

It's the Mountain True Raleigh Report! In this edition – **snow and ice** bring the legislature to a screeching halt (more or less), the legislature tweaks last year's **coal ash** bill and **Tom Apodaca sings** in the Halls of Democracy.

It's been a slow couple of weeks at the General Assembly. Just as work was getting underway, the snow, ice and cold froze Raleigh in its tracks. Last week was all but lost to any real legislating because of the weather. And just as lawmakers were getting a head of steam on Tuesday of this week, an unexpected storm forced them to shut down and send everyone home.

So, if you are keeping score, it's Winter 2, NC General Assembly 0 so far this year.

Legislators did find time to hear from their economists last week, who told lawmakers to prepare for a \$271 million shortfall at the end of this fiscal year (though that number may change based on tax collections in April). While [some lawmakers argue about what shortfall means](#), the experts – and the math – are pretty clear: there is less money coming in than was expected last summer when lawmakers approved the 2014-15 state budget, which of course makes it even harder to prepare a new state budget later this spring.

The only substantive legislation approved during the General Assembly two-week white out was SB 14, which, among other things, tweaks last year's coal ash bill to correct a technical problem and allow the new Coal Ash Management Commission to access funds to do its work. WNC Rep. Chuck McGrady also amended the bill in two ways. First, by clarifying that owners of coal ash ponds and other similar water pollution "impoundments" are not required to use engineers in the preparation of emergency action plans. Second, McGrady's amendment moved the deadline for submission of these plans for impoundments NOT associated with coal ash to December 31st, 2015. The deadline for submission of emergency plans for coal ash ponds remains March 1, 2015.

Overall these are relatively small changes to the original bill approved last year, and they may have been offered by McGrady as a way of heading off other legislators' desires to make even more dramatic changes to the still-new law.

Legislators also continue to introduce new legislation. Here are two of note:

- HB 76 and SB72 would disapprove the state's new rules for fracking – and start the rulemaking process all over again. This is largely an effort to demonstrate opposition to fracking in NC. Thanks to WNC sponsors: Reps. Susan Fisher, John Ager, Chuck McGrady, Joe Sam Queen and Sen. Terry Van Duyn.

About that singing

As the snow fell harder and harder Tuesday – and the hopes for a full week's work in Raleigh became dimmer and dimmer – WNC senator and legislative powerhouse Tom

Apodaca was seen strolling from his office and singing a few Christmas carols, including “Let It Snow” and “It’s Beginning to Look a Lot Like Christmas.”

News Items

[Federal charges filed against Duke Energy after coal ash spills](#)

[President Obama announces free National Parks admission for all fourth graders](#)

[Clean energy-related firms employ nearly 23,000 people across North Carolina and now represent nearly \\$5 billion a year in economic impact](#)

Find Your Legislator

WRAL has a new tool to help you find your representatives in the General Assembly. It is much less tedious than the search on the General Assembly’s site – and you get photos. Check out the [Find Your Lawmakers](#) application.

MountainTrue’s Agenda

Since the legislators have been taking it slow, we’d like to remind you what MountainTrue is working on in Raleigh. Our legislative priorities for 2015 include:

Preserving North Carolina’s Special Places - Investments in The Clean Water Management Trust Fund, the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund and other conservation programs help North Carolina protect its natural resources and pump millions of dollars into the state’s economy.

Clean Energy for a Clean North Carolina – North Carolina is among the fastest growing in new investments – and jobs – in sustainable, clean energy. Protecting and speeding this progress is good for our state, good for our economy and good for our future.

Accountability and Responsibility – Our state needs strong laws to ensure our natural resources are protected for future generations. And we need to guarantee that everyone follows these laws and are held accountable when they don’t.