



IDAHO DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND GAME

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C.L. "Butch" Otter / Governor
Virgil Moore / Director

Testimony of Ed Schriever, Deputy Director, Idaho Department of Fish and Game

I am Ed Schriever, Deputy Director of Operations for Idaho Department of Fish and Game. I am here today representing Director Virgil Moore.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today about how Idaho Fish and Game has leveraged director discretion for CEC to positively impact our staff. I would also like to share some of our challenges we continue to have in ensuring our compensation package is competitive enough to attract and retain our dedicated employees. I want to emphasize that CEC is an important tool in meeting this challenge.

Over the last several years with the support of the Governor, this committee, and JFAC, we have been able to implement pay distribution plans to target the unique attributes of our workforce. This allowance for director discretion has allowed us to positively impact important workforce issues of compression and salary inequity. It has also allowed us to substantively benefit the bottom line of take home pay for employees on a merit basis and make progress with attracting and retaining employees in certain sectors such as information technology.

Keeping Idaho's Wildlife Heritage

Ed Schriever

Attachment 5

attachment

1/15/18 Testimony #5

IDFG is dedicated fund agency, funded by a unique mix of discretionary and nondiscretionary funds. Nearly 50% of our budget comes from license fees, which support operations and deliver critical services to our customers. The recent history of national economic conditions has demonstrated that this revenue can fluctuate substantially, so we value efficiency and effectiveness – values that are enabled by competent employees and high employee retention rates. CEC helps us address workforce issues to deliver these values.

IDFG has been and remains fully committed to funding employee compensation in alignment with the spirit and intent of Idaho Code. Because of this standard, the Director's Office continually works to identify efficiency improvements within our organization to ensure all of our resources are fully utilized and to recoup long-term savings to reinvest in staff. As a result, tough decisions have been made, such as eliminating 10 positions in FY15, devolving our in-house construction crew in FY18, and creating a structured internal process to evaluate individual vacancies and programs, thereby decreasing our reliance on temporary personnel and asking staff to take on more responsibility.

These strategies have enabled us to use salary savings for early implementation of any approved CEC and also add additional funds to permanent raises. Doing so allows us to target specific areas of concern, whether it's long standing compression issues, retention risks, or other salary inequities. A great example is the work to significantly alleviate severe compression issues within our Enforcement ranks in our FY15 and FY16 distributions.

The compression was the combined result of long term system issues such as inconsistent pay raises and changes to the pay structure, and much less opportunity for our enforcement officers to promote or laterally transfer to a different position. The bottom line was that our enforcement officers, due to their dedicated commitment to their jobs, communities, and longevity, were lagging significantly behind their counterparts in other disciplines. Our ability to tailor the CEC distribution plan to target these issues significantly alleviated this compression. While these distributions improved morale throughout the department, the impact on our enforcement personnel was truly remarkable.

The FY17 and FY18 CEC distributions did not target specific areas of compression because we had addressed needed corrections in FY15 and FY16. Our plan for FY19 would be to continue with the consistent application on a merit basis that we have developed to keep parity within our department disciplines and different job classes.

Another crucial component to our effective pay distribution has been in the foundation of our performance evaluation rating system which drives our merit based pay philosophy. We have made significant strides over the past five years in providing consistent and accurate rating distribution across the department through an increased focus on training and rating calibration. This has greatly improved our agency-wide rating distributions and clearly delineated performance levels of employees.

The result is clearer accountability, improved morale, and an accurate distribution of changes in employee compensation to recognize and reward our highest performers.

I'd like to share with you an excerpt from one of several dozen emails the Director's Office received after the early implementation of FY18 CEC which included a 3% CEC, and additional 1% the department was able to identify through strategic salary savings that we invested on a continuing basis:

"...I wanted to express my appreciation for your efforts in regard to salary compression and CEC the past few years. It was only 3 years ago, I was looking for employment outside the agency, because frankly, I could not support my family on my income. For my family and many others, the increase in pay has made a substantial improvement in our lives. I have seen a noticeable difference in stress levels and morale among many other coworkers as well. Again, thank you and know your efforts do not go unnoticed or unappreciated."

This email is from one of our biologists on the front line of day-to-day field operations. Our employees are highly trained professionals with years of experience and substantial formal education; the majority has master's degrees and many have doctorate degrees. They work long hours often in remote and difficult work conditions throughout the year in order to fulfill the Fish and Game mission to preserve, protect, perpetuate, and manage Idaho's fish and wildlife resources and serve the citizens of Idaho.

Idaho's abundant natural resource opportunities make employment at IDFG appealing to many natural resource professionals. However, for every story I can tell you like the one above, I can tell you about the employees we have lost through federal and other state's competition. In all cases, these are employees in which we have made significant investment and cannot afford to lose. They are experienced, high performers with the capacity to move into critical leadership roles. And while our long-term succession planning cannot afford for these people to leave, we are often unable to find a way to keep them. This is challenging for our mid-level management because 20% of our employees will likely retire in the next several years and we may not have experienced individuals available to move into those roles.

Over the last year we have lost 10% of our professional level Biologists, with many of these employees being cherry picked by the federal government for 20% to 25% more for the same position, sometimes even in the same location. We also struggle with retention of our Conservation Enforcement Officers. These people are highly trained, hold full peace officer status through POST, and most have a minimum of a bachelor's degree. They routinely confront dangerous situations in remote locations. The people who become Conservation Officers don't do it thinking they will get rich. They do it because they are passionate about protecting the resource and committed to public service. We recently lost an officer who exhibited significant leadership potential. This employee took a federal enforcement job in the same work location, for a 207% increase in pay.

I share with you these examples not to say the State or IDFG aren't doing enough. I share them with you to highlight that IDFG has been extremely fortunate to benefit from both the continued support of the CEC and our internal commitment and ability to reinvest in staff to the fullest extent possible. We have made dramatic improvements over several years and we clearly see it reflected in the morale of our staff. We have avoided some loss of experienced and valued staff. Our department average compa-ratio has moved from 84% in FY10 to 93% in FY18. This is a huge success and we thank you for your role in achieving this success.

However, from an agency perspective, we must never think that we have done enough, or that we can slow down. Your ongoing commitment to fund consistent Changes in Employee Compensation and changes to the pay structure ensures that we do not fall further behind. We've made some great gains and we are positioned to continue to improve our ability to recruit and retain the best and brightest. On behalf of Idaho Fish and Game, I thank you again for your continued commitment to our state government's greatest resource, our employees.