

MINUTES
HOUSE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: Monday, March 04, 2013
TIME: 1:30 pm or Upon Adjournment
PLACE: Room EW42
MEMBERS: Chairman Andrus, Vice Chairman Boyle, Representatives Bolz, McMillan, Batt, Bell, Agidius, Dayley, Miller, Romrell, Stevenson, VanOrden, Pence, Erpelding
**ABSENT/
EXCUSED:** Rep. Bolz
GUESTS: Gretchen Hyde, Idaho Rangeland Resource Center; Forrest Hymas, Idaho Horse Board; Wally Butler, Idaho Farm Bureau Federation; Stan Boyd, Idaho Cattle Association; Dar Olberding; Bret Rumbeck, Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts

Chairman Andrus called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m.

MOTION: **Rep. Pence** made a motion to approve the minutes of the February 26, 2013 meeting. **Motion carried by voice vote.**

Gretchen Hyde, Executive Director, Idaho Rangeland Resource Commission (IRRC), presented an update. She commended the IRRC's newly expanded website as a valuable tool for ranchers. She explained the recent formation of rangeland fire protection associations, consisting of ranchers who can respond quickly to rural wildfires on a volunteer basis. These associations worked with forest protection districts to receive wildfire training and resources. These additional fire suppression services will help to keep Idaho ranchland productive; they benefit ranchers and game and prevent loss of wildlife habitat so that natural resources are not unnecessarily devastated.

Ms. Hyde discussed the Forest Service's agreement to send invoices for their commission, which saves them money. She indicated that the commission received additional grants and other unexpected funding this past year. She mentioned annual assessments from ranchers have been steady. She acknowledged that she is the sole full time employee and now has one part time employee. She stated that most of her time is spent traveling throughout the state, promoting public relations and conducting educational programs. She noted that the commission provides funding for student field trips to rangeland areas and for research on grazing. Ms. Hyde related that other services provided by the commission include teacher workshops, partnerships with 4-H programs, Idaho history and rangeland textbooks, and career development events.

Forrest Hymas, Executive Director, Idaho Horse Board, presented an update. He outlined that the horse industry in Idaho consists mainly of the Idaho Horse Council and the Idaho Horse Board. The Board was created with seven members appointed by the Governor, as a self-funding program with dollars collected from branding. It was the first of its kind in the nation. These monies are then awarded in the form of grants, to further promotion, research and education of diverse equine interests. He indicated that various horse groups and categories are aided through their donations.

Chairman Andrus put the committee at ease.

Chairman Andrus called the committee back to order.

H 208:

Stan Boyd, Legislative Advisor, Idaho Cattle Association (ICA), presented **H 208**, Animal Damage Control. He described the federal government's introduction of wolves to Idaho, which have rapidly multiplied and preyed on livestock and game. Ranchers especially have been hard hit and wolf depredation complaints have risen sharply. Recent funding is significantly reduced and no other wildlife resources are currently available to combat the damage being done.

Mr. Boyd stated this legislation would allow the ICA to assess up to 25 cents per head on cattle for use in Idaho's Animal Damage Control (ADC) program. The current ceiling for this assessment is five cents per head. This increase would apply only to cow and calf operations; dairy and feedlot cattle would be exempt. He commented that cow and calf operators support this bill, to aid with the severe wolf depredation problems they are experiencing.

In response to concerns that ranchers would have to pay for damage inflicted on them, **Mr. Boyd** replied that he understands this is a difficult position. He related that they have looked at many other funding options, and other animal industries have been recently granted authority to raise their assessments for rising costs. This would be a tool for the cattle industry to use if needed and it would likely take years before assessments climbed toward the new ceiling.

Pertaining to the range of ADC services, **Mr. Boyd** specified they also deal with birds, marmots, coyotes, beavers, bears, etc., but wolves are the number one predator in the state, and 40% of the ADC's workload is dealing with wolves. He clarified that other programs also contribute to the ADC, such as airports, the state's General Fund, district grazing boards, counties, other animal industry assessments, and the Department of Fish and Game. He pointed out there is no longer federal money offered for predator control; cuts have dictated that claims are also no longer available. Any USDA monies are strictly for monitoring. Relating to how much funding has been lost, he shared that previously \$125,000 was issued for responding to depredations and another \$100,000 for ranchers that applied for losses. He expressed concern that monies are needed to replace this \$225,000 in lost funding for heavy cattle losses, due to wolves.

Wally Butler, Range and Livestock Specialist, Idaho Farm Bureau, **testified in opposition to H 208**. He opposes any assessment increase from brand inspections. He conveyed that not all of the cattle industry supports this measure. He suggested looking at funding from wolf or other tags, or assembling a task force to look at broader funding sources to bear this burden.

Wyatt Prescott, Executive Vice President, Idaho Cattle Association, **testified in favor of H 208**. He explained that this issue has been weighing heavily on cattle operators and their consensus was that they cannot afford to lose wildlife services predator control. He stated that a working group was put together and the 25 cent assessment ceiling was a compromise among the industry. They approached other entities, but budgets were tight there as well. Regarding concerns over what percentage of money collected would go to predator control, he responded that monies are transferred monthly, straight from the Idaho State Brand Department to the ADC. **Mr. Boyd** concurred with this.

MOTION:

Rep. Pence made a motion to send **H 208** to the floor with a **DO PASS** recommendation.

Rep. Pence spoke in support of the motion that although she feels it is not the responsibility of the cow and calf operators, if they voted to support this, they are willing to make the best of a bad situation, and will continue to look for other funding sources.

Rep. Boyle spoke in opposition to the motion. She justified that her constituents, although suffering from wolf depredation, are frustrated that the Fish and Wildlife Services will not allow the wolves to be killed. She believes this bill is not the answer to the problem.

VOTE ON THE MOTION: **Motion carried by voice vote. Chairman Andrus** will sponsor the bill on the floor.

ADJOURN: There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 4:47 p.m.

Representative Andrus
Chair

Kim Jensen-Porter
Secretary