

MINUTES  
**SENATE RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Wednesday, February 11, 2026

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

**PLACE:** Room WW55

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

**ABSENT/ EXCUSED:** Senators Guthrie and Harris

**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 1:30 p.m.

**PRESENTATION:** **Quagga Mussels Update. Chanel Tewalt**, Director, Idaho State Department of Agriculture, provided a history of the quagga mussel, reviewed the Idaho Legislature's actions to combat the proliferation of the quagga mussel in Idaho, and spoke about the effectiveness of Idaho's response to eradicate the mussel from the Snake River in 2025 (Attachment 1).

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Cook** asked for the difference between the gold and the dotted lines on the presentation slides showing active mussel presence. **Ms. Tewalt** responded that the dotted line was simply river miles and the gold was where they found the larval form of mussels. **Chairman Burtenshaw** asked if their quagga mussel treatment extended above Shoshone Falls, past the Twin Falls Dam in the second year. **Ms. Tewalt** responded that it did. They went as far up river from Twin Falls as they could get a boat, and that was where the treatment started.

**Senator Cook** asked for Ms. Tewalt's predictions for the coming summer. **Ms. Tewalt** responded that they would continue to try to eradicate the quagga mussel and they believed this was possible. **Senator Kohl** asked if other states had employed some of the methods to eradicate quagga mussels used by her task force. **Ms. Tewalt** responded that other states had come to view their methods, but most stated they did not have the political support to overcome the expected negative response to the side effects of the treatment.

**Senator Okuniewicz** asked if the copper treatment needed to be in the water column itself to work, as opposed to just landing on the muscles themselves and killing them. **Ms. Tewalt** responded there were different types of products. She explained that mussels respire similar to fish and an adult mussel could protect itself by closing its shell. They looked for a product that would be bioavailable long enough to stop the respiration of the mussel. The treatment would not necessarily interfere with the reproduction of the mussels, but would impact them at the moment of respiration. **Senator Okuniewicz** stated that it sounded like they were trying to attack the muscles where they sat as opposed to in their mid-life or early life stage when they were floating in the water. **Ms. Tewalt** clarified that the amount of copper they used would impact a mussel at all life stages, but they used the maximum level that was safe, but would impact an adult mussel. A much lower rate of copper would kill the mussel larvae, because they did not have a shell to close and protect themselves. **Senator Okuniewicz** asked why getting the treatment to a 30 foot depth was such a problem. **Ms. Tewalt** responded that treating shallow spots and areas where power plants and

waterfalls created churning water worked well, but areas with smooth flow that did not create much natural mixing required a consistent fight.

**Chairman Burtenshaw** asked for an explanation for the Committee of the reproductive behavior of the mussel and for how many offspring they could generate in a year. **Ms. Tewalt** referred to her first slide, which showed one mussel produced 300,000 up to 1,000,000 veligers per year. She also spoke about the likely impact on Idaho's agriculture, irrigation, and fish species.

**Vice Chairman Hart** asked if, since the quagga mussel was from Ukraine, whether the rest of Europe was infested with them. **Ms. Tewalt** responded that many water bodies in Europe were impacted, but Europe did not need water for irrigation and hydropower the way Idaho did. **Senator Hart** asked if there was any economic use for the shell of the mussel. **Ms. Tewalt** responded that she was not aware of one, but she would get back to the Senator if she found anyone reasonably reusing the mussel shell.

**Chairman Burtenshaw** asked if there really was seven and a half feet of mussel shell on the bottom of Lake Michigan. **Ms. Tewalt** responded that she had heard three to seven feet in many of the Great Lakes. She added that at that concentration, they could clear a lake to the point where it was clear enough to see the mussel colony at the bottom. This created an imbalance in that ecosystem that resulted in toxic algae blooms and shores of dead birds.

**Senator Kohl** asked if there was an instance where these mussels burned themselves out through overpopulation. **Ms. Tewalt** was not aware of this happening, but would follow up with her counterparts at Lake Michigan.

**PRESENTATION:**

**An Overview of the Joint Finance-Appropriations Committee (JFAC) Process and an Update on FY 26 and FY 27 Budgets.** **Senator Grow** introduced Janet Jessup, Budget and Policy Analyst, Legislative Services Office, who provided a budget overview specific to the Committee (Attachment 2), and Keith Bybee, Budget and Policy Analysis Division Manager, Legislative Services Office, who provided a more general budget update (Attachment 3).

