

MINUTES  
**SENATE RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Wednesday, February 19, 2025

**TIME:** 1:30 P.M.

**PLACE:** Room WW55

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Burtenshaw, Vice Chairman Hart, Senators Guthrie, Harris, Okuniewicz, Cook, VanOrden, and Kohl

**ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** Senator Taylor

**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 Resources and Environment Committee (Committee) to order at 2:19 p.m.

**GUBERNATORIAL REAPPOINTMENT:** **Committee Consideration of the Gubernatorial Reappointment of John Ford Elsaesser of Priest River, Idaho to the Lake Pend Oreille Basin Commission** (Commission) to serve a term commencing July 24, 2024 and expiring July 24, 2027. **Mr. Elsaesser** shared with the Committee some of the significant activities of the Commission. This included advising on the rebuild of the Albeni Falls Dam and the thoroughfare, which was the access by boat to the upper lake, and on the recently initiated joint economic study by the University of Idaho of the impact of the lake on the community. He stated the biggest challenge for the Commission was to convince the parties involved in the operations of the Albeni Falls Dam, which controlled the water level of Lake Pend Oreille, to allow a full recreational season, as was promised by Congress when the dam was authorized in 1948. A full recreational season was six months up and six months down. He shared the Commission was also active in a joint effort with the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) and the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) in stabilizing erosion on the Clark Fork Delta.

**DISCUSSION:** **Vice Chairman Hart** asked if Mr. Elsaesser was one of the first members of the Commission. **Mr. Elsaesser** responded that all members of the Commission were the original members nominated by Governor Kempthorne in the spring of 2003.

**DOCKET NO. 37-0302-2401** **Chairman Burtenshaw** stated that in the interest of time, hearing of **Docket No. 37-0302-2401** would be postponed to a future meeting.

**PRESENTATION:** **Idaho Water Resources Institute. Kendra Kaiser**, Director, Idaho Water Resources Research Institute (IWRRI) shared what IWRRI did and how they supported the State of Idaho. She explained IWRRI was developed by an act of Congress in 1964. Their priorities were to plan, conduct, and coordinate research on water-related issues for the benefit of Idaho, to support the professional development of students in water resource science, and to ensure that the results of their research were accessible to those that needed it. They were involved in the first implementation of the East Snake River Plain Aquifer (ESPA) model. They were in the process of creating a strategic plan for IWRRI as well as an advisory structure that would include a committee of technical experts from across the State that would help ensure the work they supported was aligned with the needs of water users and water managers in Idaho.

**DISCUSSION:** **Chairman Burtenshaw** asked Ms. Kaiser to share her educational background. **Ms. Kaiser** responded she had a Bachelor of Science in Soil and Water Systems and Environmental Biology from Montana State, a PhD in Ecosystem Science, which emphasizes watershed hydrology and biogeochemistry, from Duke University, and a Postdoctoral Fellow in Ecosystem Modeling with Lejo Flores at Boise State University. **Senator Kohl** asked if they were involved in ongoing research models for the ESPA. **Ms. Kaiser** responded that the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) was the primary lead on new development of the ESPA model.

**AGENCY UPDATE:** **Idaho Department of Water Resources. Mat Weaver**, Director, IDWR, presented an agency update. He referred the Committee to his Powerpoint presentation (Attachment 1). He presented an overview of IDWR's adjudication work in the State, including the status of recent court cases. He reviewed IDWR's progress on recovering and rebuilding their electronic document management system, which they lost last year due to some poor management and some bad luck. This was now up and running and available to the public, with the exception of a small gap period.

He reviewed the highlights of the Fiscal Year 2026 proposed budget, which included a fund transfer request to pay for ten staff, a request for five new full time employment positions to support their water administration group, which they would pair with 11 existing positions to create a new water administration bureau, a request for a full time public information officer, and requests for two technical enhancements, one for Esri GIS software licensing, and one to build an online beneficial use application.

He spoke about IDWR's follow up actions to implement the legislation passed last year that modified the area of common ground water on the Eastern Snake River Plain. He shared his reasoning for the curtailment order issued last year and the subsequent four year settlement agreement and mitigation plan. He was looking forward to a return to administrative stability and peace on the Eastern Snake Plain. He shared IDWR's effort over the last year to develop a groundwater management plan on the Eastern Snake Plain, which provided some good information, but was preempted by the settlement agreement and the conjunctive management delivery call process and was now on pause.

**PRESENTATION:** **Idaho Water Resources Board Update. Jeff Raybould**, Chairman, Idaho Water Resource Board (IDWB), presented an update of items managed by the board. He referred the Committee to his Powerpoint presentation. (Attachment 2) He presented an overview of water project funding allocated from IDWB's Water Management Account, which was designated for regional water sustainability projects, aging infrastructure grants, loans, groundwater to surface water conversion projects, efficiency and capacity improvements to canal systems, statewide monitoring and measurement, and other regional sustainability projects, loans, or grants.

He reviewed projects funded by the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA), including the Anderson Ranch Dam raise, the Mountain Home Air Force Base water pipeline, ESPA recharge infrastructure, work at the American Falls Dam Spillway, the Lewis and Orchards Exchange Project, and the New York Canal Rehabilitation. He reviewed the successes of their Aging Water Infrastructure Grant Program. He spoke about the recently initiated Groundwater to Surface Water Conversion Project Grant Program, and the ongoing ESPA Telemetry and Monitoring and the Flood Management Grant Programs. He listed some of their regional water sustainability projects.

He reviewed the status of ESPA recharge and the costs of their cloud seeding program. He shared their updated web site that provided information on their cloud seeding program. He spoke in more detail about the expected additional water from the Anderson Ranch Dam raise and the associated costs, the Mountain Home Air Force Base pipeline, pump station, and water treatment plant, and projects related to Priest Lake, including the Priest Lake Outlet Dam modification to better manage lake levels, improvements to access along the thoroughfare to Upper Priest Lake, and the addition of a breakwater to prevent erosion along the northern shore.

**DISCUSSION:**

**Senator Cook** asked how critical the \$30 million was for water resources in Idaho. **Mr. Raybould** responded that the cost of the projects people have asked IWRB to review and help fund was well beyond their available resources. **Vice Chairman Hart** asked what facility was the base for the cloud seeding program. **Mr. Raybould** responded that the cloud seeding ground generators were located in each of the three basins, the Boise Basin, the Wood Basin, and the Upper Snake, and those generators were remotely operated by Idaho Power from a control center in Boise. Two of the cloud seeding aircraft were located in Boise and one serviced out of Pocatello.

**ADJOURNED:**

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

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Senator Burtenshaw  
Chair

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Shelly Johnson  
Secretary