

MINUTES  
**SENATE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Thursday, March 18, 2021

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

**PLACE:** Room WW53

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

**ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** Senator Johnson

**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 Rabe** moved to approve the Minutes of March 9, 2021. **Senator Nelson** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**,

**Vice Chairman Bayer** moved to approve the Minutes of March 11, 2021. **Senator Rabe** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**PRESENTATION:** **Idaho Alfalfa and Clover Seed Commission (Commission) Update.** **Benjamin Kelly**, on behalf of the Commission, introduced Davis McConnell, also representing the Commission, to talk about Idaho's alfalfa and clover seeds industry. **Mr. McConnell** stated that southwest Idaho's conducive climate makes it a premier spot to cultivate high-quality alfalfa seeds. He added the seeds are also grown in Wyoming, Montana, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, Canada, and Australia. He presented a video to give a bird's-eye view of alfalfa seed production in Idaho.

**Mr. McConnell** said the Commission's main focus is to advocate on behalf of the alfalfa and clover seed industry; and to work with universities and research centers to conduct research that benefit the industry, like University of Idaho and its Parma Research and Extension Center (Research Center). He mentioned the Research Center is currently working on the development of an insecticide to help control lygus bugs, the primary pest of alfalfa seed. (Refer to Attachment 1.)

**DISCUSSION:** In response to Senator Ricks' question about varieties of alfalfa and bee management during the pollinating season, **Mr. McConnell** explained that there are two types of alfalfa crops: genetically modified crops and conventional crops. He further said there are several varieties that can be grown around the nation. He also gave a rundown of the process, importance, and danger in using leafcutter bees to pollinate the alfalfa seed crops.

**Vice Chairman Bayer** asked Mr. McConnell to clarify on the lifespan of leafcutter bees, the selection process, and the price of buying those bees. **Mr. McConnell** emphasized leafcutter bees are used to pollinate alfalfa seed crop and are more efficient pollinators than honeybees. He added female leafcutter bees are used for reproduction and its lifespan is between six to eight weeks. Furthermore, he said when purchasing bees, suppliers quantify bees in gallons, and he estimated three gallons of bees are needed for every acre of alfalfa seed crop field. Prices vary every year and depend on the market's supply and demand. Currently, he pays \$55 per gallon.

## H 166

**Relating to Domestic Cervidae. Representative Sage Dixon**, District 1, presented **H 166**, which proposes to repeal language in the existing statute. He mentioned that this matter was brought up by his constituents who are interested in developing new business in the north of the Salmon River. He specified that the bill will remove the prohibition of breeding reindeer in the north of Salmon River.

**Representative Dixon** indicated that he had conversations with Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), and former and current state veterinarians regarding Idaho Code § 25-3701 and how it was established. From those conversations, he heard concerns of mixing of domesticated caribou known as reindeer with wild caribous in the northern border of Idaho and Canada.

**Representative Dixon** noted that he consulted with IDFG with regard to **H 166** and IDFG expressed no concerns about the bill. He explained any individual interested in breeding or owning reindeer must go through IDFG's permit process for domestic cervidae. Furthermore, he said IDFG noted the absence of wild caribou herd in northern Idaho. The bill would provide the opportunity for the people living on the north of the Salmon River to once again raise and farm reindeer.

### TESTIMONY:

**Mike Miller**, representing himself, spoke in support of **H 166**. He mentioned that he and his family lived and raised reindeer in Alaska for several years before moving to northern Idaho. He provided the economic and social benefits of raising reindeer, and remarked that reindeer are unique and special animals. **Mr. Miller** also talked about the concerns of chronic wasting disease (CWD), an infectious disease that originated from domesticated animals and spread to wild animal populations. He added that CWD is closely monitored and managed in Idaho by IDFG. He explained that U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) created a list of species that are susceptible to contract CWD, and reindeer are not included on the list.

### DISCUSSION:

**Chairman Burtenshaw** asked Mr. Miller to elaborate on the aforementioned USDA list. **Mr. Miller** explained reindeer are species at low risk of catching CWD. For that reason, USDA did not place reindeer on the list of species that are susceptible to CWD.

### TESTIMONY:

**Jordan Jonas**, reindeer farmer, testified in support of **H 166**. He stated that it would be a great economic and cultural boost to allow northern Idaho residents to breed or raise reindeer.

### DISCUSSION:

**Senator Nelson** asked Representative Dixon if there are any other states in the nation that border Canada and have similar prohibitions to Idaho on raising reindeer. **Representative Dixon** yielded to Mr. Jonas to answer the question. **Mr. Jonas** responded that to his knowledge, Washington State does not have laws relating to prohibition on raising reindeer.

In response to Chairman Burtenshaw's question about the problem of caribou and reindeer coexistence, **Representative Dixon** explained the concern was the transmission of CWD and other diseases between domesticated reindeer and their wild counterparts. **Mr. Miller** pointed out reindeer and caribou are the same species. On the other hand, he said reindeer have been domesticated for thousands of years and developed different behavior, body characteristics, and appearance to adapt to their specific environment. He noted that domesticated caribou are called reindeer while their wild counterparts are called caribou.

**Vice Chairman Bayer** asked Mr. Miller about the requirement in raising reindeer. **Mr. Miller** replied USDA requires a 6-foot game fence to protect domesticated animals from wild animals.

**Senator Rabe** asked Representative Dixon regarding imports of reindeer to Idaho. **Representative Dixon** explained all animals entering the State are regulated by ISDA. He clarified **H 166** is not altering the rule governing domestic cervidae farming, rather it will only add reindeer to the list of domesticated cervidae. He said he will provide the Committee the lists of ISDA's health requirements in importing reindeer.

**MOTION:**

**Senator Den Hartog** moved to send **H 166** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Nelson** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**ADJOURNED:**

There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Burtenshaw** adjourned the meeting at 8:47 a.m.

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Senator Burtenshaw  
Chair

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Rellie Wisdom  
Secretary