**Ms. Jessup** provided an overview of the natural resources budgets, covering the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), the Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG), the Idaho Department of Lands (IDL), the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation (IDPR), and the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR), who supported the Water Resources Board, and the Endowment Fund Investment Board. She outlined recent actions by JFAC, including a 3 percent rescission for fiscal year (FY) 2026 converted from the Governor's requested holdback, an additional 1 percent rescission for some agencies, a 5 percent ongoing base reduction for FY 2027, and approval of statewide maintenance costs, with maintenance bills and enhancements to be considered separately. She explained that the Governor's holdback asked agencies not to spend certain FY 2026 funds due to an anticipated shortfall, while a rescission formally removed those funds from appropriations. She also reviewed FY 2027 enhancement changes and estimated savings by agency, highlighted adjustments to IDL's Fire Suppression Deficiency Fund and the Endowment Fund Investment Board, and concluded by directing members to budget resources on the Idaho Legislature's website, including the Legislative Budget Book, session records, and staff contacts for further information.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Okuniewicz** asked how much credit the Fire Suppression Deficiency Fund had. **Ms. Jessup** responded that to her knowledge, there was no credit limit set in code for this fund. **Senator Okuniewicz** asked if Idaho had catastrophic fires in one year that cost \$100 million, if the executive branch had the authority to spend the \$100 million to put out the fires and then ask legislators to fund that debt in the next legislative session. **Ms. Jessup** responded that this was her understanding. She added that there were other deficiency funds in Idaho, but the one for fire was the largest, and that there had not been deficiency requests for fire over the past decade, because Idaho had been pre-loading the fund. **Chairman Burtenshaw** asked if the agency did not request the funding for the Fire Suppression Deficiency Fund. **Ms. Jessup** responded that was correct. She also noted that this fund was historically funded with a General Fund appropriation that was transferred to the Fire Suppression Deficiency Fund. She emphasized that agencies were directed to make limited general fund requests this year, so the lack of a request by IDL for this fund was not because the funds were not needed.

**Mr. Bybee** provided a high-level overview of the State's current budget situation following recent JFAC actions adjusting the FY 2026 budget, highlighting that while the Legislature originally projected a \$419 million beginning balance, actual unobligated cash came in lower at \$313 million, though available cash after adjustments was closer to \$362 million. Revenue forecasts were revised downward significantly, from \$5.929 billion at adjournment to \$5.512 billion under the Governor's forecast. The Legislature adopted a slightly higher \$5.665 billion estimate, narrowing the gap to about \$151 million, although tax policy changes such as **H 559** further reduced available revenue. As a result, projected ending balances dropped from roughly \$440 million to as low as \$32 million under the Governor's plan. This prompted JFAC to increase rescissions to 4 percent, which yielded only about \$15 million more due to exemptions for major cost drivers like public schools, Medicaid, and corrections. This underscored how tight the \$5.6 billion budget was. While FY 2027 projections looked somewhat better, with a potential \$156 million ending balance under legislative forecasts and additional base reductions still to be incorporated, new spending proposals could quickly erode that cushion. Despite \$1.7 billion in available cash reserves, about 30 percent of the FY 2026 original appropriation, lawmakers faced a decision between growing into structural balance through natural revenue growth or further reducing spending to strengthen long-term fiscal stability.

**DISCUSSION:** **Chairman Burtenshaw** asked what "Other" represented on the Cash Position Then and Now slide. **Mr. Bybee** responded that this was footnoted at the bottom of the page and included the Medicaid Stabilization Fund, the Technology Infrastructure Stabilization Fund, the Higher Education Stabilization Fund, the 27th Payroll Fund, and the Millennium Traditional Fund.

**Senator Grow** highlighted the narrow projected ending balances for FY 2026 and emphasized how quickly reserves could vanish within a \$5.6 billion budget. He further warned that significant uncertainties remained, including a potential \$50 to \$70 million in wildfire suppression costs not built into the budget, fluctuating Medicaid enrollment and utilization, and variable population impacts on corrections and public schools. He concluded that uncertainty defined the current fiscal outlook, and reminded members that, under the Idaho Constitution's balanced budget requirement, the Legislature must adopt a balanced budget, leaving senators to evaluate and vote on the final appropriations accordingly.

**ADJOURNED:** There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Burtenshaw** adjourned the meeting at 2:44 p.m.

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Senator Burtenshaw  
Chair

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Shelly Johnson  
Secretary