left behind a two-fold legacy: loss of good-paying industrial-sector jobs and, in many cases, polluted land and water.

Ironically, those activities – mining, smelting, large-scale logging -- which provided so many jobs while they were operating, spawned a huge new industry when they left: Montana's ever-expanding reclamation/restoration sector. According to a special reclamation series in the Great Fall Tribune, between \$500 million and \$1 billion could be spent on reclamation and restoration projects in the next ten years alone.

These reclamation projects are cleaning up lands and rivers, closing and reclaiming old mines, safely disposing of toxic waste, replanting trees in logged and burned areas, and restoring fisheries. Already, our rivers and air are cleaner, fisheries are returning to rivers formerly considered unsalvageable, and native trees, grasses and shrubs are growing on old mining wastes.

In addition to environmental benefits, these reclamation dollars could produce thousands of good-paying jobs for Montana's workers. The work could be done by Montana companies in and around Montana communities, so the money would stay in the state, providing a new source of economic development for towns, counties and the state itself. Workers who have found themselves out of a job as mining, smelting and logging declined would be able to transfer their skills to the jobs provided by new land and water restoration projects.

State investment in reclamation and restoration can provide a substantial return for Montana's workers, their families and their communities by providing significant economic development, a larger tax base and an enhanced natural environment.

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The money provided by HB 388 would be used for clean-up projects under the state, as opposed to the federal Superfund laws. Among other projects, it would allow large restoration activities to begin along the banks of the Stillwater River in Kalispell, at the rail yard in Livingston, at the Davis Pole Yard south of Three Forks, and at an old refinery site in Lewistown. These are all communities that do not have available existing funding or need matching dollars to apply for federal money.

In short, this money would bring both good-paying jobs and an improved natural and economic environment to a number of diverse communities across the state.

The Montana State AFL-CIO supports the economic and environmental opportunities represented by this bill for both current and future generations. We urge you to vote for HB 388.