

1 _____ JOINT RESOLUTION NO. _____

2 INTRODUCED BY _____

3 (Primary Sponsor)

4 A JOINT RESOLUTION OF THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE STATE OF
5 MONTANA REQUESTING AN INTERIM STUDY ON FUNDING OPTIONS FOR MONTANA'S
6 CONSERVATION DISTRICTS; AND REQUIRING THAT THE FINAL RESULTS OF THE STUDY BE
7 REPORTED TO THE 68TH LEGISLATURE.

8
9 WHEREAS, Montana has 58 conservation districts collectively operated by a locally elected and
10 appointed group of more than 450 Montanans, and for more than 80 years, conservation district supervisors
11 have served the people of our state and our natural resources without pay, essentially donating tens of millions
12 of dollars of their time to help make Montana the Last Best Place; and

13 WHEREAS, for decades, the Legislature has linked conservation district funding to the extraction of
14 natural resources, particularly coal, with the intent that the care and conservation of natural resources should
15 be funded using nonrenewable natural resources; and

16 WHEREAS, the Coal Severance Tax is the primary funding mechanism for the operation of
17 conservation districts; and

18 WHEREAS, revenue from the Coal Severance Tax has declined over the past several years and
19 continues to show a significant decline that may not abate; and

20 WHEREAS, the increasing gap in the amount of dollars annually appropriated by the Legislature and
21 the actual, lesser, dollars that are received by the conservation districts impacts the districts' abilities to fulfill
22 their purpose of providing for conservation, including natural resource projects that take considerable planning
23 and preparation; and

24 WHEREAS, proposed solutions to the funding decline must be identified to inform the next Legislature.

25
26 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE AND THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF
27 THE STATE OF MONTANA:

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1 That the Legislative Council be requested to designate an appropriate interim committee or statutory
2 committee, pursuant to section 5-5-217, MCA, or direct sufficient staff resources to:

3 (1) review statutory authority and guidance related to conservation district funding mechanisms and
4 funding sources;

5 (2) explore and identify other sources of revenue that may link to the services that conservation
6 districts provide;

7 (3) examine the feasibility of equitably expanding the local tax base; and

8 (4) examine the practicality and viability of establishing a trust fund managed by the state for the
9 benefit of the operation of conservation districts.

10 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the committee:

11 (1) include input from appropriate stakeholders, including but not limited to conservation district
12 supervisors, conservation district administrators, the Montana Association of Conservation Districts, partner
13 state agencies, including the Department of Natural Resources, the Department of Environmental Quality, the
14 Department of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks, and the Department of Agriculture, and members of the interested
15 public; and

16 (2) invite to all meetings and solicit input from personnel representing federal natural resource partner
17 agencies, including the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Bureau of Land Management, the United
18 States Department of Agriculture Forest Service, the Bureau of Reclamation, the United States Army Corps of
19 Engineers, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, the Environmental Protection Agency, and other
20 interested and pertinent federal agencies.

21 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that if the study is assigned to staff, any findings or conclusions be
22 presented to and reviewed by an appropriate committee designated by the Legislative Council.

23 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all aspects of the study, including presentation and review
24 requirements, be concluded prior to September 15, 2022.

25 BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the final results of the study, including any findings, conclusions,
26 comments, or recommendations of the appropriate committee, be reported to the 68th Legislature.

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