

MINUTES
SENATE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: Tuesday, March 10, 2026

TIME: 8:00 A.M.

PLACE: Room WW53

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Nichols, Vice Chairman Zito, Senators Lakey, Lent, VanOrden, Blaylock, Kohl, and Taylor

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Senator Semmelroth

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 Nichols** called the meeting of the Senate Agricultural Affairs Committee (Committee) to order at 8:00 a.m.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator Lent** moved to approve the Minutes of February 17, 2026. **Senator Lakey** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

MINUTES APPROVAL: **Senator VanOrden** moved to approve the Minutes of February 19, 2026. **Vice Chairman Zito** seconded the motion. The motion carried by **voice vote**.

PRESENTATION: **Mr. Mat Weaver**, Director, Idaho Soil and Water Conservation Commission (ISWCC), discussed the ISWCC's organizational structure. He explained the Governor's proposed integration of the ISWCC with the Idaho Department of Water Resources (IDWR) for efficiency purposes. He explained how the Langdon Group, a consulting firm, evaluated merging the two agencies. **Mr. Weaver** explained the conceptual ISWCC-IDWR organizational chart and said it was very similar to the current system with the Water Resource Board.

Mr. Bryant Kuechle, Executive Director, Langdon Group, provided a background of the company and explained that they focused on facilitation, strategic communication, and public involvement. He discussed the tasks they completed from July 2025 to November 2025, which involved a situational assessment (SA) and a public survey, and delved into their results. **Mr. Kuechle** explained the Langdon Group's recommendation was for the ISWCC to merge into IDWR due to its technical capacity, career growth opportunities, and overlapping services and processes. He explained the Langdon Group's recommended organizational structure. **Mr. Kuechle** stressed the importance of preserving the non-regulatory, voluntary independence of the ISWCC in both reality and perception and provided recommendations to achieve this. He mentioned proposed changes to Idaho Code which supported the integration of the ISWCC into the IDWR. The Langdon Group believed effectively communicating the merger of the two agencies was key to a successful transition (Attachment 1).

DISCUSSION: **Vice Chairman Zito** queried about the cost of the evaluation. **Mr. Weaver** explained the contract was split between the two agencies and totalled around \$90,000. **Senator Lakey** requested Mr. Weaver discuss efficiencies that would come from merging the two agencies from a legislative perspective. **Mr. Weaver** explained there were two pieces of legislation which would integrate the two agencies. He mentioned personnel savings of around \$110,000 with additional savings in other sectors anticipated in the future. **Senator VanOrden** asked if the ISWCC Bureau Chief was hired in consultation with the ISWCC. **Mr. Weaver** answered affirmatively. **Senator VanOrden** referred to the conceptual ISWCC-IDWR Organization Chart and asked if this proposed structure was similar to current structure. **Mr. Weaver** answered affirmatively. **Chairman Nichols** pondered next steps and whether there had been pushback on agency integration. **Mr. Weaver** explained there was concern the regulatory role that the IDWR played would overshadow the ISWCC's work. He explained that by addressing concerns, answering questions, and creating a recommendation report, most agreed this merging would be beneficial. **Mr. Weaver** said next steps included the conclusion of the two pieces of legislation that were working their way through the Legislature, proposing additional legislation that would be needed, preparing a combined budget, and preparing a final legislative packet for the Legislature in 2027 for the final resolution of the matter.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Nichols** adjourned the meeting at 8:38 a.m.

Senator Nichols
Chair

Rachel Verrette
Secretary