

MINUTES
SENATE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: Tuesday, March 16, 2021

TIME: 8:00 A.M.

PLACE: Room WW54

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Burtenshaw, Vice Chairman Bayer, Senators Patrick, Johnson, Zito, Ricks, and Nelson

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Senators Den Hartog and Rabe

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

Chairman Burtenshaw indicated changes in the order of the agenda due to time constraints. He called the first presenter to the podium.

PRESENTATION: **Wolf Depredation Control Board (Board).** **Ed Schriever**, Director, Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), stated the Board is jointly chaired by the Directors of IDFG and Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA). He mentioned the Board was created in 2014 when the Legislature passed H 470 with the primary purpose of managing funds to address wolf depredation on livestock and its effects to wildlife populations. He also indicated that H 470 limits the Board from contracting with other state agencies. Currently, the Board could only contract with U.S. Department of Agriculture Wildlife Services (WS) and IDFG for wolf control, and ISDA for fiscal and legal services.

Mr. Schriever explained the Board's fund sources are fees from livestock industries; IDFG's annual fund transfer of up to \$110,000; and annual legislative appropriations from the State's General Fund. He pointed out that the IDFG contribution is based on matching funds provided by the livestock industry. He emphasized that funds are not used to compensate livestock producers for livestock losses; they are used to pay for the process of identifying, locating, and removing wolves associated with depredation on livestock or in places that IDFG determines are causing undue effects on wildlife populations. **Mr. Schriever** showed IDFG's contributions to the Board, its expenditures, and the number of wolves removed Statewide since 2015. (See Attachment 1.)

DISCUSSION: **Vice Chairman Bayer** asked Mr. Schriever to clarify the figures in Attachment 1 with regard to the number of wolves removed. **Mr. Schriever** confirmed that the figure in Attachment 1 only pertains to the number of wolves removed mainly from Lolo Elk Zone and a few from Elk City Zone.

- PRESENTATION:** **Mr. Schriever** continued to explain the funds the Board receives from the livestock industry and appropriations from the General Fund. He pointed out the 2021 appropriated fund indicated the Governor's request for a 5 percent holdback on its budget. On the other hand, 2020 financial report showed the Board has carried over funds from the previous year, thus the Legislature allocated less than the usual allotment of funds. He also talked about the IDFG's actions in the removal of wolves. He said IDFG authorizes WS to regulate wolf removals as a result of livestock depredations. He presented a table that depicted WS responses to livestock mortalities. (See Attachment 2.) He affirmed that wolf removal is dangerous, difficult, and expensive.
- DISCUSSION:** **Senator Ricks** asked Mr. Schriever about the methods used by WS to remove wolves. **Mr. Schriever** replied that wolves are lethally removed by the WS.
- PRESENTATION:** **Mr. Schriever** recounted the history of wolf management in Idaho. He stated in 2009, wolves were removed from the list of imperiled species in Endangered Species Act (ESA) in Idaho and Montana. But, in 2010, a federal district judge reinstated ESA protections for wolves in both states. However, in 2011, U.S. Congress legislatively delisted wolf from the endangered species list, and wolf hunting and trapping seasons began in Idaho and Montana. He emphasized that wolf harvest started expanding incrementally in 2009. He presented and explained in detail the graphs of hunting and trapping lengths as well as wolf mortality. (See Attachment 3.) He mentioned the trend in wolf mortality is significantly increasing. He also identified the three different ways of wolf removal: hunting, trapping, and removal by WS.
- DISCUSSION:** **Senator Johnson** asked Mr. Schriever about the disparity in the figures presented in Attachment 3. He asked if there are other mortality methods that were not included in the graph. **Mr. Schriever** acknowledged the discrepancy in the graph and said he would get back to the Committee members with the exact numbers and an explanation.
- PRESENTATION:** In closing, **Mr. Schriever** explained the importance and the methods of monitoring the status of the wolf population in Idaho. He stated that installing radio collars on wolves are dangerous, labor-extensive, and expensive. Hence, IDFG implemented a peer-reviewed scientific method in estimating wolves in areas. This method uses game cameras, which are placed in random places across the State and take pictures at the same time, several times a day. He explained pictures were taken during a period from July to August, when wolf population was at its peak. He indicated that the 2019 and 2020 population estimates were remarkably similar. He added that with the Board's proactive responses and WS's wolf removal management, the wolf population is stable at estimated 1,500. (See Attachment 4.)
- DISCUSSION:** **Chairman Burtenshaw** asked Mr. Schriever about the Board's future plans in managing the wolf population in Idaho. **Mr. Schriever** responded that the Board collaborated with Foundation for Wildlife Management (F4WM) and implemented the "Wolf Harvest Reimbursement Program." He explained that the program reimburses up to \$1,000 for legally hunted and trapped wolves. He further said that the Board will continue its venture with F4WM and work on increasing the reimbursement rates to attract more hunters and trappers to participate in the program. He added that the Board will continue to conduct public hearings to get more input and proposals from the public, and extend hunting and trapping season in some areas.

