While those high-profile bills drew a lot of media and public attention, Montana residents are still waking up to the full effects of more than 500 bills that passed into laws. One of those bills that avoided a lot of scrutiny was House Bill 599, which was pitched by Rep. Steve Gunderson, R-Libby, as one that would cut the red-tape of permitting gravel and sand operations.

The approval process could move quickly, too. For example, the law requires the DEQ to make a decision in 60 days, or 120 days if the permit would impact more than 100 acres.

But Fantasia said there are still concerns. "This is not a good day for environmental protection," he said. "We have a bunch of holes in the bill. It's still a mess."

Some of the concerns include a lack of public input, restrictions on setbacks from residential areas and the potential for mining operations to简直就是 "high and dry" in remote areas and be allowed to operate 24/7.

Fantasia said the bill was "eviscerated" by the Legislature and that the DEQ "has no teeth" to regulate the operations.

He said the DEQ's attitude is to "move the ball." "We've got issues with our public participation process in the Department of Environmental Quality," Fantasia said. "It was gutted."