

MINUTES
SENATE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

- DATE:** Tuesday, February 12, 2013
- TIME:** 8:00 A.M.
- PLACE:** Room WW53
- MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Bair, Vice Chairman Guthrie, Senators Brackett, Tippetts, Rice, Nonini, Patrick and Durst.
- ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** Senator Buckner-Webb
- 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 Bair** called the meeting to order at 8:01 a.m.
- MINUTES:** The committee reviewed the minutes from January 29, 2013 and January 31, 2013.
- MOTION:** **Senator Nonini** moved to approve the minutes from January 29, 2013. **Senator Tippetts** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.
- MOTION:** **Senator Brackett** moved to approve the minutes from January 31, 2013. **Vice Chairman Guthrie** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.
- PRESENTATION:** **Chairman Bair** introduced **Rich Garber**, Director of Industry and Government Relations, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, University of Idaho, who introduced Dr. Karen Launchbaugh, Rangeland Ecologist and Department Chair, University of Idaho. **Dr. Launchbaugh** thanked the committee for the opportunity to talk about the University of Idaho Rangeland Center (Center). With the desire to address the rangeland issues facing Idaho and the collaborative efforts of researchers, educators and outreach specialists, the Center was created in August of 2011. The University of Idaho had the first academic program in Rangeland Management and now has one of the largest programs in the United States (U.S.). The Center is comprised of three to six faculty members with expertise in all fields concerning rangelands. There are sixty students currently enrolled, with 80 percent of the graduates getting jobs in range and land management. With their partners they have conducted educational workshops, printed handbooks and recently created a website that provides scientific information and articles on ranges. Their newest publication "Backpack Guide to Range Plants of Idaho" was a collaboration with the Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission. Proceeds from the sales will help support their interns and research.
- Dr. Launchbaugh** said the hot topics the Center is currently addressing are fires, grazing and the sage-grouse. They are proposing a new program that will monitor the effect of spring cattle grazing on the demographic traits of greater sage-grouse, the sage-grouse habitat characteristics and their sagebrush communities, fuel loads, and wildfire behavior. One unintended consequence of restricting spring grazing is more fuel for fires, so the Center is always seeking ways to balance these issues. **Dr. Launchbaugh** said by spring they will have the sites selected. The research would require a team of ten people, a budget of \$500,000 a year and take ten years to complete.

Dr. Launchbaugh introduced **Scott Jensen**, Instructor from Owyhee County Extension, University of Idaho, who talked about the extension programs and their partnership with the Center. Their curriculum includes the "Winter Beef" classes; one day educational workshops for the beef and cow producers across the state. Part of the curriculum deals with range management and range principles. They also partner with the Owyhee Watershed Council and conduct Owyhee Field Days where they teach fourth and fifth grade students about the watershed, and rangeland and livestock use of the rangeland. They have also offered riparian workshops and grazing management workshops. **Mr. Jensen** said that the extension programs are a good fit with the Center in helping to promote rangeland management.

Supporting documents relating to Dr. Launchbaugh's presentation have been archived and can be accessed in the office of the Committee Secretary (See attachment 12).

PRESENTATION: **Chairman Bair** introduced Gretchen Hyde, Executive Director of the Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission (IRRC), who presented the annual report and financial updates. **Ms. Hyde** said the IRRC has been active for fifteen years and is the only state with an active Rangeland Commission. The IRRC works to increase the public's understanding of the rangeland as a renewable source of consumer products, provides information on rangeland practices, promotes public support for livestock grazing and responsible stewardship, and advocates the multiple use of the resources.

The IRRC conducts summer continuing education workshops, works with the K-8 classroom students providing materials, activities, range camps and contests. They publish booklets for the schools to educate students on rangelands and agriculture. The IRRC often partners with Dr. Launchbaugh and the University of Idaho Rangeland Center and just finished publishing the "Backpack Guide to Range Plants of Idaho"; sales will help the Center and intern's expenses.

The IRRC receives its funding from fees assessed on the owners for a "per animal unit month" for their cattle and sheep that graze on dry, state or federal grazing land, grants from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and from private foundations, interest and special license plate income. Their budget for July 2012 to June 2013 projects a net loss due to high expenses. However, the IRRC diligently seeks partnerships to share the costs and has been able to turn the loss around to a positive net income. The IRRC is holding a five-year reserve of approximately \$220,000; this amount remaining static for some time.

Supporting documents relating to Ms. Hyde's presentation have been archived and can be accessed in the office of the Committee Secretary (See attachments 13 and 14).

DISCUSSION: **Chairman Bair** began the discussion by asking for input on budget issues. He is scheduled to report before the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee (JFAC) to address budgets for 2014. The Agricultural Research and Extension Service budget requested operating expenditures of \$1 million to come out of the General Fund for communication costs, repairs and maintenance, fuel lubricants, computer supplies, and utility charges. This has been recommended by the Governor and **Chairman Bair** proposes supporting this.