In response to Chairman Burtenshaw's question on the reimbursement money of the aforementioned program, **Mr. Schriever** clarified those funds, came from private fund raising events organized by F4WM and the Board has provided F4WM with funds through their matching grants in some of their fundraising projects. He explained F4WM's actions greatly helped keep the wolf population low in areas negatively impacted by wolf predation, but not all wolf removals can be credited to the program.

Senator Ricks asked Mr. Schriever about the State's target wolf population. **Mr. Schriever** answered that there is no target number. He stated the ESA identified a threshold of 150 wolves and added that going below that number could jeopardize Idaho's authority and sovereignty over the management of wolves. Furthermore, the Board is authorized to carry out plans to reduce conflicts between wolves and ungulates in the State with the condition that the wolf population would not go below 150.

PRESENTATION:

Invasive Species; Updates on Quagga Mussels. Lloyd Knight, Administrator, ISDA - Division of Plant Industries, explained that ISDA's Invasive Species Program (Program) addresses the environmental cost and damages caused by invasive species through prevention, early detection monitoring, management and control, and education and outreach campaigns. He explained there are a number of activities associated with these goals. He further said that the Program has several offices across the State to assist the public and project implementation. (See Attachment 5.)

Mr. Knight also discussed source funding of the Program and its 2021 Rules Review. He said funding comes from three avenues: dedicated funds from the sales of Invasive Species Fund sticker; annual Legislature appropriations from the State General Fund; and some federal grant funds from U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' Water Resources Development Act, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) and the Bureau of Land Management. (See Attachment 6.)

Mr. Knight introduced Nic Zurfluh, Section Manager, ISDA - Program, to give updates of the Program's plans and projects. **Mr. Zurfluh** gave background information about invasive species. He indicated invasive species are not native of Idaho and they are transported in Idaho through various ways such as watercraft.

Mr. Zurfluh discussed recent concerns regarding moss balls contaminated with zebra mussels found in pet stores in Idaho. He elaborated on all the actions taken by ISDA locally, regionally, and nationally. He cited some of those measures: pulled out contaminated products within 24-hour verification from Idaho's pet stores; published series of press releases with regard to the State's current actions, future plans, and public awareness; and continuous visits and follow ups at pet stores and distributors. Furthermore, ISDA coordinated with Pacific Northwest states and federal agencies like USFWS regarding proper disposal methods of the invasive species, as well as to align the State's program with theirs. (See Attachment 7.)

DISCUSSION:

Vice Chairman Bayer asked Mr. Zurfluh about the origin of the contaminated moss balls. **Mr. Zurfluh** replied that the contaminated moss balls were harvested in Ukraine and shipped through Thailand to a port in Los Angeles. He added contaminated moss balls are sold online through Florida distributors.

PRESENTATION: **Mr. Zurfluh** explained that quagga mussels bring in significant economical and environmental harm by infesting the waterbody. He added that quagga mussels can colonized various substrates like irrigation systems and dams. He showed a picture of the first mussel-fouled boat launched in 2021. He discussed previous year's watercraft inspection program in Idaho. He pointed out that ISDA is expecting a busy 2021 watercraft season due to an increase of outdoor recreation in the State. He also presented ISDA's watercraft inspection stations and law enforcement support sites. (See Attachment 8.)

DISCUSSION: **Senator Zito** asked Mr. Zurfluh to clarify the sticker enforcement issue at the Bear Lake inspection stations. **Mr. Zurfluh** stated that Idaho and Utah have a cooperative agreement with the Bear Lake Regional Commission to work together to fight against aquatic invasive species in both states. He further explained that when a watercraft is launched in Idaho, it needs an Idaho invasive species sticker, otherwise, any watercraft launched in Utah does not need an Idaho sticker. He added the majority of watercrafts entering the lake comes in from Utah side.

PRESENTATION: **Mr. Zurfluh** presented a graph that shows the increase of watercraft inspection since 2009 and indicated ISDA's anticipates a busy 2021 inspection. He also mentioned online datas like web mapping tools, monitoring data, and inspection dashboards are available for the Legislature and stakeholders to access. He showed samples of data available on the website. (See Attachment 9.) In conclusion, **Mr. Zurfluh** stated there is a system of watercraft inspection in the region, and Idaho continues to coordinate with its regional neighbors to implement robust watercraft inspection prevention programs.

DISCUSSION: **Chairman Burtenshaw** voiced his appreciation of ISDA's expertise and its proactive efforts to keep invasive species out of Idaho's lakes and borders.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Zito** moved to approve the Minutes of March 4, 2021. **Vice Chairman Bayer** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Burtenshaw** adjourned the meeting at 9:27 a.m.

Senator Burtenshaw
Chair

Rellie Wisdom
Secretary