

MINUTES  
**HOUSE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Thursday, February 26, 2015

**PLACE:** Room EW42

**MEMBERS:** Chairman Andrus, Vice Chairman Boyle, Representatives McMillan, Batt, Bell, Dayley, Miller, Romrell, VanOrden, Burtenshaw, Kerby, Troy, Pence, Erpelding

**ABSENT/  
EXCUSED:** Rep. VanOrden

**GUESTS:** Gretchen Hyde, Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission; Candi Fitch, Idaho Cherry Commission; Larry Ball, Idaho Cherry Commission; Richard Kincheloe, Idaho Cherry Commission; Dennis Stevenson, Rules Coordinator.

**Chairman Andrus** called the meeting to order at 1:31 p.m.

Chairman Andrus stated a correction to **RS 23663** which was presented on February 24, 2015, should have read **RS 23663C1**.

**H 148:** **Candi Fitch**, Idaho Cherry Commission, stated there are two districts listed in the code and with more production now in District 2 and fewer growers in District 1, the commission is asking the reference to the districts be removed from their section of the code. Removing the districts will assure the members can chose to give the best representation to the Cherry Industry. She stated with the removal of districts, the commission members will serve staggering appointments for a term of three years. She said there will also be some clerical changes to give greater clarity.

**MOTION:** **Rep. Romrell** made a motion to send **H 148** to the floor with a **DO PASS** recommendation. **Motion carried by voice vote.** **Rep. Batt** will sponsor the bill on the floor.

**Candi Fitch** reported on the Apple Commission stating there have been good years in the past with the variance of weather. This year started with ideal growing conditions and resulted in record yields of 20% more apples than the largest recorded harvest. However, this year will be remembered as one of the most difficult years in the apple industry. It began with a shortage of trucks to get the harvest to market. She then explained the strike on the western shore docks resulted in a back log of product waiting to be shipped. She said this added to transportation costs. As a result she said, this will be one of the worst years recorded for the apple growers with revenue well below production costs.

**Ms. Fitch** continued with an annual report for the Idaho Cherry Commission. She reported this was a record crop year for Idaho cherries. She stated the growers continue to struggle with labor shortages. This falls early extreme cold weather did not give the trees a chance to acclimate so there will most likely be some damage to the fruit trees this spring. She said there is also a concern about the water supply.

**Ms. Fitch** said being a member of the NW Trader Growers is an import way to market. Instead of marketing against the neighboring states, Washington, Oregon, Utah and Montana, they are marketing together and are much more productive.

**Ms. Fitch** reported Idaho is number three in the nation in harvested acres of onions. The conditions and drip irrigation used in Idaho make for ideal growing conditions.

In response to committee questions concerning why our onions bring a lower price than other areas of the country, **Ms. Fitch** explained the sweeter onions grown in other parts of the US bring a higher price, also supply and demand effect the price.

**Larry Ball**, Chairman of the Cherry Commission, answered the committee question concerning where the Idaho cherries are marketed. He stated they are marketed to all 48 states plus Hawaii and Alaska. The cherry season is only about four weeks long as opposed to the apple season being much longer. He said because the cherry season is so short they demand a higher price.

**Mrs. Fitch** responded to committee questions about the loss of cherry orchards in the Emmett area and explained the cherries today are grown mostly in the sunny slope area of the state.

**Gretchen Hyde**, Executive Director of Idaho Rangelands, presented their annual report to the committee. She reported a new statewide poll found that 90% of Idaho residents approve of livestock grazing as a legitimate use of public lands, the same percentage as guided recreation and mountain biking. Public support for livestock grazing was approximately 20% higher than it was for logging which had a 71% approval rating.

**Ms. Hyde** explained the majority of the funding comes from the voluntary assessment of state and federal grazing land permits. The committee commented it was commendable as this is a voluntary assessment that is seldom refunded upon request. This reflects a high rate of satisfaction among the ranchers who participate in the assessment.

**Ms. Hyde** stated sales of rangeland license plates generated \$30,000. She said the commission keeps an annual budget in savings.

**Ms. Hyde** reported Idaho is the only active state to have a Rangeland Commission. She stressed the importance of education and stated there is more information in the Idaho schools about rain forests than about rangelands when in fact Idaho consists of 60% public lands of which 80% of that land is rangeland.

**Ms. Hyde** indicated how important the internet has been in telling their story and to educate the public about rangelands. She said on the IRRC's website are over twenty-five videos and feature stories about ranch life on the range in Idaho.

In response to committee questions about who their research partners are, **Ms. Hyde** stated the University of Idaho is the main partner.

**ADJOURN:** There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting was adjourned at 3:12 p.m.

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Representative Andrus  
Chair

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Joan Majors  
Secretary