

MINUTES
(Subject to Approval by the Committee)
Natural Resources Interim Committee
Monday, November 03, 2025
9:00 A.M.
Room EW42
Boise, Idaho

Members in attendance: Cochairs Senator Burtenshaw and Representative Raybould; Senators Guthrie, Den Hartog, Semmelroth, and Woodward (Ad Hoc); and Representatives Moyle (Speaker), Monks, Mendive, and Church. Absent and excused: Senator Harris (35). Legislative Services Office staff: Alli Olson, Janet Jessup, Casey Hartwig, Janni Wheeler, and Jennifer Kish.

Others in attendance: Jeff Raybould, JoAnn Cole-Hansen, and Brian Olmstead (Idaho Water Resource Board); Mathew Weaver, Brian Patton, and Shelley Keen (Idaho Department of Water Resources); Dustin Miller, Jim Elbin, Bill Haagenson, Julia Lauch, and John Richards (Idaho Department of Lands); Chanel Tewalt (Idaho Department of Agriculture); Jim Fredericks (Idaho Department of Fish and Game); Douglas R. Jones (Idaho Water Engineering); and Rich Hahn (Hahn Lobbying).

NOTE: Presentations and handouts provided by the presenters/speakers are posted to the Idaho Legislature's website <https://legislature.idaho.gov/sessioninfo/2025/interim> and copies of those items are on file at the Legislative Services Office in the State Capitol. Recordings of the meeting may be available under the committee's listing on the website.

Welcome/Approval of Minutes

At 9:00 a.m., Cochair Burtenshaw called the meeting to order; a silent roll call was taken. Cochair Burtenshaw asked for a motion on the minutes. **Cochair Raybould moved to approve the minutes of the October 28, 2024, meeting; Senator Den Hartog seconded the motion. The motion passed by voice vote.**

Idaho Department of Water Resources

Jeff Raybould, Chairman of the Idaho Water Resource Board (IWRB), provided the committee with status updates for various water projects around the state. His presentation, [IWRB Programs and Projects](#), discussed funding for water projects, regional water sustainability programs, cloud seeding programs, and aging water infrastructure and flood management grant programs.

- Senator Den Hartog inquired if IWRB, prior to awarding aging water infrastructure grants, had looked at the historical practices of irrigation companies and whether fees charged were enough to cover the needs of repairing and maintaining their own infrastructure. Mr. Raybould confirmed that IWRB looked into this matter as part of its process. Companies were rated on a point system, and the infrastructure projects that rated highest were the ones chosen for grants.
- Speaker Moyle expressed his desire that IWRB improve the response time for project approvals so that irrigation companies could begin projects before the next irrigation season started. Mr. Raybould responded that IWRB could look into moving up the August deadline for applications, but he also noted that staff conducts a fairly detailed analysis, which takes time to complete. He informed the committee that they would be awarding grants at the board meeting on November 21.
- Senator Guthrie asked who the intended beneficiaries were for water created by cloud seeding operations and wondered if such water was being evenly dispersed to all water users. Mr. Raybould explained that the additional water created through cloud seeding was not marked for specific recipients; rather, it augments the water supply as a whole. He acknowledged the concern, especially regarding the Portneuf River, but expressed his opinion that increasing the overall water supply creates more access for all water users.

At 9:29 a.m., **Mathew Weaver**, Director of the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR), provided an overview of the recently established Water Administration Bureau. His presentation, [IDWR Update](#), discussed the five new positions created within the Water Administration Bureau, the creation and management of water districts across the state, and updates regarding ground water and surface water, including changes to the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer and the process of determining water rights according to the Surface Water Coalition.

- Senator Woodward asked who was responsible for managing aquatic invasive species inspection stations under the new organization within IDWR. Mr. Weaver responded that the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission works with individual water districts to manage inspection stations throughout the state and that, currently, the commission was established within the Department of Agriculture. He noted that stakeholder feedback agreed that the current management of inspection stations worked well and that the process would continue in the same manner regardless of which agency the commission was affiliated with.

