

It's the latest edition of the Mountain True Raleigh Report. In this issue...it's all about the money, REPS redux and big fines for Duke Energy.

Budget Update

Last week was all about the money. The House started earnest work on its budget, releasing pieces in subcommittee meetings. The full budget is expected to make its appearance on Tuesday in committee and is likely to be voted on by the full House on Thursday.

The good news about the House budget: it would commit \$12.5 million to the Parks and Recreation Trust Fund over last year's budget in 2015-16 and \$1.5 million recurring in subsequent years. It also adds another \$10 million in one-time funding to the Clean Water Management Trust Fund.

The bad news is that the House would cut the operating budget for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) by an additional 13 percent, by \$1.9 million, and reduce a number of positions that have been vacant for more than six months.

The Wildlife Resources Commission also took a big hit – a \$3 million cut that amounts to 23% of its appropriated budget. The House directed the commission to make up the difference with fee receipts.

[WRAL](#) has a good overview of the budget proposal. More details about the budget will be available in coming days, so follow us on twitter @MtnTrue to keep up with the latest.

REPS Update

We've talked a lot about REPS – (Renewable Energy Portfolio Standard) in our reports, and, unfortunately, this week we don't have much good news to report. You may recall that this is the law requiring the big utilities get certain percentages of the energy they sell to all of us from renewable sources. The law has been under assault in recent years and this year is no different. Visit our [website](#) to tell legislators to protect REPS and oppose House Bill 760.

The version of House Bill 760 that passed the House and is now in the Senate freezes REPS at 6% and eliminates future planned increases to 10% and 12.5%. It allows energy efficiency to meet 50% of a utility's REPS requirement instead of 25% and decreases the residential cost cap from \$34 to \$12 per year. Taken together, these changes would devastate the still young green energy industry in North Carolina, kill jobs and increase North Carolina's carbon footprint.

In fact, a recent study published by RTI International and ScottMadden Consultants shows that REPS has saved ratepayers \$162 million since it was adopted and would save ratepayers an additional \$489 million by 2029.

MountainTrue is working directly with legislators and with our partners to fight for REPS. We also encourage you to [contact your senators](#) and tell them about the importance of protecting North Carolina's clean energy standards.

Coal ash News

Coal ash continues to be in the news, most recently with Duke Energy's guilty plea to Clean Water Act violations and the resulting \$102 million in fines. At the hearing, prosecutors presented evidence that Duke illegally channeled coal ash leaks from its Asheville plant into the French Broad River. Read more from [*The New York Times*](#).

There are also continuing concerns about the safety of water near coal ash ponds. The results from testing of some wells have been delayed because the labs couldn't provide North Carolina health officials enough data on pollutants. Read more on [WRAL](#), and we'll continue to keep you up to date on the latest.

MountainTrue in Raleigh

There's still time to take your involvement to the next level and talk with legislators about protecting WNC and our values. [Sign up on our website](#) to join MountainTrue's next trip to Raleigh on May 28th.

Green Tie Awards

MountainTrue would also like to congratulate our area legislators – Rep. Joe Sam Queen and Buncombe Sen. Terry Van Duyn – being honored by the N.C. League of Conservation Voters at their Green Tie Awards on May 27th.

WNC's own Joe Sam Queen will be honored as the "Representative of the Year" for his leadership on environmental issues, especially fracking. Buncombe County Senator Terry Van Duyn is also being honored as a "Rising Star."

MountainTrue will be on hand to celebrate these legislators and the other winners at the dinner. [Visit the N.C. League of Conservation Voters' website](#) to learn more about the awards or purchase tickets. Give Rep. Queen and Sen. Van Duyn a call or an email to congratulate them on their awards and thank them for their commitment to our community.