

MINUTES  
**SENATE RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Monday, March 09, 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 1:31 p.m.

**S 1337** **IRRIGATION DISTRICTS - Amends existing law to revise provisions regarding irrigation district directors.** **Senator Anthon** explained this legislation amended board qualifications for irrigation districts under 15,000 acres to allow landowners to serve on a board as long as they owned land in the division being represented and lived in the same or an adjoining county as the district. This change was meant to address the difficulty many irrigation districts had finding qualified and willing landowners to serve on the board. The change had to be adopted by a two-thirds vote of the board of directors.

**TESTIMONY:** **Paul Arrington**, Idaho Water Users Association, testified in favor of **S 1337**. He explained that as more farms consolidated, it was difficult to find individuals who were qualified and interested in serving on an irrigation district board for districts 15,000 acres or smaller. Allowing an individual to serve on a board if they owned land in the division, so they still had a connection to the area they were serving, expanded the pool of eligible individuals to serve on the board.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator VanOrden** requested clarification that the local board would have to agree with the landowner serving on the board. **Mr. Arrington** responded that was correct. The board had to take an action to enact this rule, and the action had to be approved by a two-thirds vote of that local board.

**MOTION:** **Senator VanOrden** moved to send **S 1337** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Okuniewicz** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**H 737** **NATURAL RESOURCES - Amends, repeals, and adds to existing law to merge the Office of Species Conservation and the Office of Energy and Mineral Resources.** **Senator Den Hartog** explained that this legislation provided for the merging of the Idaho Governor's Office of Energy and Mineral Resources (OMER) with the Office of Species Conservation (OSC). This was consistent with the intent of the Legislature to improve coordination, policy alignment, and operational efficiency within state government. Although a small ongoing fiscal savings was anticipated, the goal was to create a single point of contact for permits with federal and state agencies, leverage administrative capacity, and reduce bureaucratic redundancy.

**TESTIMONY:** **Paul Arrington**, Idaho Water Users Association, testified in favor of **H 737**. He thought this was a meaningful way to cut costs while also streamlining tasks and creating more efficient offices.

**MOTION:** **Senator Okuniewicz** moved to send **S 737** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator VanOrden** seconded the motion.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Taylor** stated he agreed with this legislation, but shared a concern that the word "conservation" had been stricken out so many times and he did not want to see more funding go to OMER at the expense of OSC.

**VOICE VOTE:** The motion moved to send **S 737** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation carried by **voice vote**.

**S 1303** **ENERGY RESOURCES FUND - Amends existing law to revise the name of a fund and to revise a definition.** **Senator Woodward** shared the obstacles facing new energy development in Idaho. He explained that this legislation allowed OEMR to serve as the single point of contact for energy projects. It modernized outdated language, including revising "renewable energy" to "renewable or sustainable energy sources," and ensured that recipients of federal land royalties had the flexibility to request appropriations and use those funds to advance energy projects. It also authorized the Idaho Legislature to allocate additional resources to this fund to support the State's energy policy.

**DISCUSSION:** **Senator Taylor** asked if when Senator Woodward stated "other sustainable" and included nuclear, if this also included hydro. **Senator Woodward** responded the intent was to include hydro, although it was more difficult to come up with new sources of hydro than nuclear.

**TESTIMONY:** **Aaron Menenberg**, Idaho Policy Manager for Renewable Northwest, testified in favor of **S 1303**. He hoped that the inclusion of additional revenue sources for OEMR would bring more energy online to meet Idaho's growing demand. He said he looked forward to working with OEMR to expand energy generation in the State and appreciated the inclusion of transmission in the legislation, noting that the State needed more of it.

**MOTION:** **Senator Cook** moved to send **S 1303** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Harris** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**. **Senator Kohl** requested to be recorded as voting nay.

**H 503** **SOIL AND WATER CONSERVATION COMMISSION - Amends existing law to provide that the commission be established in the Idaho Department of Water Resources.** **Senator Harris** explained this legislation moved the Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission (ISWCC) to within the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR). This consolidation aligned ISWCC's core mission, which was protecting Idaho's water resources through soil conservation, with IDWR's expertise and infrastructure. This was expected to streamline administrative functions, consolidate overlapping responsibilities, and reduce redundant expenditures. The savings included in the fiscal note were the immediate personnel savings plus savings due to efficiencies created by combining the two entities.

**MOTION:** **Senator VanOrden** moved to send **H 503** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Guthrie** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**GEOTHERMAL - Amends existing law to provide for the municipal use of geothermal water.** **Senator Cook** spoke about the Boise Geothermal Heating System, which used naturally heated water to heat more than 80 buildings in downtown Boise. He referred the Committee to his handout, "Boise Front History" (Attachment 1). This showed an initial decline in geothermal water until the city began injecting water used for geothermal heat back into the aquifer. The aquifer recovered and leveled out and has remained healthy for 20 years. This legislation updated the Reasonably Anticipated Future Needs (RAFN) statutes to include municipal geothermal systems as an allowable municipal purpose. The legislation codified geothermal system best practices focused on non-consumptive use and reinjection to preserve the water while maximizing access to the heat resource. This would allow municipal geothermal systems to have better flexibility in obtaining and holding water rights needed to serve their community's heating needs.

