

MINUTES
SENATE RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

DATE: Wednesday, January 25, 2017

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Bair, Vice Chairman Vick, Senators Brackett, Heider, Bayer, Johnson, Stennett, and Jordan

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Senator Siddoway

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 of the Senate Resources and Environment Committee (Committee) to order at 1:30 p.m.

WELCOME: **Chairman Bair** welcomed Director Virgil Moore and staff from the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) and members of the Fish and Game Commission (Commission). **Chairman Bair** announced that the first order of business would be to hear from the two Gubernatorial appointees to the Commission, Jerry Meyers and Greg Cameron.

GUBERNATORIAL APPOINTMENT HEARING: **Jerry Meyers** said that he has been a life long resident of Idaho, primarily in the Pocatello and Salmon areas. He and his wife, Sidni, have a blended family of 10 children, 27 grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

Mr. Meyers' educational background is as follows:

- American Falls High School, 1964
- Brigham Young University, 1968, Bachelor of Science, Agricultural Economics
- Utah State University, 1970, Master of Science, Agricultural Economics
- University of Idaho, 1986, Juris Doctor of Law

Mr. Meyers stated that his professions have been varied, which he feels will be beneficial working with the wide spectrum of issues and people coming before the Commission. His professions include: owner/broker of a real estate agency that marketed agricultural properties throughout Idaho and the Pacific Northwest; outfitter and guide services for cougar, bear, deer, elk, bighorn sheep and goats in Lemhi County and the Frank Church Wilderness area; guided brown bear hunters in Alaska; guide services for leopard, buffalo, and elephant hunts in Botswana, South Africa, Namibia, and Zimbabwe; law associate and partner with McDevitt and Meyers Law Office in Pocatello; Magistrate Judge in Lemhi County; Senior Judge for the Idaho Supreme Court; and presently active in Meyers Mediations and Law.

In explaining his reasons for applying for the position of Fish and Game Commissioner, **Mr. Meyers** stated that he has been an avid outdoorsman all his life. His life experiences have prepared him to meet the challenges being advocated by the various competing interests. The 17-year tenure as a judge has taught him to listen and consider all positions before making a decision. **Mr. Meyers** said that he also feels that his professions have put him in a position to enable him to have the necessary time and resources to commit to the position and he is prepared to do his part perpetuating the preservation of the wildlife.

Current organizations of which Mr. Meyers is a member of:

- National Rifle Association, Endowment Life Member
- Safari Club International, Life Member
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- Idaho Houndsmen
- National Academy of Designated Neutrals
- Idaho Trial Lawyers Association

Mr. Meyers was appointed by the Governor and awaiting confirmation by the Senate to serve a term commencing September 22, 2016 and expiring June 30, 2020.

**GUBERNATORIAL
APPOINTMENT
HEARING:**

Gregory Clark Cameron stated that his objective as a commissioner, if approved, is to protect the resources that are in the State and to make sure they are available for future generations to enjoy. Without good management, hunters, fishermen, his four children and four grandchildren will not be able to enjoy the resources of fish, game, and fowl.

At the age of six, Mr. Cameron learned to fish and has tied his own fly fishing flies since the eighth grade. However, his passion is archery and he has won six indoor archery championships and numerous outdoor archery awards. **Mr. Cameron** said that he has taken many game animals, including the once-in-lifetime trophies consisting of goat, moose, and Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep.

Sporting organizations of which Mr. Cameron is a member of:

- Minidoka Bowman
- National Rifle Association
- National Field Archery Association
- Pheasants Forever Mini-Cassia Chapter
- Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation
- Ducks Unlimited
- Idaho State Bow Hunter Association

Mr. Cameron stated that the Cameron family had a tractor and implement business in which he started working from a very young age. Later in life, Mr. Cameron started farming, raising sugar beets and malt barley with his son. He has also sold sugar beet seed for the last 15 years, supplying it to Holly Seed Company, Sheridan, Wyoming.

