

MINUTES
JOINT FINANCE-APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

DATE: Monday, January 29, 2024
TIME: 8:00 A.M.
PLACE: Room C310
MEMBERS PRESENT: Senators Co-Chairman Grow, Bjerke, Burtenshaw, Lent, Cook, VanOrden, Adams, Herndon, Ward-Engelking, Just
Representatives Co-Chair Horman, Miller, Bundy, Raybould, Furniss, Handy, Lambert, Petzke, Tanner, Green
ABSENT/ EXCUSED: None

Co-Chair Horman called the meeting to order at 8:00 a.m.

Ms. Janet Jessup, Principal Analyst, LSO Budget & Policy, gave an overview of the Department of Fish & Game. The department is organized into seven programs and funded by licenses, fees, and federal fund sources.

Ms. Jessup reviewed the sources of the dedicated funds associated with the Department and reminded the committee each fund has a specific legislated purpose. She pointed out the Expendable Big Game Depredation Fund is likely to further decrease due to escalating claims of livestock losses, property damage, and crop loss caused by wildlife.

Ms. Jessup highlighted the department's FY 2023 and FY 2024 budget enhancements. She explained the FY 2025 ongoing and onetime enhancements to the budget. The agency is seeking to acquire additional resources and staff to work with landowners to limit depredation claims. Ms. Jessup explained various enhancements would be paid by distinct dedicated fund sources. Dedicated funds are not entirely interchangeable.

In response to committee questions, **Ms. Jessup** explained the difference between actual and projected end balances of funds as well as the distinction between replacement items and line items.

Mr. James Fredericks, Director of the Department of Fish & Game, answered committee questions. He explained the projected growth in the License Fees Fund is based on anticipated revenue and expenditures for the agency.

Dir. Fredericks explained the Department manages depredations by prevention and compensation. The Depredation Fund monies are not adequate to cover all the depredation claims they receive. He pointed out protecting in-field crops is labor intensive yet less expensive than paying depredation claims. The agency requests additional capacity to perform prevention efforts year-round.

In response to a committee question, **Dir. Fredericks** explained the agency has legislative authorization to spend \$1.8M from the Depredation Fund. However, the fund is projected to have only \$1.4M available. The agency has had to move dollars from operating reserves to make up the difference and cover depredation claims. He acknowledged the need for a future plan about generating more revenue for the fund.

In response to a question about depredations occurring on federal land to non-native crop owners, **Dir. Fredericks** explained the agency works with entities to increase access to the lands where elk take refuge and cause crop damage.

Ms. Jessup gave an overview of the Department of Lands, which has six budgeted programs, including the Business Services Program, Forest Resources Management Program, Trust Land Management Program, Forest and Range Fire Protection Program, Scaling Practices, and the Minerals, Public Trust, Oil and Gas Conservation Program.

Ms. Jessup reviewed the agency's dedicated funds. She directed attention to the Department of Lands Fund, which has numerous sources and statutorily specified uses of the fund. She pointed out the Fire Suppression Deficiency Fund has legislative approval to spend against the General Fund. Ms. Jessup explained since 2015, the Legislature has pre-funded the Fire Suppression Deficiency Fund, recognizing that wildfires are a growing and persistent problem for the state.

Ms. Jessup reviewed the agency's FY 2023 and FY 2024 budget enhancements and expenditures. She gave explanations for the agency's FY 2025 budget requests.

Ms. Jessup pointed out the Cottonwood District has been renamed the East Idaho District for FY 2025. She explained the Timber Protective Association (TPA), while not part of the Department of Lands, receives funds through the Department of Lands to fight fires. She explained budget enhancements requested for various aspects of firefighting.

In response to a committee question, **Ms. Jessup** explained the TPA process for requesting funding. The TPA is not part of the formal budget submission process with the Department of Lands. The State Board of Lands does not review the TPA budget.

Mr. Dustin Miller, Director of the Department of Lands, answered committee questions. He explained the State Board of Lands maintains the policy that all state land, unless leased to the National Guard, is open for public recreation, so long as those recreational activities do not impact the state's ability to generate income from those lands. Given the Land Board policy, the Department prefers to maintain trails with state employees and volunteers and avoid damage to state lands caused by unmanaged recreation.

In response to committee questions, **Dir. Miller** gave further explanation about the agency's FY 2025 budget requests. He pointed out the Department realizes significant savings by building and repairing the agency's fire engines instead of outsourcing that work.

In response to further committee questions, **Dir. Miller** explained the Department would prefer to continue the grant arrangement with the Idaho Geological Survey; however, the funding source is shrinking, and the agency must prioritize its mandate to safely close all abandoned mines in Idaho and address any environmental contaminants. He also explained the Department's role as a real estate broker for other state agencies without the ability or authority to purchase land.

Ms. Jessup gave an overview of the Department of Parks & Recreation. For the purposes of budgeting, the department is organized into three programs: 1) Management Services, which includes fiscal support, pass-through grants for recreational programs, planning and development, information technology, registrations, and reservations; 2) Park Operations, which manages the 30 state parks and trails throughout six regions, and also manages boating and interpretive programs; and 3) Capital Development, which includes only the capital outlay appropriated for facility maintenance, repair, and construction.

Ms. Jessup explained the Department receives funding through General, federal, and dedicated funds; dedicated funds are not universally available for all department activities.

Ms. Jessup pointed out the FY 2023 increase in estimated expenditures was due to legislative approval to address deferred maintenance projects. She gave a high-level review of the capital improvements made with this appropriation to address maintenance backlogs. She pointed out in some cases the agency is requesting additional appropriation because it had additional revenues, and the Department needs additional authority to allow the funds to go back out again.

Ms. Jessup reviewed the FY 2023 and FY 2024 budget enhancements for the agency. The Department has made consistent requests for funds for recruitment and retention of personnel. She pointed out the marked increase in visitors to state parks as one reason for the increased need for park staffing and additional park support.

Ms. Jessup explained the FY 2025 ongoing and onetime enhancements and gave brief explanations of the budget requests.

Ms. Susan Buxton, Director of the Department of Parks & Recreation, answered committee questions about the agency's Off-Highway Vehicle (OHV) media campaign. The publicity campaign, funded by OHV tag fees, is designed to raise public awareness about the safe and respectful use of public and private lands. Dir. Buxton explained the need for local law enforcement to partner with private landowners in the protection of public and private lands. She explained the FY 2025 budget request for additional training for law enforcement will help facilitate such partnerships and the understanding of laws pertaining to federal, state, and private lands.

In response to a committee question, **Mr. Troy Elmore**, Operations Administrator for the Department of Parks and Recreation, explained the agency's budget requests for OHV law enforcement pass-through funding. These pass-through funds will go to the county sheriffs' offices. The Department will provide the training. Resources will be allocated by a number of factors.

Sen. VanOrden thanked **Dir. Buxton** for the Responsible OHV media campaign.

In response to committee questions, **Mr. Adam Zaragoza**, Management Services Administrator for the Department of Parks and Recreation, gave examples of the cost increases requiring additional outlay for capital improvements. **Dir. Buxton** explained the difficulties in hiring seasonal employees. She stated the agency is prioritizing the use of ARPA funds across the state while they are still available; she assured the committee regardless of the fund source, the agency is frugal with taxpayer money.

Dir. Buxton gave concluding remarks and pointed out these are the first significant improvements to the Idaho State Park system since statehood.

ADJOURN: There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 9:34 a.m.

Representative Horman
Chair

Alyson Jackson
Secretary