

MINUTES  
**SENATE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Thursday, January 28, 2021

**TIME:** 8:00 A.M.

**PLACE:** Room WW53

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Burtenshaw, Vice Chairman Bayer, Senators Patrick, Den Hartog, Johnson, Zito, Ricks, Nelson, and Rabe

**ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** None

**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 Burtenshaw** called the meeting of the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee (Committee) to order at 8:00 a.m.

**MINUTES APPROVAL:** **Senator Den Hartog** moved to approve the Minutes of January 19, 2021. **Vice Chairman Bayer** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**Senator Patrick** moved to approve the Minutes of January 21, 2021. **Senator Den Hartog** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**PRESENTATION: Idaho Rangeland Resources Commission (IRRC) Annual Report. Gretchen Hyde**, Executive Director, IRRC, opened with a quick introduction of IRRC. She stated that IRRC is a quasi-state agency led by five board members nominated by members of the University of Idaho, College of Natural Resources; Idaho Cattle Association; and the Idaho Wool Growers Association. Each board member serves a five-year term and is appointed by the Governor. She added that IRRC is legislatively mandated to have advisory members who come from different state agencies. Over the past years, IRRC members have increasingly encouraged open dialogue between the public and its members.

**Ms. Hyde** talked about the budgeted and actual revenues of IRRC for 2020. She stated the IRRC assessment fees were contributed by ranchers and landowners, and are refundable upon request. The assessment fee was set in 1997, and changes on the fee must be legislatively approved. Furthermore, she said IRRC also received grants from partners based on its projects and activities. Other revenues come from license plate sales, trespass fines, sales of materials, and registration fees from workshops. She emphasized that these fundings supplement the IRRC's educational programs.

**Ms. Hyde** detailed one of the IRRC partnership programs, called the Idaho Rangeland Conservation Partnership (IRCP). The partnership brings together ranchers, conservationists, agencies, scientists, recreationists, and rangeland stakeholders to conserve and enhance the social, ecological, and economic values of rangeland through shared learning and actions. One of IRCP's projects was to disseminate informative brochures about the appropriate use of public and private lands. The release of the brochure was delayed due to the COVID-19 onslaught. (Refer to Attachment 1 for the brochure.) She added that the partnership serves as a platform to its members to exchange information and foster support for collaborative initiatives.

Attributable to population growth in Idaho over the years, **Ms. Hyde** mentioned that IRRC partnered with "Recreate Responsibly Idaho," a campaign to educate people about Idaho recreational areas and to ensure safe outdoor activities in the State.

Another partnership that **Ms. Hyde** talked about was youth education. According to Ms. Hyde, IRRC worked with private and public schools. In 2020, IRRC conducted virtual and interactive workshops, online learning programs, online activities and lessons, a virtual tour of the IRRC educational trailer, and in-person learning for students and teachers. She stressed that in-person learning programs followed health advisories and protocols. To make learning more fun for students, IRRC designed badges: Explorer, Scientist, Rancher, Manager, Firefighter, and Steward (see Attachment 2). Lastly, Ms. Hyde showed a video titled "Life on the Range." **Ms. Hyde** noted the project showcases stories about ranching, land management, and stewardship on Idaho's rangeland. These videos enable teachers to augment their classroom resources.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Den Hartog** expressed her appreciation for the hard work that IRRC had done throughout the years. She lauded on the innovativeness and creativeness of IRRC to be able to pivot and be able to carry out campaigns even in the midst of the pandemic. She commented that the educational components of IRRC's mission are critical factors in increasing public knowledge about Idaho rangeland.

**Chairman Burtenshaw** asked Ms. Hyde to expound on the beneficial use of livestock grazing in controlling the rapid growth of cheatgrass in rangeland. **Ms. Hyde** gave a brief description of cheatgrass. She clarified that cheatgrass is not toxic but is an invasive species. She said cheatgrass vegetates sporadically, and for this reason, it needs to be managed properly. She said the best long-term scientific way to control cheatgrass is livestock grazing. It is a beneficial when it is done properly. She emphasized that it takes a lot of collaborative efforts among ranchers, landowners and state agencies. She highlighted that half of Idaho is rangeland, and if there is no access to healthy rangelands, the beef industry will be negatively affected to a great degree. Consequently, it would have a huge financial repercussions in Idaho's economy.

**Vice Chairman Bayer** asked Ms. Hyde if there is something that the legislation can do or needs to correct to ease the difficulty of the ranchers in using public lands for their livestock. **Ms. Hyde** responded that the restrictions that the ranchers are facing is related to the use of public lands, which indirectly affects private lands. She explained that the Bureau of Land and Management manages livestock grazing and issues permits to public land ranchers. IRCP and other groups came up with a consortium to get people involved, and to proactively participate in an open dialogue to better understand the mechanisms of managing the land and the restrictions of the permits to use public lands.

**Chairman Burtenshaw** asked Ms. Hyde to expound on the \$95,000 expenditure on research and industry expense of IRRC. **Ms. Hyde** explained that most of the research expenses went to the Idaho Rangeland Conservation Partnership grant. She stated that IRRC does not have the financial resources to support big grants, thus it partners with foundations to support research programs.

**Senator Rabe** asked Ms. Hyde to update the Committee on the difficulty of enforcing trespass citations, and the issue regarding private landowners blocking off public land roadway. She acknowledged that the legislation related to trespassing on private lands helped protect local landowners from public abuse and misuse. She highlighted that IRRC does not lobby for legislations; however, IRRC encourages the public to engage in an open dialogue to improve the public's understanding of the balanced, responsible management of public and private rangelands.

**Senator Johnson** asked about the frequency, reasons, and ways to handle refundable assessment fees. She affirmed that IRRC only has less than a 2 percent refund rate. She said good communication and rapport with the ranchers and landowners minimized refund requests.

**ADJOURNED:** There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Burtenshaw** adjourned the meeting at 8:43 a.m.

---

Senator Burtenshaw  
Chair

---

Rellie Wisdom  
Secretary