Senator Patrick supported the proposal and said that last year even though there was no recommendation from the Governor regarding operating expenditures, they felt it was important to put money into this to be able to keep up the maintenance of the buildings.

Chairman Bair said the next item is for occupancy costs for Kimberly Labs who recently made some changes there and proposes that this amount be approved.

Vice Chairman Guthrie asked about the 57 percent increase over the estimated operational expenses for the operating expenditures. What has changed?

Chairman Bair said that he did not have the specifics. He did say that over the last five years there have been cuts of up to sixteen percent, and this is needed to meet the most urgent needs of the extension offices. There have been no significant repairs done for quite a few years.

Chairman Bair introduced **Senator Joe Stegner**, University of Idaho, who further explained that due to the recession a few years back, Agricultural Extension and Research was cut \$5 million. The Governor made a commitment several years ago to replace the money if the funds became available in the future. This \$1 million request is the first step in trying to replace that money. There is another request from the University of Idaho for \$196,000 for the Rangeland Center. This money is needed for personnel, travel and operations management. This was recommended by the State Board of Education but was not included in the Governor's budget.

Chairman Bair said he did not see this amount and was told it shows up under Special Programs.

Senator Nonini questioned the \$300,000 for utility charges; is this a back due amount, an increase or the annual amount needed. **Chairman Bair** will contact the budget analyst and get more clarification. **Rich Garber** approached the podium to answer this question. He said the utilities had been paid; that this request for the Operating Expenditures is because during the downturn, the University used the money they had to keep their personnel, and did not use any resources towards operations. This is for maintenance of the facilities.

Senator Rice commented that the research facilities in his area have had less activity lately, and he would like to see more use to avoid possible decay. He said that continued research helps with better productivity in agriculture. He also said the research by the Rangeland Center regarding grazing and its impact was very important and worth continued support. **Chairman Bair** concurred, and said that it is worth mentioning this to JFAC. **Senator Brackett** stated that with the increase of students enrolling in science and the importance of getting this science right, the Rangeland Center is a worthy project and should be conveyed to JFAC as well.

Senator Durst mentioned the importance of continuing conservation in operations and water resources. **Chairman Bair** agreed and next moved to the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission (ISWCC) budget. There were no copies for the committee, and **Chairman Bair** said there is one line item the Governor recommended. The ISWCC provides field-based expertise in water and engineering, and has requested on-going spending authority from the dedicated fund from the consulting services they offer. This is an increase of \$20,000 from the base amount. **Chairman Bair** proposed the amount be supported for approval. Another item not in the budget concerns the ISWCC's on-going work with growers and producers to fix problems by providing them with funding, resources and expertise before the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) get involved. The program has been very successful and has been done with matched funding grants, the money being provided by the state and matched by the federal government. There is about \$200,000 being left on the table because the money needed to qualify for the grant has not been provided. **Senator Rice** agrees that providing the matching fund money, if it is available, is a better use of the money instead of paying for DEQ actions. **Chairman Bair** said he did not know where the additional funds would come from. That would be the work of JFAC. The recommendation he would like the committee to consider would be a policy decision on whether it would be wise to go after the federal grant money. This money would help in the restoration of creeks and streams.

Chairman Bair said the last items are regarding the Department of Agriculture budget. One change affects the Eurasian milfoil eradication program and the department's request for on-going funding of \$900,000, but the Governor has recommended this continue to be one-time general funding. **Senator Patrick** said that since this is a permanent problem, a permanent source of funding would be more beneficial as it is important to be able to keep up the eradication programs. This amount is much smaller than the requests from previous years, and shows that the on-going efforts are paying off.

Chairman Bair said Weights and Measures is requesting \$69,700 to be able to hire another worker to meet the increasing and changing needs. **Senator Durst** asked why they are not able to get the money from the services they provide. **Chairman Bair** explained that this money does not come from the general fund but from their dedicated funds spending authorities. Next was another spending authority request from the Idaho Preferred Program. They are in need of a part-time inspector to make sure the crops meet the criteria to be qualified for the program. He recommends this be approved.

Chairman Bair said that the pesticide collection program has grown so quickly, they are requesting another \$120,000 of dedicated spending authority to expand into another area to better provide the service to more customers, and he will recommend this be approved. The last item is regarding the State Rail Plan. Rural Economic Development and Integrated Freight Transportation Program (REDIFIT) has requested that \$40,000 be used for the Department of Transportation's Railroad Transportation Study. **Senator Patrick** and **Senator Rice** both agreed this would be a benefit and an appropriate use of the funds.

ADJOURNED: **Chairman Bair** adjourned the meeting at 9:28 a.m.

Senator Bair
Chairman

Denise McNeil
Secretary