



Idaho Council on Industry and the Environment

Saturday Summary 1-21-08

This is a weekly roundup of some of ICIE's activities in and around the Idaho Legislature. Staffing limits mean we can't cover every meeting. If there's an item of interest to you at an upcoming meeting of one of the environment or agriculture committees, let us know and we'll try to cover it. Agendas are available at www.state.id.us. Click on "Legislative" and click on "Calendars and agendas."

Joint Senate & House Agricultural Affairs Committee Meeting

A joint session of the Senate and House Agricultural Affairs Committees met on Monday, January 14, 2008. Several officials and staff members of the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) visited and discussed agricultural interests common to the region. PNWER is a public/private partnership with legislators, government officials and businesses from Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, British Columbia, Alberta and the Yukon Territory. Its mission is to promote regional cooperation among governments and businesses that leads to increased global competitiveness while working to maintain and improve the environment in the region. (www.pnwer.org)

Idaho State Representative George Eskridge (District 1-B) from Dover, Idaho, is this year's president.

The Canadian Vice President from British Columbia explained that the group works together using common sense and good judgment to serve the people in the region. The issue of BSC (mad cow disease) drove home the need for thoughtful discussion and analysis and the exchange of information to make good decisions.

One of the committee members asked him about the issue of Canadian soft wood lumber exports to the United States. The change in the value of the U.S. dollar has made a difference recently in those exports. In British Columbia There is an effort to maximize timber harvest because of an outbreak of pine beetle. If the timber is not cut soon after being infested, it will deteriorate and become useless as lumber. The beetles started moving across British Columbia 15 years ago. They have had a serious economic impact on British Columbia. Recent winters have not been cold enough to kill them. Now spruce bark beetle is moving into Alaska.

He says that they are seeing massive changes in vegetation in British Columbia because of changes in climate.

The organization discussed the differences in regulations between Canada and the U.S. British Columbia may have more environmental issues to deal with than the U.S.

One of the goals of PNWER is to look ahead so that the region can be ready for the next potential threat. In order to act quickly, it helps to have cross-border relationships among governments and producers to develop solutions based on science rather than knee-jerk reactions.

Canada has a lot of potential energy resources but no infrastructure to deal with it. For example, they are facing labor shortages because they do not have places for workers to stay close to where the projects are.

After that introduction, the committee and the visiting members were joined by Director of Agriculture Celia Gould and staff from ISDA for a round table discussion of potato cyst nematodes and how that infestation can be handled most effectively with the least disruption to agriculture.

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House Energy, Environment & Technology Committee

In another committee room at the same time. Matt Morrison, PNWER's executive director, updated the House Energy, Environment and Technology Committee on energy transmission issues throughout the region:

Resource Availability and Distribution: Currently 1.2 million barrels, or 6% of our domestic supply of oil, is imported from Alberta. That amount could increase three-fold were it not for a crunch in the labor market. The Northwest states in the U.S. are currently looking at ways to collaborate with Alberta to meet these needs.

Alternative Resources: A group within PNWER is looking at tidal and river energy. The costs of getting a permit to test a tidal turbine are high. The Idaho National Lab (INL) is looking at other ways to test this technology.

Education: An example of why good information is so important to legislators is a Washington State bill which proposed to ban burning coal to create power. An amended bill was necessary to prevent huge impacts to energy availability that were not considered in the original bill.

Resource Planning: PNWER is currently implementing policies that standardize planning by utilities to help avoid duplication by multiple utilities which would be trying to use the same resource during peak times.

Generation capacity: By 2010 to 2015, there will be competition in the region for increasingly limited resources. PNWER is contracting with INL to look at alternative sources and increased energy transmission capacity. California is spending up to \$12 million to look at renewable resources. Our options today for energy include natural gas, coal, hydro and nuclear. Alberta is looking at back up wind power – studying ways wind moves through the province. It's important to look at several options that might help this region meet its needs in the near future. Morrison stressed PNWER's concern for capacity to meet the energy needs in this region when those needs arise.

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Observations and Review of Idaho Water Law

On Friday, Professor Barbara Cousins, University of Idaho School of Law did a presentation on how we could modernize Idaho water law before the Senate Resources and Environment Committee. She outlined ways to modify the law to adapt to changing climate and growing population pressures and to introduce flexibility in allocation of water.

She mentioned four areas where the state might keep more stringent tabs on water use: mining of ground water, unregistered wells, follow-up on adjudication, and examination of reasonable use.

There should be flexibility in management and allocation. Land use planning in urban areas could be used to deal with the issue of scarcity. We might try easing the burden on water transfer or changing the amount of water use allowed in the exempt well category. In Idaho that is presently 15,000 gallons per day or enough water to irrigate a half acre of land. These amounts go back to the days when there were scattered homesteads that required more water to subsist than today. Times are changing and now subdivisions are being built with small ranchettes. They do not need water to subsist in the same way as the first settlers did. Average municipal water use in Boise is 190 gallons of water per day per person.

It is possible that there could be enough domestic use from wells in the Eastern Snake Plain to impact the surface water. While there is growing concern about these domestic wells, there is not a big enough budget or enough personnel to start permitting all of them. We need to look at something tailored to meet the need. It might mean a reduction in the amount of water exempted from permitting. The State of Washington allows 5,000 gallons of water per domestic well. The Department of Water Resources could track the exempt wells and eliminate the permit exemption only in basins where there is actually a problem with growth.

Ground water mining is defined as withdrawal of water at a rate that is more than can be replenished by natural recharge.

It is nice to think that the Snake River Basin Adjudication is almost done, but what we have is only a snapshot in time. We must keep the data base updated to have a correct picture into the future.

As water supplies get tight and population grows, municipalities need more water. There could be a lot of scrutiny on how people use the water. There is an impact on both quantity and quality. Local governments need the knowledge and resources to deal with the conflict.

She mentioned some things that are being done in other areas:

Some put growth caps on development, but that can impact affordable housing. Some areas required a developer to have an assured supply of water for a new subdivision. Some places use tiered pricing—paying more for water in the summer when more is used for landscaping. Subdivisions are using wastewater for landscaping. There is technology available for the re-use of waste water but the “yuk” factor plays a role in whether or not people want that.

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From the Idaho Council on Industry & the Environment (ICIE), *a private, nonprofit organization whose mission is to facilitate the use of science and facts in shaping public policy on environmental issues.*