

It's the latest issue of the MountainTrue Raleigh Report. This week...Crossover craziness, legislators get the giggles and state environmental policies take a hit.

Crossover Craziness

Last week was Crossover, a date certain when any bill without an impact on the budget must pass one chamber or the other in order to remain eligible for consideration. So far, 1,655 bills have been filed this session with 343 bills passing the House and 164 passing the Senate by the crossover deadline. With the bill filing and crossover deadlines now behind them, the members of the General Assembly will turn their attention to crafting this year's budget.

Legislators Get the Giggles

The looming crossover deadline led to a very late night in the House chamber. Around 1:30 a.m., the discussion turned to Rep. Chuck McGrady's bill to regulate the ownership of exotic animals ([H554](#)). First, there were questions about whether snakes used in religious ceremonies would be exempt, and then someone asked about "birds of prey." Legislators got the giggles, and it only escalated when Rep. Pat Hurley offered an amendment to ensure that "service monkeys' weren't included. [Here's the full exchange.](#)

Environmental Sucker Punch

Last issue we told you about a threat to the state's Renewable Energy Portfolio Standards, or REPS, which has helped North Carolina create more than 25,000 clean energy jobs and more than \$6 billion in clean energy investments since 2007. Well, there is good news and bad news on the REPS front.

First, the good news, H681, which would have frozen the standards at their current levels, was voted down in committee. In House Public Utilities, the roll call vote on the motion for a favorable report failed 14-16.

The bad news is that last week similar provisions gutting REPS got new life in an amendment to H760, Regulatory Reform Act of 2015. A deal struck by Reps. Mike Hager (Rutherford-R, pro-Duke Energy) and Charles Jeter (Mecklenburg-R, pro-renewable energy) removed provisions added in committee that would have hurt renewable energy producers but dealt a tough blow to REPS. The amendment freezes the renewable energy goal of the REPS at 6% of Duke Energy's generation, repeals a local property tax abatement for solar farms, and allows 50% of the REPS goal to be satisfied with energy efficiency, up from 25% as originally enacted.

Unfortunately, the amendment was approved 97-19, and the bill passed second reading 80-31. It is scheduled for third reading and vote on the House floor Tuesday.

Another Blow for Environmental Protection

The House also considered H795, a bill that guts the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). SEPA requires environmental assessments for projects using public lands or public money. Unfortunately, there's very little good news here.

First, the tiny sliver of good news is that the bill was amended to gut SEPA slightly less. As Rep. McGrady said, “this [bill] professes to be a reform, but it’s actually a repeal.” The amended bill lowers the monetary trigger for SEPA from \$20 million in state funds to \$10 million and lowers the threshold for unreviewed impacts to state lands from 20 acres to 5 acres, or any submerged lands.

And now the bad news: The bill passed second reading 76-41, and third reading on a voice vote.

Renewable Energy Tax Credits

Last week, Governor McCrory signed into law Senate Bill 372, which extends the tax credit for renewable energy projects in advanced stages of development for one year. The tax credit was originally scheduled to expire at the end of this year, but will now sunset January 1, 2017. [Read more.](#)

Coal Ash Update

There has been a lot of news about coal ash and Duke Energy’s plans, here’s a quick rundown of a few news stories.

- [Lifespan of Duke Energy's coal ash liners debated](#) – The News & Observer
- [Would fracking in Walnut Cove pose earthquake danger?](#) – The Winston-Salem Journal
- [Most wells near Duke Energy ash ponds contaminated](#) – The Charlotte Observer
- [Duke Energy to Construct Coal Ash Landfills in Eden, Wilmington](#) – TWC News