

MINUTES
SENATE RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

DATE: Monday, February 16, 2026

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

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

**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 Resources and Environment Committee (Committee) to order at 1:30 p.m.

RS 33201, RS 33074, RS 33307, RS 33308, RS 33309, RS 33337 **Senator Harris** moved that **RS 33201 Idaho's Public Lands, RS 33074 Relating to Energy Resources Fund, RS 33307 Relating to Irrigation Conduit Rights-of-Way, RS 33308 Relating to Water Districts, RS 33309 Relating to Irrigation Districts, and RS 33337 Relating to Delivery of Water**, be sent to print. **Senator Cook** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

GUBERNATORIAL REAPPOINTMENT: **Committee Consideration of the Gubernatorial Reappointment of David Bobbitt of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, to the Idaho Fish and Game Commission** (Commission) to serve a term commencing June 30, 2025 and expiring on June 30, 2029. **David Bobbitt** introduced himself to the Committee and shared about himself. He had served as an Idaho Department of Fish and Game (IDFG) Commissioner for the last four years and was Chairman. He was retired from a career in banking, but had spent his life hunting and fishing in Idaho.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Harris** asked what some of Mr. Bobbitt's goals were for his next few years on the Commission. **Mr. Bobbitt** responded that getting wolves delisted, so they could regulate the wolf population in Idaho, was something he would like to get done to protect Idaho's ungulates and ranching communities. He added that the grizzly bear issue was similar and intertwined with the wolf issue. **Senator Cook** asked Mr. Bobbitt to expand on the Commission's plans to address the costs of wolf depredation. **Mr. Bobbitt** responded that the plan for wolves was to manage them. Their long-term plan was to manage wolves down to a population of around 500 and the last wolf survey showed a population of 1,278. He thought it would be difficult to reduce wolf numbers due to legal handicaps, but IDFG had taken some actions to track wolves, so they would know where the wolves were when they were less regulated.

Senator Kohl asked Mr. Bobbitt for his perspective on the recent rules for IDFG that revolved around optics for big game hunting and on the rulemaking process that took place around these rules. **Mr. Bobbitt** responded that he was supportive of those rule changes. He stated they had been working on addressing thermals and instant read cameras for over three years. He liked using the technology, but as a Commissioner, he was concerned about what would happen to Idaho's game populations. He wanted game populations to be sustainable over time. He shared that the majority of the task force created to review the use of thermals and instant read cameras and of the public, based on surveys and scoping meetings, were also in favor of prohibiting those technologies.

Senator Cook asked if thermal binoculars were everything that they claimed to be online. **Mr. Bobbitt** responded that they were. He explained you could spend two or three hours scoping a big hillside and might see all the game on that hillside, but with infrared, you could spend 30 seconds and if there were no red heat spots, there was no game there. **Vice Chairman Hart** asked if Idaho was monitoring the wolf population in the wilderness areas of central Idaho and if they had an accurate number of how many wolves there were in Idaho. **Mr. Bobbitt** responded that Idaho calculated a population estimate for the state, but he did not know if Idaho was monitoring the wolf population in the wilderness areas. **Vice Chairman Hart** asked how involved the federal government was in wolf management in the State of Idaho. **Mr. Bobbitt** responded they worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

H 502

IDAHO FOREST PRODUCTS COMMISSION - Amends existing law to revise provisions regarding the Idaho Forest Products Commission.

Senator Harris explained this legislation proposed to move IDAPA 15.03.01, Rules of Administrative Procedure of the Idaho Forest Products Commission (Commission), into Idaho Code § 38-15. It moved the definitions throughout the rules chapter, it removed outdated and unnecessary language, it moved the nomination of vacancy requirements for the Commission from rule to statute, it moved requirements around nominations and elections of chairs and vice chairs from rule to statute, it removed some requirements relating to assessments, and revoked some requirements related to administration. This was designed to help the Commission improve their efficiency and better serve the public.

DISCUSSION:

Senator Okuniewicz asked if this legislation made any changes to the meaning of the rules. **Senator Harris** responded that this legislation was only moving language from the rules to Idaho Code.

MOTION:

Senator Okuniewicz moved to send **H 502** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Cook** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

HJM 9

FEDERAL LAND POLICY AND MANAGEMENT ACT - States findings of the Legislature and requests federal intervention to ensure proper application of FLPMA. **Senator Harris** explained this memorial called on the United States Congress to reaffirm the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) as the primary authority governing federal land management and land exchanges. FLPMA was enacted in 1976 to bring order to prior federal land management laws and to create a consistent, unified framework for public land administration. A recent legal decision by an Idaho judge had threatened the predictability and stability of FLPMA's long-established framework, which was essential to effective land management in Idaho and throughout the West. This memorial called on Congress to act expeditiously to reaffirm FLPMA as the primary authority to manage federal public lands and prevent disruption to existing and future land exchanges.

