

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION TO HB971
TERRY CUNNINGHAM for the City of Bozeman
House Natural Resources Committee
04-17-23

Good afternoon Chair Gunderson and members of the House Natural Resources Committee. My name is Deputy Mayor Terry Cunningham (C-U-N-N-I-N-G-H-A-M) speaking on behalf of the Bozeman City Commission.

As a reminder, in 1971, MEPA was enacted with a 99-0 vote in a Republican led house and 55-1 vote in a democratic led senate. The legislative record includes the following: “..we must use all of the scientific, technological and sociological expertise available to us.”

HB 971 aims to upend Montana’s Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) for a short-term win. The bill arbitrarily excludes greenhouse gas emissions when authorizing or changing permits, including an evaluation of impacts on the climate *in the state* or beyond the state’s borders. Locally, Tourism spending and business recruitment efforts are already being impacted by a declining snowpack, flooding rivers, increased wildfires, and polluted air. This isn’t the time to prevent environmental reviews from considering the impacts of climate change.

MEPA is robust in Montana because of the legacy of powerful corporations that brought good economic opportunities to our state, as well as heavy contamination and superfund sites requiring decades of cleanup. When it’s time to clean up the mess, it’s often the US taxpayer on the hook. A good economic opportunity for one sector should not be made at the expense of another.

MEPA requires deliberation and conservative, science-based risk assessments. It is designed to help avoid costly and ill-considered actions that may cost tens of millions of dollars to mitigate, restore, or repair in the future. MEPA is an opportunity to “look before we leap” to make an honest assessment of the alternatives for the sake of current and future generations of taxpayers.

This does not close the door to energy and natural resource development but rather asks for an assessment of alternatives and reasonable measures for mitigation. It is a thoughtful and purposeful Act and we ask for thoughtful and purposeful action by this committee to advance a legacy of conservative deliberation for the benefit of all Montana residents. Please oppose HB 971, and similar amendments before this committee.