Idaho Department of Lands

At 10:09 a.m., **Dustin Miller**, Director of the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL), provided the committee with his presentation, [IDL Update](#). He gave an overview of IDL's leasing, exchange, and disposition policies for state endowment lands and provided an update on IDL's fire program.

- Cochair Raybould asked how the department and the State Board of Land Commissioners ensure the constitutional duty to manage lands for "maximum financial long term return" is being met. Mr. Miller stated that IDL uses strategic planning and works closely with consultants to establish appropriate rates to ensure endowment land returns are enough to meet the fiduciary obligation. He noted that returns vary based on the type of leasing activity and specified that timber leasing accounted for 94% of endowment revenue. In order to maximize revenues, IDL prioritizes combining projects first and then considers whether to replace an existing lease with a new project that has potential to produce more revenue. Cochair Raybould inquired about the department's process to determine whether current revenue-generating activities versus selling a property would be more profitable. Mr. Miller explained that the Land Board looks at a property's revenue generation based on recommendations, but often that means reconsidering the best use of a property rather than selling. He stated that property sales were a rare occurrence; since 2010, the state had sold about 300 acres in contrast to purchasing 54,000 acres.
- Senator Guthrie inquired if the state is limited in its spending to the appraised value of a piece of land and expressed concern that the state is competing with the private sector. Mr. Miller directed the question to IDL Deputy Director Bill Haagenson, who explained that every transaction IDL enters into with private landowners is a competitive bidding process and that all sales are voluntary. Senator Guthrie questioned whether the state ever pays beyond the appraised value through the negotiation process and asked if transactions occur without public knowledge. Mr. Haagenson stated that IDL does not have land appraised prior to a transaction; rather, the state makes an offer based on its determination of market value, which the seller may not agree to. Mr. Haagenson explained that private landowners determine whether the negotiation process is public knowledge. However, a transaction must be approved by the Land Board before it is finalized, at which point the transaction is made public. Lastly, Senator Guthrie asked about the process for land appraisal. Mr. Haagenson explained that IDL solicits contracts when selling endowment land.
- Cochair Burtenshaw asked if IDL is able to terminate lease agreements within 18 months. Mr. Miller responded that the current lease agreements allow for a change in use with a 180-day notice to lessees, although the department strives to provide notice earlier.
- Senator Woodward inquired about the recreational access policy regarding state endowment lands and wanted to know how public access is balanced with leasing interests. Mr. Miller stated that the Land Board maintains a policy allowing for public use of endowment lands as long as public activities don't degrade the land or impede the ability to produce revenue. He informed

the committee that public access and maintenance can't be funded through endowment funds, and therefore the budget was limited to sources such as vehicle sticker fees and a small portion of hunting and fishing license fees. He emphasized that the recreational program is small, with only a single dedicated employee and volunteers managing it. Senator Woodward shared that constituents in Northern Idaho expressed difficulty accessing endowment lands. Mr. Miller agreed that a patchwork of federal, state, and private lands created challenges for recreational access.

- Cochair Raybould noted the \$52.5 million spent on a relatively small fire season, at 5,000 acres burned, and questioned the high amount spent per acre on fire suppression. Mr. Miller first commented that about \$12 million had been used on resources in other areas, which would be reimbursed to the state. He stated that during this fire season, there were three notable fires, with the Sunset Fire being the most expensive. He went on to explain that fire suppression focused on aviation assets up front in order to get the upper hand on fires quickly. This, coupled with firefighters' pay, accounted for a significant amount of expenses.

At 10:54 a.m., the committee recessed for a short break.

Idaho State Department of Agriculture

At 11:12 a.m., **Chanel Tewalt**, Director of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA), provided the committee with her presentation, [2025 Snake River Quagga Mussel Update](#). She discussed the department's latest actions against the invasion of quagga mussels in the Snake River and the results ISDA has seen from its quick response.