TESTIMONY: **Elizabeth Criner**, on behalf of J.R. Simplot Company, testified in favor of **HJM 9**. She explained the legal decision, which involved J.R. Simplot Company, that brought FLPMA into question. She provided some background on the land exchange in question, which was approved by the federal government in 2020. She stated that after using FLPMA to handle land exchanges and land management for 50 years without question, this was the first time a judge reverted to one of the more than 3,000 land disposal laws existing prior to FLPMA's passage. She believed this legislation was important for the J.R. Simplot Company and for every Western state where there were large tracts of federal lands that interspersed with other property.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Harris** referred the Committee to a letter of support for **HJM 9** from the Idaho Mining Association (Attachment 1).

MOTION: **Senator Guthrie** moved to send **HJM 9** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Taylor** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

AGENCY UPDATE: **Idaho Water Resources Research Institute. Kendra Kaiser**, Director, Idaho Water Resources Research Institute (IWRRI), shared the work accomplished by IWRRI over the past year (Attachment 2). **Ms. Kaiser** reviewed the mission of state water research institutes, which was to identify research needs, coordinate research that addressed those needs, and ensure research transferred to decision makers. They also supported the education of the next generation of scientists, particularly Idaho students. This year, IWRRI distributed more than \$500,000 to faculty at Boise State, Idaho State, and the University of Idaho to support water research. She spoke about IWRRI's research prioritization process. IWRRI's 32 member Research Advisory Committee identified over 90 research needs, primarily related to water scarcity, technology, and water quality, with more than half relevant statewide. She provided some examples of priority research projects, including the development of tools to visualize how snowpack levels compared to historical patterns, to improve how satellite images matched assessments of algae on the water, to assess Idaho's weather and climate systems and identify opportunities for improvement, and to monitor water seepage along irrigation canal systems. She identified several research projects related to the Eastern Snake River Plain Aquifer (ESPA), including research to evaluate aquifer recovery strategies, to quantify headwater contributions, and to develop seasonal curtailment forecasts. She spoke about research to support higher summer lake levels on Lake Pend Orielle.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Okuniewicz** asked how IWRRI was able to provide a forecast and estimate curtailments for the upcoming season in under a month and a half. **Ms. Kaiser** responded that they did not have the answer yet, but would have one by their deadline of the second week of March. **Senator Okuniewicz** asked if Ms. Kaiser meant the model was completed in a month and a half. **Ms. Kaiser** responded they created the statistical analysis to recreate what went into the methodology order, which was relatively simple statistics. **Senator Okuniewicz** asked for the level of error in this statistical analysis. **Ms. Kaiser** responded that the biggest uncertainty was estimating the level of precipitation at the end of March, April, and May.

Senator Taylor asked how many of the 90 identified research needs had been undertaken. **Ms. Kaiser** responded that faculty and IWRRI staff were working on 18 prioritized research projects. **Senator Taylor** asked if algae blooms were treated, or if IWRRI was only involved in studying what was seen on the water. **Ms. Kaiser** responded that their project collected data to match between satellite observations and water measurements, but they were not involved in conducting treatment.

Senator Cook asked how involved IWRRI would be in the Snake River Basin Study and did she see any interaction between IWRRI and the Bureau of Reclamation. **Ms. Kaiser** responded that she requested that IWRRI scientists be on the technical advisory committee associated with this study. She stated IWRRI was already modeling the water supply from ESPA tributary basins, so she anticipated that IWRRI would move forward conducting analysis of the water supply in the basin before the Bureau of Reclamation decided if they would move forward on the study. **Senator Cook** asked for a copy of IWRRI's final study of the water supply in the Snake River Basin. **Ms. Kaiser** responded that the results would be available on their website.

Senator Guthrie asked if the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) was using IWRRI's data to issue curtailment orders. **Ms. Kaiser** responded that IDWR would not be using IWRRI's analysis to issue their curtailment orders. IWRRI was working on an analysis that was independent of IDWR to provide some additional early planning information for water users. **Senator Guthrie** asked how their forecasting would help water users plan for curtailment. **Ms. Kaiser** responded that this analysis was requested by a group of water users. From their perspective, if they had an understanding in March about curtailment expected in July versus August or earlier in the season, that could potentially allow water users time to make decisions about leaving fallow fields or putting water into recharge. **Senator Guthrie** asked if sensitivity to ESPA tributaries could be included in their analysis. **Ms. Kaiser** responded that IWRRI had worked on projects involving the Big Wood River and the Portneuf River, and was looking for opportunities to collaborate with ESPA tributaries in particular.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Burtenshaw** adjourned the meeting at 2:15 p.m.

Senator Burtenshaw
Chair

Shelly Johnson
Secretary