



# TREASURE STATE RESOURCES ASSOCIATION OF MONTANA

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## TREASURE STATE RESOURCES ASSOCIATION NEWS

February 2024



### **Montana DEQ Launches MEPA Work Group to Enhance Public Engagement and Environmental Policy Implementation**

HELENA—The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) is pleased to announce the formation of a dedicated work group to further discuss the agency’s implementation of the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA). Following a productive series of listening sessions and public comment opportunities in late-2023, DEQ looks forward to continuing the conversation with a diverse group of MEPA experts.

**“When we launched the public listening sessions last year, I asked Montanans to share their thoughts about MEPA,”** said DEQ Director Chris Dorrington. **“I’m grateful to every person who took time out of their busy lives to provide input on this important topic. The hundreds of comments DEQ has collected over the last few months confirm that there is work to do.”**

In September 2023, DEQ initiated a statewide effort to foster meaningful public and stakeholder engagement on the topic of MEPA implementation today and into the future. The response from Montanans was overwhelming, with participants from diverse backgrounds sharing valuable insights during listening sessions and through written comments. DEQ is now reviewing the nearly 300 comments and plans to shape future conversations around several key themes.

Based on public comment themes, the work group will initially focus on the following areas:

- Sustaining and improving robust public engagement under MEPA.
- Addressing implementation and applicability challenges of MEPA – clarity, consistency, communication and procedural continuity.
- Determining the applicability and scope of a greenhouse gas inventory and disclosure and climate impact analyses.
- Informing next steps for broad and sustained MEPA education and outreach.

**“This is a complex topic. As an agency, we implement MEPA alongside many other environmental laws covering a wide variety of activities,”** Dorrington said. **“Requirements often differ between programs and MEPA does not always align with what is required under permitting laws. As we have seen recently in the press, this results in confusion about timelines and requirements that appear to conflict, leaving the public uncertain about the best way to participate in environmental policy decisions.”**

**“We can do better to transparently communicate our work with the public,”** Dorrington continued, **“but we are subject to the authorities and constraints provided in law. This public process is an opportunity to pull together people with diverse backgrounds and perspectives and work on recommendations for DEQ or, if the law needs updating, for the 2025 legislature.”**

The first work group meeting will be held at 3 p.m. on Jan. 22 at DEQ's Helena office in Room 111. The meeting will also be accessible online or by phone. For more information about the work group, including a list of work group members, or to learn how to attend the meeting, please visit: <https://deq.mt.gov/about/MEPA>

The work group will meet regularly throughout the first half of 2024. Meetings will be open to the public and provide opportunities for public comment. Following the work group's deliberations, DEQ anticipates presenting a comprehensive report summarizing the conversation and offering actionable recommendations. DEQ remains committed to transparency, collaboration and continuous improvement in environmental policy implementation.

**“I respect that not everyone agrees about the intent and purpose of MEPA, but as people who care deeply about the health of Montana's environment and communities, we must come together to find durable solutions,”** said Dorrington. **“I ask the public to stay engaged in this process and help shape the future of MEPA for our state.”**

**TSRA has a MEPA work group – If you would like to be a part of that workgroup, please let us know.**

# BLM unveils plan for utility-scale solar development in western states

The United States' largest land manager is soliciting public input on a plan to open federal land to new solar projects.

by [Amanda Eggert](#) 01.18.2024

The Bureau of Land Management this week released a plan to bring utility-scale solar energy projects to five western states that currently lack a framework for permitting such projects. The plan is the result of a year-long effort by the agency to solicit input on what considerations should be foregrounded in the permitting process as it opens federal lands in Montana, Wyoming, Idaho, Washington and Oregon to solar development.

The BLM, which manages one-tenth of the land in the nation, and 9% of the land in Montana, described the new plan as part of President Joe Biden's agenda to accelerate the country's transition to clean energy and expand the transmission infrastructure needed to tie new projects into the grid. In a Wednesday announcement, the agency said that buildout will "lower consumers' energy costs, prevent power outages in the face of extreme weather [and] create good-paying union jobs," among other benefits.

"Our public lands are playing a critical role in the clean energy transition — and the progress the Bureau of Land Management is announcing today on several clean energy projects across the West represents our continued momentum in achieving those goals," [BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning](#) said in a release about the plan. "Investing in clean and reliable renewable energy represents the BLM's commitment to building a clean energy economy, tackling the climate crisis, promoting American energy security, and creating jobs in communities across the country."

The nuts and bolts of the initiative are included in the [Utility-Scale Solar Energy Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement](#), also known as the updated

Western Solar Plan. The agency is currently soliciting public input on which of the identified alternatives in the draft plan should be adopted.

[More on this](#)

Map 2.1 Electric Transmission System



**CANDIDATE FILING OPEN ON JANUARY 11, 2024, AND RUNS  
UNTIL MARCH 11, 2024**

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**TSRA Contact Information:**

TSRA's address and general telephone number will remain the same.

Mailing address is: P.O. Box 1700, Helena, Montana. 59624

TSRA Phone: 406-443-5541

Website: <http://treasurestateresources.org/>

**Upcoming Legislative Meetings:**

**Local Government Interim Committee**

**Next Meeting is Scheduled for March 20, 2024**

**Where: State Capitol & Zoom**

For more information go to: [committee website](#)

**Revenue Interim Committee**

**Next Meeting is Scheduled for March 21-22, 2024**

**Where: State Capitol Room & Zoom**

For more information go to: [committee's website](#).

Contact committee staff, [Megan Moore](#), with any questions.

## **Water Policy Interim Committee**

**Next Meeting is Scheduled for March 19-20, 2024**

**Where: State Capitol & Zoom**

An agenda and materials will be available at <http://leg.mt.gov/water> For more information, contact Jason Mohr, committee staff, at 406-4444-1640 or <http://jason.mohr@legmt.gov>.

## **Environmental Quality Council**

**Next Meeting is Scheduled for March 13-14, 2024**

**Where: State Capitol Room & Zoom**

Please use this link to check in for more information:

<https://leg.mt.gov/committees/interim/eqc/>

## **Energy and Telecommunications Interim Committee**

**Next Meeting is Scheduled for March 14-15, 2024**

**Where: State Capitol & Zoom**

For more information go to:

<https://leg.mt.gov/committees/interim/etic/meeting-info/>

**Upcoming Events/Dates:**

May 28-20, 2024

Montana Stockgrowers Midyear Meeting  
Miles City, MT

June 12-13, 2024

Treasure State Resources Association Annual Meeting  
The Forge Hotel, Anaconda, MT

*If you don't want to receive the TSRA Newsletter, please let me know. If you want to share with others in your company or organization, please do so. The mission of the Treasure State Resources Association is to promote and enhance the Montana Way of Life through responsible resource development.*