

MINUTES
SENATE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, February 09, 2017

TIME: 8:00 A.M.

PLACE: Room WW53

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Rice, Vice Chairman Den Hartog, Senators Patrick, Guthrie, Johnson, Thayn, Foreman, Jordan

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Senator Bayer

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Rice** called the meeting of the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee (Committee) to order at 8:03 a.m.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Jordan** moved to approve the Minutes of January 26, 2017. Seconded by **Senator Thayn**. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

RS 25230 **Relating to the Idaho Invasive Species Act.** **Senator Harris** stated this proposed legislation amends Idaho's Invasive Species Act through the addition of a new Office of Invasive Species Policy within the Office of Species Conservation. The Invasive Species Interim Working Group met during the summer concerning the Quagga and Zebra Mussels issue. Several recommendations were made to update Idaho's efforts to prevent these species from gaining a foothold in Idaho. **RS 25230** creates the position within the Office of Species Conservation to coordinate all State departments to address the Quagga and Zebra Mussels Program. This legislation is not intended to take any authority away from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

MOTION: **Vice Chairman Den Hartog** moved to send **RS 25230** to print. Seconded by **Senator Jordan**. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

PRESENTATION: Idaho Apple and Cherry Commission. **Candi Fitch**, Executive Director of the Idaho Apple and Cherry Commission, pointed out an electronic copy of the financial statement for the Idaho Apple and Cherry Commission has been supplied in the Committee's hand out. **Ms. Fitch** explained the fruit crop started out with good prices for plums, peaches, and Gala Apples. About mid-October the apple market showed pressure of oversupply and prices decreased for certain varieties, especially Fuji. Red Delicious prices have been extremely low, and this could cause the Red Delicious variety to be removed from the market to be replaced with newer varieties.

Apple production in the State continues to slowly decrease. Some of the decrease in apple production is driven by a labor shortage. There was one grower that had to leave 1/2 his crop unharvested because of lack of labor. With the critical labor shortage, many of the growers are looking to the H-2A Visa Program to supply that labor help.

The Apple Commission has received several grants for production research with Dr. Fallahi at the University of Idaho, Parma Research Extension. The specialty crop grants that have been received are through the Farm Bill, but they are administered through Idaho State Department of Agriculture.

This continued research is vital for the improvement of Idaho Apples to be able to remain and compete in the global market place (see Attachment 1). The Specialty Crop Grant of 2015 allowed the Apple Commission to create awareness of Idaho apples through in-store promotions, web site development and social media.

Ms. Fitch reported on the Cherry Commission advising that the Idaho cherry season went well in 2016. The crop was about two weeks early and it was a condensed season lasting only about four weeks instead of the usual six weeks. The market was good, and there was satisfactory movement even post 4th of July. It was an average price and crop year. Looking ahead, the growers are anticipating that there might be some frost damage from this cold winter and a drop in volume of the cherry crop next summer.

The Cherry Commission was included in the 2015 Specialty Crop Grant which allowed for in-store promotions, web site development and social media.

Ms. Fitch spoke about the other two committees that fall under her directorship which are the Idaho-Eastern Oregon Onion Committee and Idaho-Oregon Fruit and Vegetable Association. The Onion Committee is a federal marketing order so the budget for this Committee is approved through the USDA. There is a promotion, export, and a research sub-committee under the Onion Committee. There is an extensive research budget because it is so vital for all the growing groups to stay competitive in this global industry. There must be relevant and reliable research to keep the crops competitive with other states and countries. For the 2015-2016 growing season the Onion Committee reduced its assessment from 10 cents per hundred weight to 5 cents per hundred weight to give some of the funding back to shippers so they could promote their own companies.

The Idaho-Oregon Fruit and Vegetable Association provides an effective avenue for its members to work collectively on instrumental issues pertinent to the agricultural industry of its area. The recent severe weather, and the collapsed roofs on onion facilities, have many growers concerned about the onion industry. In Malheur County they are correlating the damage with a tornado disaster because there have been 160 buildings damaged or destroyed. Out of the 160 buildings, 35 were onion related.

The conclusion of **Ms. Fitch's** presentation featured an educational video on apple growth to harvest and another for cherries which were produced from funding the Commission received from a Specialty Crop Grant.

