

MONTANA  
Audubon



eNewsletter —March 2011



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## March News from Montana Audubon

### We all love when our spring migrants return....

Spring is a great time to get outside -- Freeze Out Lake, your local park, migratory stop over "hotspots"... As you're out and about this spring and summer, consider taking photos of your favorite birding spots. We are in need of scenic shots of Montana, especially our [Important Bird Areas](#). If you have any good photos, contact [Amy](#). Thank You!

Check out our list of [Birding Hotspots](#) and if you're not already, consider being a part of the [Montana Outdoor Birding Group](#) - MOB - a great way to track our returning migratory birds.

### Help Us Save MEPA & Other News from Helena

Get the latest [News from the session](#). Download our [March 18 Action Alert](#)

**MEPA.** The Montana Environmental Policy Act has informed the public about potential impacts to the environment for nearly 40 years. This process has allowed those who will be impacted by a project such as a gravel pit or a power plant or a transmission line to learn how they may be affected and make comments *before* a project is built. In addition, MEPA is the only tool available to determine impacts to fish and wildlife, cultural and historic



[Chapter's website.](#)

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At our Center in Billings, they report Mountain Bluebirds, Trumpeter Swans, Gadwall, and more migrants... Check out [Heather's blog](#)

sites, and public health and safety.

There are 2 bills up this session:



**SB 233** (Jim Keane, D-Butte) is the most damaging MEPA bill in a decade. It would allow a project to go forward even if a State agency failed to comply with MEPA and did not analyze a project's environmental consequences. This bill would also prohibit the State from considering most regional, national, and global impacts (e.g., climate change). **Yuck.**

**SB 317** (Chas Vincent, R-Libby) completely rewrites MEPA. SB 317 changes the purpose of MEPA from disclosing environmental impacts to encouraging natural resource development. This bill would limit analysis of alternatives, reject information that is not publicly available and restrict consideration of greenhouse gasses. **Ouch.**

These bills, while different and even conflicting at times, serve similar ends. Both are efforts to tip the scales in favor of industry by allowing projects to go forward without thorough environmental review and public input. Both bills have been approved by the Senate. SB 233 is awaiting a vote in the House Energy Committee. The hearing for SB 317 has not been scheduled.

Governor Schweitzer has repeatedly said that environmental laws are simply NOT preventing natural resource development in this state. We couldn't agree more. Analysis and disclosure of environmental impacts creates better projects today while safeguarding Montana's environment for tomorrow.

Learn more about attacks on MEPA and what you can do [HERE...](#)

**Need another reason to come to Helena or write a letter to the editor - cyanide !** SB 306 would repeal the voter's will to keep cyanide out of our streams. Learn more [HERE.](#)

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## Common Loon ~ *March Bird-of-the-Month*

*Thanks to author David Cronenwett*

One of more startling moments during spring on the Rocky Mountain Front can be experienced at Eureka Reservoir. If you hit it right, you can spot migrating Common Loons on this human-created, prairie lake.

When these iconic northern birds travel from their coastal winter range back towards boreal, wilderness lake habitat to breed, they are often seen in unsuspecting places, like Eureka. Globally, there are 5 species of loons, each in the family *Gaviidae*. They are all beautiful, well-evolved for diving and strongly associated with northern lands and waters. ....



The Common Loon is a large bird weighing up to 17 pounds, with denser bones and larger muscles for swimming than most waterfowl. They have an internal floatation system of balloon-like air sacs arranged along the backbone that can keep them on the water's surface even in fierce conditions. The feet are positioned improbably far back on the body, near the tail and they flay outward. While this makes walking on land dangerously awkward, it is yet another important adaptation for diving, their primary mode of hunting. Loons have a thermoregulation system that utilizes their large, webbed feet. A bird can sometimes be observed waving (or "wagging") a foot above the water to help warm or cool itself. A useful tactic for a species that spends a great deal of time in very cold waters.

In the Western US, Common Loons are actually rather *uncommon*; they are only known to breed in Wyoming, Idaho, Washington and Montana, having been extirpated from California, Oregon and Utah by the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century. The State of Montana considers the bird a Species of Concern. Although, with an average of 200 individuals counted each breeding season since 1980, Montana is actually a *stronghold* for the species in the West...

**The rest of David's article is [HERE....](#)**

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## Mercury ~ The Clean Air Act ~ the EPA

After 20 years of delays, the EPA has just proposed a [new rule](#) requiring power plants to reduce emission of mercury and other airborne toxins -by over 90 % in the next 5 years. This is great news for kids, fish, and birds -- Common Loons (see above), [Bald Eagles and Osprey](#), Belted Kingfishers and more. We'll need to defend this rule - more to come this spring.

The Clean Air Act is truly an excellent tool to protect public health. We remain very concerned with efforts to rollback the Clean Air Act, and we cannot let the polluters and their "friends" in Congress succeed with attacks on public health. Efforts to prevent the EPA from regulating greenhouse gas pollutants are ongoing -- and senseless. The science is settled, and we need to act. [Read our fact sheet and make a call.](#)

Make your voice heard: Head over to [National Audubon's Action Center](#) where you can easily send a note to our delegation (be sure to adjust the letter with your own thoughts) and send away!

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## News from Our Audubon Center

### Earth Day at the Audubon Conservation Education Center

Right around the corner: our third annual **Earth Day Celebration**. Saturday April 16.

9:30 - 12:30. Join us in stewardship projects to create and improve habitat for wildlife at the Center. We'll be planting, weeding, and cleaning up our big backyard in celebration of Earth Day. Free BBQ lunch. More at [mtacec.org](http://mtacec.org)

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## Audubon's Bird Festival and Tours

Registration is now open for our annual ***Wings Across the Big Sky Bird Festival*** - to be held in Glasgow June 3-5, 2011. Plan a vacation to northeastern Montana, see amazing birds and learn about grassland and sage conservation. Details [here](#)



**Montana Audubon Birding Tours.** Our 2011-12 tour season is packed with adventures offered close to home or as far away as Africa. [More about our tours.](#)

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HAPPY SPRING! Thanks for all you do.

The Montana Audubon Staff



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