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It's the latest MountainTrue update from Raleigh. In this edition, the legislature takes up its annual smorgasbord of environmental nicks and cuts, and tensions escalate between the Governor and legislators.

But first, let's take a moment to update you on MountainTrue's work in the General Assembly. The MountainTrue staff is taking monthly trips to Raleigh to speak up for conservation to western legislators. On last week's trip, we met with GOP Sen. Soucek, who represents Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Caldwell, and Watauga Counties. We had a great conversation. He expressed an interest in old growth forests and where they might still be found in WNC. (Fun Fact: there are about 80,000 acres of old growth in the region, though much of it is hard to find). We promised to take him and his family on a hike to some old growth later this year.

In addition to the very positive meeting with Sen. Soucek, we also had a great meeting with Rep. Jonathon Jordon who represents Ashe and Watauga Counties. A big fan of the New River (he has a map of the entire basin on the wall in his office), which is in his district, we have pledged to make him an equally big fan of the Watauga River.

Finally, we met with the newest members of the Buncombe County delegation – Sen. Terry Van Duyn and representatives Brian Turner and John Ager. We also briefly saw old friends and longtime Mountain True supporters Rep. Susan Fisher (Buncombe) and Rep. Joe Sam Queen (Haywood, Jackson, Swain). Look for our monthly reports in future Raleigh Reports.

Fracking Update

Governor McCrory signed H157, Amend Environmental Laws, making it SL2015-1, the first law of the session. Among other minor changes, the legislation repeals the mandate for the state's Environmental Management Commission (EMC) to write independent rules to control air pollution from fracking. The new law allows the EMC to conclude that federal rules were adequate, and avoid adoption of any additional state rules on the matter.

Rep. Pricey Harrison (D-Guilford) put it best when she said recent actions by states like Colorado, Wyoming, Ohio and Pennsylvania to adopt their own rules on air pollution from fracking help show that federal rules have fallen short of the need for protection. Harrison said "the limited federal regulations currently in place do not extend beyond the wellpad and exempt wildcatters as well as exploratory wells. This is just another broken promise by the General Assembly, which assured North Carolinians that we would have the strongest and safest regulations in the country overseeing fracking."

McCrory vs. Legislators

Other big news in Raleigh last week was court ruling that further strained relations between the Governor and legislators. A three-judge panel struck down the Coal Ash Management Commission (CAMC) and two other commissions as unconstitutional. The North Carolina

constitution provides for the separation of powers between the legislative, executive, and judicial branches; 2014 legislation establishing all three commissions let the legislature appoint a majority of commissioners on each (and established the CAMC as independent of the Governor), even though the commissions' functions are to execute the laws. Attorneys representing the NC House and Senate are appealing the decision; the case will move directly to the NC Supreme Court. In the meantime, the House and Senate immediately halted all consideration of the Governor's proposed appointments to other, unrelated commissions that require legislative consent.

Third-Party Electricity Sales

Last week, Rep. Chuck McGrady, along with Reps. John Szoka of Cumberland County, Nelson Dollar of Wake County and Linda Johnson of Cabarrus County, introduced House Bill 245, The Energy Freedom Act. The bill introduces limited market competition for North Carolina's electricity customers, placing the power of choice in the consumers' hands by legalizing a practice commonly known as "third party sales" of electricity. The legislation would for the first time allow North Carolina property owners to purchase electricity directly from a renewable energy company of their choosing. The company would own, operate and maintain a power system installed on the property owner's roof or property. Read more information about this important step toward a sustainable, clean energy economy on the [N.C. Sustainable Energy Association's](#) blog.