Mr. Cameron said through 45 years of hard work in various businesses, he has developed important "people skills" which has taught him to listen to all sides of a situation and to make good decisions. Many of his dealings have been with farmers, bankers, truckers, implement salesmen, ditch riders, and beet and barley field men. **Mr. Cameron** also has a learning disabled daughter and he has attended classes and worked with local educators for 15 years to help her obtain a high school diploma. Mediation was the key in accomplishing this.

Leadership positions that Mr. Cameron has held are: Minidoka Beet Growers Board - nine years; Pheasants Forever Grass Roots Chapter - vice president; and basketball and baseball coach - 16 years. Other significant involvement includes the Idaho Wheat and Barley Association and the Snake River Sugar Beet Co-op.

Mr. Cameron said that he honestly feels that he would do a very good job as a Commissioner as he is a passionate outdoorsman and truly cares about Idaho's natural resources, especially the fish and game. **Mr. Cameron** was appointed by the Governor awaiting approval by the Senate to serve a term commencing September 22, 2016 and expiring June 30, 2020.

Chairman Bair thanked both Mr. Meyers and Mr. Cameron for appearing before the Committee and said that voting on their confirmation would take place at the next scheduled meeting.

PRESENTATION: **Chairman Bair** asked Virgil Moore, IDFG Director, to make his presentation.

Director Moore provided two handouts: IDFG's Winter Feeding Report and the Director's Annual Report to the Commission for Fiscal Year 2016. **Director Moore** said he would give a quick overview of current events, primarily winter feeding.

The IDFG Commission approved the elk management plan a few years ago and it has proven to be very successful. IDFG has invested a large amount of financial resources and staff during the past four years in this plan. **Director Moore** stated that he has been the director for the past six years and has been working on this issue for the past five years of that time. The inventory of animals, and inventory of tags that are sold to make money, are one of the business activities of the agency.

Director Moore said IDFG has reprioritized their financial resources for the large scale capture and collaring efforts of the deer and elk. He thanked the volunteers for the help provided. The additional cost of helicopter time has been very expensive. The downside of the success of the deer and elk program is what IDFG is dealing with this winter. The last four out of five winters have been easy and it has allowed them to capitalize on what has been going on with the game on the hill. Now with a tougher winter, IDFG is seeing depredation on private lands and private resources.

Director Moore stated that last year, IDFG invested over \$1 million to protect stack-yards so that the elk could not access them. Landowners have been compensated \$360,000 for damages to crops, above and beyond what was anticipated. Depredation controlled hunt tags have been increased by 7,000 to compensate for the increase in population on deer, elk and pronghorn. Nearly \$200,000 has been invested to improve habitat for the game animals.

Director Moore thanked Chairman Bair and JFAC for the supplemental money approval and the increased spending authority that was granted. An increase of \$300,000 was requested and after conversations with Chairman Bair, the figure of \$400,000 was arrived at and it was right on target.

There have been 341 depredation complaints to date and more are likely to come. **Director Moore** stated there are 35 winter feeding operations in place at this time, with most of them for depredation for elk to keep them away from haystacks. There is only one permanent elk feeding station and it is in the Sun Valley-Ketchum area and that operation is going well. **Director Moore** said there are 7,800 elk and 4,000 mule deer that are currently being fed and all of the appropriated money is expected to be spent.

Director Moore said that he has prepared an annual report to the Fish and Game Commission for several years. The document is very concise and shows the allocations for fish and wildlife. The report also provides the big game harvest history from 1935 to present. In 2015, it was the best combined season in 25 years. **Director Moore** said 2015 was the result of the fruits of the labor of the IDFG staff and what has been invested has paid off, but the downside is that the depredation has doubled.

Senator Heider inquired about the deaths of the antelope that ate poisonous plants. **Director Moore** stated that the plant was Japanese Yew and the concern needs to be directed to the Department of Agriculture. **Director Moore** indicated that he will have a dialogue with Director Gould.

Senator Stennett asked if \$400,000 was enough funding to meet the needs of the winter feeding. **Director Moore** replied that he and the staff feel that it will be sufficient to get them through this winter.