- Cochair Raybould asked if the department had an estimate of the economic cost if the state chose to end its approach of eradication. Ms. Tewalt referred to the cost of invasive mussel management in the Great Lakes, including \$76 million spent on a single year of cleanup. She emphasized that, unlike the Great Lakes, Idaho has hydropower and irrigation infrastructure dependent on its water systems, and the department estimates the cost would be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.
- Senator Woodward inquired about ISDA's relationship with inspection stations once the Soil and Water Conservation Commission is no longer affiliated with its department. Ms. Tewalt explained that ISDA works with individual soil and water conservation districts, not the commission, and noted that the current affiliation was minimal. Senator Woodward also commented on the difficulty of staffing inspection stations due to the \$16.20 hourly wage, which couldn't compete with better-paying opportunities. Ms. Tewalt pointed to the complexity of hiring contract workers versus full-time employees but expressed that the department was open to discussing solutions.

At 11:37 a.m., the committee recessed for lunch.

Idaho Department of Fish and Game

At 1:30 p.m., **Jim Fredericks**, Director of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), provided the committee with his presentation, [Wildlife Management Issues](#). He gave an overview of the department's wildlife translocation practices and provided an update on grizzly bear and wolf management in the state.

- Senator Woodward asked if Mr. Fredericks could elaborate on the large number of moose translocations in the Upper Snake River region. Mr. Fredericks explained that the region has a large moose population and difficult winter conditions had pushed them into urban areas.
- Cochair Raybould inquired if there was a process for citizens to file an appeal with the department for review or reconsideration after an emergency translocation had occurred. Mr. Fredericks responded that there was no formal process in place but assured the committee that IDFG would address any concern brought to its attention. Cochair Raybould iterated her desire that the community have an opportunity to comment on emergency translocations.
- Cochair Burtenshaw asked how IDFG determines whether to translocate or euthanize problematic wildlife and wondered specifically about grizzly bears near the border of another state. Mr.

Fredericks acknowledged the lack of vacant habitat for translocating grizzly bears and said that the decision to euthanize often comes down to the bear's history of aggression.

- Senator Woodward asked if IDFG tests bighorn sheep for disease prior to translocation. Mr. Fredericks confirmed that bighorn sheep are tested, particularly for pneumonia, to avoid transferring disease.
- Speaker Moyle inquired about the University of Idaho's attempt to administer a pneumonia vaccine for bighorn sheep via salt. Mr. Fredericks responded that vaccination via salt has not been effective and that the most effective way of managing the disease is through removal of infected sheep.
- Cochair Burtenshaw asked for clarification on the number of bears within the Yellowstone monitoring area. Mr. Fredericks answered that there are 1,000 bears in the Yellowstone area and a combined total of 2,000 bears in the lower 48 states.
- Senator Semmelroth pointed to the 27 confirmed livestock depredations by grizzly bears in Eastern Idaho and asked why the other six investigations were not confirmed. Mr. Fredericks replied that it can be difficult to confirm whether a grizzly bear has killed an animal or found it dead. Senator Semmelroth asked if those six unconfirmed depredations were not compensated, and Mr. Fredericks confirmed they were not, as unknown depredations do not receive compensation.
- Cochair Raybould wanted to know if federal agencies have a long-term strategy for managing the inevitable movement of grizzly bears into human areas. Mr. Fredericks informed the committee that there is a settlement agreement involving the state of Idaho that requires the United States Fish and Wildlife Service to either de-list grizzly bears or redefine the listed entity. He said that grizzly bears are currently listed for the entire lower 48 states but that the recovery areas will be redefined to address population expansion.
- Cochair Burtenshaw observed that the estimate for wolf populations dropped by about 400 specimens when IDFG changed its tracking method from trail cameras to genetic testing. He asked why the estimate had changed so significantly when the number of wolves harvested remained the same. Mr. Fredericks explained that the number of wolves harvested varied over the years and pointed to the 2019-2020 season when both the population and number harvested peaked. He showed that in the following years, the harvest numbers remained high while the population decreased. He also noted that IDFG had compared the camera estimates to the genetic estimates and found both methods to be reliable.
- Senator Guthrie shared his concern about low water levels at American Falls Reservoir, describing many dead fish along the banks, and asked if IDFG monitors or manages the water level. Mr. Fredericks said he was not informed on the situation but would be happy to follow up.
- Senator Semmelroth thanked IDFG for providing field trips to legislative members over the summer and appreciated the opportunity to see the work in person.

With no further business, the meeting adjourned at 2:15 p.m.