



ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY COUNCIL

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Sept. 13, 2018

Steve Bullock
Office of the Governor
PO Box 200801
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Governor Bullock,

The Environmental Quality Council requests that you include \$600,000 in the upcoming budget for the Montana Natural Heritage Program (MTNHP) within the State Library.

The EQC studied the work and funding structure of the Natural Heritage Program over this interim and found that the program is of great importance to the state and needs increased funding. Among the conclusions EQC reached are:

- State agencies and others rely on data collected and presented by the MTNHP. Representatives of the departments of Agriculture, Environmental Quality, Natural Resources and Conservation, and Transportation testified about the program.
- Most agencies required to conduct environmental reviews under the Montana Environmental Policy Act use MTNHP data. Accurate and easily accessible data to complete environmental reviews is key to processing and approving permits requested by private industry and others.
- The funding structure of the MTNHP is complex and money is allocated through a variety of sources, including agreements with four executive branch agencies and the university system. The funding in the agreements fails to keep up with the costs of the program. The program also solicits funding from federal agencies and other entities.
- Funding to support the core work of the MTNHP has declined. The program now relies on one-time and inconsistent project funding to supplement its core work. program relies on special project funding to maintain the program.
- A sustainable funding model would include an increase in core funding of \$300,000 a year.

The EQC explored several options to increase funding including fees related to permits that require environmental review, reapportionment of the lodging facilities tax, a fee on all state computers, and a general fund appropriation. The EQC did not favor any of the options, but the Council continues to support increased funding for the program that serves everyone in the state in one way or another, as well as out-of-state visitors and entities. Toward that end, the Council requests that you propose an increase in funding of \$600,000 for the program and submit that request to the 2019 Legislature.

Sincerely,

Sen. Chas Vincent, Chairman