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Invasive Species Bill Adds Fee to Flathead Electric Members

Measure adds a fee to users of hydroelectric power and fishing licenses

BY TRISTAN SCOTT # JUN 29, 2017



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A Montana Senate bill designed to fund the fight against aquatic invasive species will place an additional financial burden on members of the Flathead Electric Cooperative.

The measure, Senate Bill 363, spearheaded by Sen. Chas Vincent, R-Libby, funds \$13.9 million over two years to fight aquatic invasive species, in part by adding a fee to users of hydroelectric power and

fishing licenses.

The estimated impact on Flathead Electric Cooperative alone is \$650,000 over the next two years, according to FEC spokesperson Wendy Ostrom-Price, which members will have to absorb because Flathead Electric didn't have an opportunity to plan for it in its budget.



Users of Flathead Electric will pay an additional 45 cents per month, she said. The hydroelectric fees will be regulated by the state Public Service Commission.

Flathead Electric has genuine concerns about the spread of aquatic invasive species, she said, and has been voluntarily contributing to prevention efforts for the past two years.

"The spread of invasive species, however, is an issue that affects all Montanans, and this bill unfairly assigns a cost to only a subset of citizens," she said.

"We are particularly concerned about the precedent this bill may set for the state to utilize utilities, especially hydro utilities like Flathead Electric, to fund other statewide issues in the future, as well as the risk that this bill may be extended longer than the scheduled two-year sunset."

The state's anti-AIS plan added 17 inspection stations to the 17 that were in use last year. In addition, four decontamination stations would be set up for watercraft at Canyon Ferry and Tiber reservoirs on the east side of the state.

The plan requires out-of-state watercraft to be inspected prior to launch in Montana, along with those crossing from east to west inside the state.

In Whitefish, the city has partnered with the Whitefish Lake Institute and Montana State Parks to craft a plan aimed at building a perimeter of mandatory inspection stations around Whitefish Lake.

Between May 1 and June 2, city staff performed 465 inspections at City Beach and 361 inspections at Whitefish Lake State Park.

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