Senator Foreman observed in the apple presentation mention was made of not having adequate labor to pick the apples and asked **Ms. Fitch** for more detail on the labor issues. **Ms. Fitch** remarked that the labor issues are not just with the apples, it is all commodities. It is harder to acquire labor without a comprehensive immigration avenue to bring in the labor. The H-2A Visa Program is working, but it also is very hard to work through this avenue. All industries are suffering from the lack of workers. **Senator Foreman** asked how is the industry responding to the lack of labor. **Ms. Fitch** replied comprehensive immigration reform has been a problem for many years and there is little progress, but the industry has to turn out a product. **Senator Foreman** said what will the growers do to get the labor force they need. **Ms. Fitch** answered the growers have been working on the labor force for their crops for years. There is so much controversy around the issue and plans have been presented, but not much has been accomplished.

Senator Patrick asked if the onion shed collapses equate into less onions processed for the next growing season. **Ms. Fitch** answered that there were four packing lines that were damaged in the collapses.

The storage buildings have to be turned into the insurance companies for replacement; at present the Vegetable Association does not know the extent of the impact this disaster will play out on the 2017 crop.

Senator Rice asked if the lack of labor is getting worse because the unemployment rate is going down. **Ms. Fitch** answered that the growers do lose labor that migrates to other employment opportunities. **Senator Rice** asked if there have been problems with delays on the visas for the H-2A Visa Program.

Ms. Fitch replied that she did not have the answer to this question and would direct Senator Rice to another source. **Senator Patrick** explained that one of the requirements for the H-2A Visa Program is the grower must identify workers six months in advance.

PRESENTATION: Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission (IRRC). **Gretchen Hyde**, Director, stated that this year IRRC decided to update their strategic plan, vision statement, and mission statement. This update pointed to the main theme of partnerships. IRRC has created 41 educational videos for their "Life on the Range" program and are in the process of updating on the website. There is a lot of public interest for how livestock is raised in the west; along with the management issues. IRRC gathers information from public opinion polls to gauge how the public perceives rangeland management and approval of public land uses. These opinion polls were conducted in Ada, Canyon, Elmore, and Owyhee Counties and were targeted to collect data on how the public used rangeland. The respondents were ATV riders, campers, hunters, and hikers. Through public outreach and education the IRRC has taken what used to be 70 percent approval rate for livestock grazing and increased it 90 percent.

Another study IRCC conducted is how wildlife habitat is affected by ranches and farms and the importance of preserving ranches and farms for wildlife habitat. The Reliability of Information slide is another measurement that IRCC started conducting back in 1997. In the first year of this measurement the ranchers came out as number one in credibility and have remained in that position. The measurement was a perception of the public's understanding of who they will listen to and believe when talking/hearing about controversial issues. The public believes ranchers over Bureau of Land Management (BLM), environmental groups and scientists.(see Attachment 2). The most recent study on rangeland issues facing Southwestern Idaho was conducted in Owyhee, Canyon, Ada, and Elmore County and compared urban, rural, and Owyhee County. Questions were asked concerning livestock grazing, wildfire risk, wild horses, sage-grouse habitat, and juniper encroachment; the higher ratings showed the public viewed these items as not a problem, except for wildfire risk.

The "Gateway West Program" showed that public outreach was needed. Power lines were going to go in a corridor that already had existing power lines, but the public does not understand the existence of the power lines that are in place. The power lines are going through a National Conservation Area and it is a controversial issue. This corridor has been resolved by the Interior Secretary signing off on the project. The amended project will avoid the Birds of Prey and relocate the power lines through private lands and other corridors. This is unfortunate and will be detrimental to sage grouse. The last slide of the presentation revealed understanding the public's view on livestock grazing. Owyhee County residence understand the value of livestock grazing. The target group to educate are urban areas such as Boise, Pocatello, and Idaho Falls with the IRRC Programs. People who are farther away from the land do not have as much general understanding about how the land is managed and the importance of sustainability long term.

Ms. Hyde concluded her presentation by showing the Committee an educational video on the Collaborative Project on Pole Creek for Endangered Chinook Salmon.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business, **Chairman Rice** adjourned the meeting at 9:08 a.m.

Senator Smith(Rice)
Chair

Carol Deis
Secretary