

MINUTES

HOUSE ENVIRONMENT, ENERGY, & TECHNOLOGY COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, February 20, 2014

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room EW42

MEMBERS: Chairman Raybould, Vice Chairman Eskridge, Representative(s) Anderson(1), Hartgen, Vander Woude, DeMordaunt, Nielsen, Thompson, Anderson(31), Anderst, Mendive, Monks, Morse, Trujillo, Smith, Rusche, Woodings

**ABSENT/
EXCUSED:** None

GUESTS: Sharon Kiefer, IDFG; Doug Dockter, Idaho Power; Scott Pugrud, OER; Becky Johnstone, ICIE; Dustin Miller, OSC; Jim Wertz, US EPA- Idaho; Danelle Heath, OSC; Madeneie Herrich, Veritas Advisors; Reaveen Welton, RMP; Beth Markley, ICIE

Chairman Raybould called the meeting to order at 3:31 p.m.

MOTION: **Rep. Smith** made a motion to approve the minutes of February 10, 2014 and February 12, 2014. **Motion carried by voice vote.**

Randy MacMillan, President of the Idaho Council on Industry and Environment (ICIE), gave a brief overview of the ICIE and environmental law. He then introduced those who would present to the committee; **Joan Cloonan**, Attorney in the U.S. Department of Justice 1974-1979; **Dustin Miller**, Administrator, Governor's Office of Species Conservation (OSC); **Dough Dockter**, Idaho Power Co. Manager 500kv Projects, **Karen Steenhof**, President of Raptor Research Foundation, Member of the Boise District BLM Resource Advisory Committee; and **Neil Rimby**, Extension Professor/Range Economist, Member of the Boise BLM Advisory Committee.

Joan Cloonan gave an introduction on the history of environmental policy and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). She stated the original purpose of the EPA was to help fuse all the varied and scattered environmental policies and agencies into one effective program and provide assistance to states who implement the standards. She gave an overview of the growth of the EPA and the variety of ways it was forced to be an enforcement body and their performance and partnership with states today.

Dustin Miller gave a brief history and overview of the Office of Species Conservation, its purpose and continued work on Sage Grouse repopulating. Mr. Miller gave a history of the Sage Grouse and how they came to be considered a potential species for listing on the Endangered Species List in 2010. He said states were given the option to work with partners to try and keep the sage grouse off the Endangered Species List. He said they were given five years to reverse the trend of decline. He listed a variety of factors influencing the decline. These factors included Habitat fragmentation, fire and inadequate federal land use plans. He also explained the various steps Idaho has taken to try and reverse the trend. He said the main initiative used by the OSC is the Governor's Sage Grouse Alternative (Alt E) Plan. He stated they have continued to receive positive feedback about Alt. E from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and are optimistic about the future of Sage Grouse in Idaho. He said there is still a lot of work to do and in order to be successful, there needs to be people continually involved at all levels. He said the program is working well and they continue to work with partners to meet the five year deadline.

Doug Dockter and **Karen Steenhof** gave their portion of the presentation on the Gateway West project. Mr. Dockter explained this project came about as a result of factors such as business need and State need for additional load and transmission capacity. He said building only some segments may provide localized transmission relief but will not provide the total benefits as planned.

Mr. Dockter gave an overview of the additional power needs in Idaho, explaining the greatest constraint is from Pocatello west to the Treasure Valley. He explained that this portion of the line has no additional available capacity to transmit power to meet future need. He said this new Gateway West project would allow Idaho Power to move additional amounts of energy across the electrical system especially during times when wind generation and consumer needs are the highest.

Mr. Dockter described the permitting process and the milestones and road bumps that have been encountered in the process of this project. He added there are several smaller projects underway to increase capacity but the power from those new lines is already spoken for. This will result in the additional transmission capacity leaving the state without options for power transfer.

Mr. Dockter focused on the two segments of the project, Segments 8 and 9 (Midpoint-Hemingway and Cedar Hill-Hemingway) that were not included in the Record of Decision project approval. In summary he said this project is essential to meeting long-term customer needs both regionally and locally and there is continued efforts to achieve permitting approval on Segments 8 and 9.

Ms. Steenhof discussed in further detail the issues that have occurred with Segments 8 and 9. She stated the key issue with lines 8 and 9 is the impact they would have on a protected area. She gave a history of the Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area (NCA). She said the purpose of the NCA is conservation, protection and enhancement of raptor population and habitat while allowing for diverse and appropriate use of lands in the area consistent with the maintenance and enhancement of the raptor population and habitats. She stated the NCA is a part of the larger National Conservation Lands Service which encompasses 27 million acres across the U.S. She outlined research done in the 1980's and what was discovered about the impact of transmission lines through the NCA. They found that the lines actually enhanced the opportunity for raptor nesting and raven nesting in the area. She said these results were published in 1993 but have not seemed to be included in the current discussions on the Segment 8 and 9 plans.

Ms. Steenhof gave an overview of the policy that has further complicated the issue of permitting. She reviewed the 2009 Omnibus Public Land Management Act (Public Law 111-11) and the rules it entails. She said the rules deal with activities in the protected areas and discussed the complications they create for the Gateway West project on Segments 8 and 9.

Ms. Steenhof reviewed the Record of Decision which came from the BLM and the reason for the decision. She explained that as a result of this decision, a subcommittee was created to address the issues and various ways to solve the issues. She said the tasks of the subcommittee are to examine options to resolved the siting issues associated with Segments 8 and 9, consider the possibility of new routes not considered in the approval process, determine if additional issues or concerns exist that were not addressed in the environmental analysis for the segments. The subcommittee will evaluate any new information or modifications to the alternatives analyzed in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, and evaluate the companies' proposal for enhancements to resources in the NCA. She said the subcommittee has come up with new information and they are looking at the evaluation criteria in attempts to answer some of the questions.

Neil Rimby concluded the presentation with a discussion on grazing issues across Idaho. He discussed public lands and grazing, livestock facts and figures, economic impacts, and the cooperative range management program in Idaho. In discussing public lands, Mr. Rimby explained there is seasonal dependence on public lands for livestock grazing on public forage lands. He stated this land use is a part of many western ranches. When looking at data, he stated there was a rising trend in the number of grazing cattle from 1940 to 1975. However, it showed that from 1975 to today there has been a gradual decrease in the cattle population. In the number of sheep there has also been a downward trend, but the sheep have been in a large decline since 1940. He stated the gross dependency of these animals on public lands for forage each year is about 29%. He also explained that Federal Land Grazing adjustments are being made and NEPA is now required, along with economic and social assessments as a part of the approval process. He stated the loss in grazing land has resulted in a loss of ranch income and has had an effect on various other sectors as well. These effected sectors includes, agriculture services, forage crops, construction and maintenance, retail and trace, as well as transportation, communication, and public utilities.

In response to questions regarding the NEIS use of existing corridors to add more transmission capacity, **Mr. Dockter** explained that new lines are necessary because of WECC separation requirements, the issues between the old and new lines, and reliability concerns.

ADJOURN: There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 2:58 p.m.

Representative Raybould
Chair

Kaela Becklund
Secretary