

Legislative Report for MAT
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Legislation to allow a slasher to legally be hauled down the road has been signed into law. House Bill 4224, sponsored by Rep. Kate Ebli, D-Monroe is now PA 37. We participated in a picture taking bill signing ceremony on June 4 with sponsor Rep. Ebli and Governor Jennifer Granholm.

The DNR and the DEQ budgets will merge into the Department of Conservation under SB 251, sponsored by Senator Michelle McManus, R- Lake Leelanau. Senate Bill 251, formerly the Senate DNR budget bill, was amended to include the DEQ budget. HB 4446, sponsored by Rep. Mike Lahti, D-Hancock, formerly the House DNR budget bill, was also amended to include the DEQ budget. House Bill 4446 includes new "no bid" language and a new version of the "cord mandate." Senate Bill 251 does not include the "no bid" or the "cord mandate." Because of the points of differences in the budget bills, they now will be considered by a special conference committee yet to be appointed. Both McManus and Lahti have combined the budgets in anticipation that Governor Jennifer Graham will issue an Executive Order to merge the two departments in an effort to down size government, staff and rent costs. It remains unknown what the impact will be to forestry programs. Former Governor John Engler separated the departments back in the early 1990's because the natural resources side was constantly being over shadowed by the regulatory side (DEQ).

We continue to "tweak" legislation in an effort to gain support to move SB 198, sponsored by Senator McManus, R-Lake Leelanau, legislation to allow a use tax exemption on equipment at a wood processing site and HB 4404, sponsored by Rep. Steve Lindberg, D-Marquette, legislation to exempt the same equipment from the sales tax.

Because of the bleak budget situation, many funds are being diverted to other areas in the budget. Legislation has been introduced to move monies from the Economic Development Fund for Targeted Industries (forestry) to the new "Priority Now Fund." The Economic Development Fund was put forth by MAT in 1987, sponsored by former Senator (and Lt. Governor) Connie Binsfeld, R- Traverse City, with the purpose to assist the forest products industry. The plan was to provide a percentage of monies to counties for road construction or reconstruction in primarily rural areas. I met with the sponsor of the bills, Rep. Lee Gonzales, D-Flint, also chair of the House Transportation budget committee, to request an explanation for the diversion. Just as I thought, they are moving monies from as many funds as possible to match stimulus monies for state wide road construction and reconstruction and not just forested counties.

Representative Kevin Daley, R-Attica is having the Legislative Service Bureau identify a section of law to amend which would require any entity using electricity, however generated, to be required to pay all Michigan business taxes if they sell their products for profit and compete with similar Michigan businesses that are required to pay Michigan businesses taxes and abide by Michigan laws. We are trying to find "a hook" in which to approach the problem many members have with competition with the Amish.