

MINUTES
HOUSE RESOURCES & CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

DATE: Wednesday, February 07, 2024

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room EW40

MEMBERS: Chairman Mendive, Vice Chairman Shepherd, Representatives Boyle, Vander Woude, Blanksma, Manwaring, Yamamoto, Raybould, Durrant, Hill, Mickelsen, Nelsen, Pickett, Raymond, Tanner, Burns, Necochea, Galaviz

**ABSENT/
EXCUSED:** Representative(s) Vander Woude, Blanksma, Manwaring, Yamamoto, Hill, Mickelsen

GUESTS: The sign-in sheet will be retained in the committee secretary's office; following the end of session the sign-in sheet will be filed with the minutes in the Legislative Library.

Chairman Mendive called the meeting to order at 1:33 p.m.

RS 31006: **Rep. Boyle**, District 9, presented **RS 31006** which will require a bond for any person or entity delaying or preventing the cutting or removal of timber by a purchaser of a Good Neighbor Authority (GNA) sale. She explained that since 2018 a timber sale has been in court due to a law suit, this legislation will require anyone who wants to sue to prevent a timber sale to post a bond equal to the market value.

MOTION: **Vice Chairman Shepherd** made a motion to introduce **RS 31006**. **Motion carried by voice vote.**

Mathew Weaver, Director of the Idaho Dept. of Water Resources gave an agency performance report to the committee. He briefly explained the agency's staffing, and the five ongoing adjudications. He said water administration, especially during dry years, combined with the modernizing of Idaho's infrastructure, sustainability and cloud seeding projects keep the Idaho Water Resources Board (WRB) busy. He spoke about the 2023, 2024, 2025 appropriations, actual expenditures, maintenance and supplemental requests. He touched on the Agency's performance in the following areas: issued licenses, water right transfers, water supply bank, the adjudication and groundwater protection programs, water distribution, groundwater measurements sites, telemetry and instrumentation, and he answered several committee questions.

Jeff Raybold, Chairman of the Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB), explained the cloud seeding program. The State and Idaho Power work together on this project and he assured the committee it is a very sophisticated program that utilizes aircraft as well as remotely controlled ground generators. The project has its own weather forecasting system including four or five meteorologists and weather balloons. He explained how cloud seeding is funded and how the water it produces is measured. He spoke about hydro-power, and meeting the state's water needs, how ongoing projects and programs are going and he answered committee questions.

Jim Fredericks, Director of the Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game (IDFG) presented the Agency's Progress Report. He explained the statutory authority that created the agency and determined its mission, elaborated on the Agency's core functions and described the ways the agency generates revenue and incurs expenditures. Typically the IDFG does not use any state general fund dollars. He went over the agency's performance measures which include: sustaining Idaho's fish and wildlife and their habitats, meeting the hunting-fishing-trapping-other recreation demands, public wildlife management education, enhancing the agency's ability to perform its mission. He said the Agency is on track with all its performance measures and he answered committee questions. Some areas of committee interest included: the increase in public citations or violations for things like no licenses, over limits, and minor infractions; deer and elk populations and the ways they are tracked and measured; and chronic wasting disease.

Director Fredericks spoke about the IDFG's emergency big game feeding policy which was a concern in eastern Idaho in 2023. The Department's policy for the emergency feeding of big game population states that big game populations should be maintained in natural conditions and by natural forage, and acknowledges that winter forage can be a limiting factor for big game populations. IDFG works with other land management agencies and land owners to maintain winter range habitat for the goal of meeting wildlife management objectives. There are events that can cause stress and force big game animals into areas that effect public safety, like when winter habitat is effected by wildfires. He made an important distinction about the use of emergency feeding, saying that it is not so much about feeding animals to keep them alive as it is about feeding animals to keep them out of trouble, specifically off producer lands and public roadways.

Director Fredericks spoke about the funding sources for IDFG's winter emergency feeding, the advisory committees that make feeding decisions, the science based forecasting and support used in feeding decisions, and some of the risks involved in using unnatural feeding sources. He explained the specific criteria used to determine a big game feeding emergency, which includes several factors: the assessment of private property damage, public safety, attempting to prevent excessive mortality, and finally if winter forage has been limited by weather or fire. When a decision is made to feed he described all the coordination and organization involved in implementation. The challenges include: securing a well placed feeding location large enough to accommodate all the necessary components of a feeding station. Cooperation from land owners is required and permission to use their property. Organizing logistics and enough personnel and equipment for a feed station to function properly. Securing appropriate and dependable feed. Once it is determined that emergency feeding is necessary and all the logistics are worked out, the station is maintained throughout the entire winter.

Director Fredericks spoke about Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) which he said is a prion disease that effects deer, elk, and moose. It is not a bacteria or virus, it is a misfolding of protein and the disease is in the same class of diseases as mad cow disease. It has been detected in North America, including Canada and United States. Expecting CWD to enter Idaho at some point the IDFG has been sampling for it since 1997. In 2021 CWD was initially detected in Idaho near Riggins and Whitebird. A management zone was established in the effected area stipulating that harvested animals must be tested for CWD. Expanded sampling and a controlled action was implemented in the hot zone to reduce white tail, mule deer, elk density. Sampling the harvested deer revealed a 7% CWD prevalence in white tail deer and 1% in mule deer. In November 2023, 50 air miles from the hot zone, an infected deer was detected near New Meadows resulting in a consorted effort of sampling harvested deer and road kill, plus another controlled action on a smaller scale.

Director Fredericks gave a quick Quagga Mussel treatment update and gave credit to US Dept. of Agriculture who mostly handled the treatment in Idaho for their good work, adding that IDFG played a support and monitoring role.

Amber Worthington, Deputy Director of Idaho Dept. of Fish and Game, presented a brief update on the fiscal year 2024 and 2025 budget enhancements and answered several committee questions.

Chairman Mendive announced there will be a committee meeting on Friday upon adjournment of the floor session.

ADJOURN: There being no further business to come before the committee the meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.

Representative Mendive
Chair

Andrea Blades
Secretary