**DISCUSSION:**

**Senator Okuniewicz** asked how water was reinjected and if there were provisions to ensure that unwanted material was not injected along with the water. **Senator Cook** responded that the system that pumped water out from about 1,100 feet and then injected it back 3,300 feet into the ground was a closed loop system, so there was no opportunity for anything to be added to the water.

**TESTIMONY:**

**Paul Arrington**, Idaho Water Users Association, **Kathy Griesmyer**, Director of Policy and Government Affairs, City of Boise, **Roger Batt**, Treasure Valley Water Users Association, and **Ryan McGoldrick**, Conservation Voters for Idaho, testified in support of **H 676**.

**Mr. Arrington** stated this legislation struck a balance between meeting demand and allowing water right review and record-keeping processed within IDWR.

**Ms. Griesmyer** shared about the growing interest in geothermal development and the number of businesses interested in connecting to the Boise system. She explained they were nearing their volume cap on their allocated water right and they sought an additional path for greater long-term planning that conserved and protected the water, while allowing them to maximize providing heat. This legislation allowed a longer planning timeline, while protecting non-consumptive water use and reinjection.

**Mr. Batt**, stated members of the Treasure Valley Water Users Association were included in the drafting of this legislation. He believed that the City of Boise had a responsibility to safely and efficiently provide heating for their customers and that this legislation would help ensure that the demand for geothermal was considered when planning for the future.

**Mr. McGoldrick** emphasized that the Boise Geothermal Heating System was a closed-loop system and that the water injected back into the ground was reheated by the earth. It was important that the temperature of the water pulled into the system had stayed the same for over 100 years. He spoke about other cities that were looking to start their own municipal geothermal systems and the increased investment in the geothermal technology office (U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Geothermal), and interest in eliminating red tape, by the Trump administration.

**Bruce Smith**, on behalf of Boise Warm Springs Water District, testified against **H 676**. He shared a concern that statute related to low-temperature geothermal use was built upon the Municipal Water Rights Act, which was a drinking water statute that did not address any of the issues associated with geothermal. He did not agree that Boise's geothermal use was non-consumptive. He believed heat was the consumptive use and that injection would eventually cause the water underground to become cooler, and stay cooler. He asked the Committee to hold this legislation pending further discussion between all users of the aquifer.

**DISCUSSION:**

**Senator Okuniewicz** asked Ms. Griesmyer how a new customer would begin utilizing the existing system. **Ms. Griesmyer** responded that it would depend on the size of the building to be connected, and its location and proximity to their current underground piping. **Senator Okuniewicz** asked if these changes would prohibit another entity from creating a geothermal system somewhere else outside of Boise's jurisdiction. **Ms. Griesmyer** responded that this legislation updated the RAFN statutes to add municipal geothermal systems as an allowable use for municipal utility providers and did not speak to general commercial development of a geothermal utility.

**Senator Guthrie** asked Ms. Griesmyer for the temperature drop between when the water was taken out compared to when it was returned, as well as what kind of volume of water was removed from the aquifer. **Ms. Griesmyer** responded they had seen stable temperature throughout the aquifer for over 100 years. Water was pumped out at about 177 degrees and was 20 to 30 degrees cooler when it was injected back underground at about 3,300 feet, to get it closer to the hot rocks underground. She would follow up regarding their current allocated water right, which was for about 370 million gallons annually.

**Senator Okuniewicz** asked Senator Cook if it was the IDWR director who received and approved or disapproved the geothermal application. **Senator Cook** responded that was his understanding. **Senator Okuniewicz** asked if that meant that IDWR would also review and monitor the heat source before approving an application. **Ms. Griesmyer** responded that was correct. IDWR would continue to maintain appropriate oversight. The city would continue to have to submit an application showing reasonably anticipated future need to IDWR and IDWR would provide oversight and track for potential injury to the water.

**MOTION:**

**Senator Guthrie** moved to send **H 676** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Taylor** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**HJM 14**

**WATER - States findings of the Legislature and supports increasing water storage in the state.** **Senator Cook** spoke about the difficulties of storing water to make it available through late summer. He spoke about the sacrifices made by the people of American Falls when they moved their city to make way for the American Falls Reservoir. He explained this joint memorial recognized that Idaho faced ongoing water shortages due to declining aquifer levels, reduced snowpack, earlier runoff, and insufficient reservoir capacity. This legislation stated the Legislature's commitment to a long-term goal of creating 750,000 acre-feet of new water storage by the year 2100.

**TESTIMONY:**

**Paul Arrington**, Idaho Water Users Association, and **Alden Koenig**, Idaho Grain Producers Association, testified in support of **HJM 14**. Both believed this legislation appropriately recognized Idaho's commitment to developing water infrastructure and the urgency of strengthening Idaho's long-term water storage capacity.

**MOTION:** **Vice Chairman Hart** moved to send **HJM 14** to the floor with a **do pass** recommendation. **Senator Kohl** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

**ADJOURNED:** There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Burtenshaw** adjourned the meeting at 2:26 p.m.

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Senator Burtenshaw  
Chair

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Shelly Johnson  
Secretary