SPEAKER:

Brad Corkhill, Commission Chairman, represents the Panhandle Region. **Mr. Corkhill** said that depredation seems to be a big issue throughout the State, but his region does not have those issues to the degree that the southern part of the State is experiencing. Depredation issues are handled on an individual basis, are much smaller in scale in his part of the State, and are being handled quite well.

Mr. Corkhill stated that there have been some issues regarding moose populations on the border with Canada which will be addressed tomorrow.

Senator Brackett remarked that he has been getting calls about wolves and the way IDFG is handling the wolf situation. He asked Mr. Corkhill what the Department is doing. **Mr. Corkhill** responded by saying the Panhandle Region is the most aggressive region in the State regarding wolf control. Over the years, there have been a few changes in the way wolf control is approached. Three years ago, the trapping season was opened early in units 7 and 9 and a portion of unit 6. That resulted in the taking of 15 wolves. Two years ago, a portion of unit 4 was opened. A two year proclamation cycle has been in effect since then. There is talk of changing some hunting regulations in order to continue the effort to control the wolf population. Since the wolf was delisted, the season has been open year round on private land and the number of tags a trapper can get in a year's time is 10. With all things considered, there has been progress in the Panhandle Region with wolf control.

There is now a lawsuit for lynx protection going on. **Mr. Corkhill** said that he and Commissioner Blanco were designated as part of a committee to meet with the plaintiffs and to begin to negotiate some compromises in the trapping regulations. The Attorney General's office got the judge to reconsider his decision and it is now under appeal.

Vice Chairman Vick said his concern is about deer moving into town and what IDFG is doing about it. **Mr. Corkhill** responded by saying it is a very complicated issue as many people are feeding the deer and there is no easy solution, but he vowed to continue working on it.

SPEAKER:

Dan Blanco, Clearwater Region, spoke next. **Mr. Blanco** said that they have had their first three season Chinook salmon run in the Clearwater River: spring, summer, and fall Chinook run. Also in the Clearwater Region, they had their first Access Yes property devoted exclusively to youth bird hunting. The property consists of 900 acres, and is provided at no cost to IDFG by the landowner. IDFG will continue to stock the property and the advantage is that it gives the youth a place to hunt.

Mr. Blanco said that as he has traveled around the State, he has noticed the importance of large tracts of private land. Some private land has the best habitat and needs to be preserved. Some landowners of large tracts of land are closing them off so that no access is available to sportsmen. **Mr. Blanco** said this is a concern of his.

SPEAKER: **Blake Fischer**, Southwest Region, said that he is focused on the future. **Mr. Fisher** indicated that the Commission is forward thinking and are looking down the road, using tools to allow them to become more proactive and more progressive. **Mr. Fisher** shared a story regarding elk in a sugar beet field. The elk were removed from that field by putting sugar beet tailings in a barren field across the road and were hazed by snowmobiles to move them.

SPEAKER: Lane Clezie represents the Southeast Region. **Mr. Clezie** said his report would be on depredation and elk wintering. He said his area is very active in protecting private property and feed lots. They have had volunteer help in 30 different areas and are working in conjunction with the Shoshone-Bannock tribe to move elk away from the highway back to Lincoln Creek where IDFG are feeding the elk.

SPEAKER: **Derick Attebury**, Upper Snake Region, said the Henry Creek Fire in August burned 50,000 acres, including over 30,000 acres of the Tex Creek Wildlife Management Area. One of his main concerns in working with people who are adjacent to the Tex Creek Area is working out solutions for the land and rehabilitation efforts. They are feeding about 4,000 elk and have moved about 1,800 ton of hay that was put in place in three days.

Chairman Bair said that he wished to add to the comments regarding depredation. There is concern with winter feeding and winter depredation, but he asked the Commissioners to consider summertime feeding, as well. Depredation in summer is oftentimes worse for landowners than in the wintertime. **Chairman Bair** thanked the Commissioners and Director Moore for their service and for appearing before the Committee today.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Bair** adjourned the meeting at 3:00 p.m.

Senator Bair
Chair

Juanita Budell
Secretary