



Idaho Council on Industry and the Environment Saturday Summary

Date 1-28-08

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."

Senate Resource & Environment Committee Meeting, 1-21-08

The first order of business was a request to send to print a resolution to amend the Idaho Constitution to limit the number of acres of state endowment land that the Idaho Land Board could sell in any one year and to guarantee access to state endowment lands to the public "to the extent that access is consistent with the purpose for which the lands were granted." After some discussion of the necessity for this change and the wisdom of using constitutional amendment as the means, the committee voted against printing the resolution.

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Next was a presentation by **Professor Jay O'Laughlin**, Director of the Policy Analysis Group at the College of Natural Resources at the University of Idaho. O'Laughlin opened his presentation with clips from the program "Sixty Minutes" presentation, "Age of Megafires" which was aired last year.

There has been an **enormous change in western wildfires**. Seven of ten of the busiest fires seasons in our history have taken place since 1999. Fire seasons are starting earlier and lasting longer. He discussed the impacts of increased fuel loads that have built up as a result of aggressive fire suppression that started after the 1910 burn, drought in most of the West, more bugs and disease that kill trees and a 1 degree increase in temperatures in the West as some of the reasons for the super hot megafires we have experienced. In addition the decision to reduce logging on most of the national forests has contributed to volume of dead trees and the increase in forest density.

Between 1970 and 1999, 3 million acres burned per year; from 2000 to 2004, 6 million acres burned; and from 2005-2007, 9 million acres burned.

Increased temperatures point to the need to move forward with some urgency in dealing with fuel loads. These fires destroy human and animal habitat and can reduce habitat values for species for centuries. Laughlin also discussed smoke from forest fires as a major source of particulate matter (PM). Wildfire emissions generate more **PM2.5** than all other sources combined.

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House Agricultural Affairs Committee Meeting, 1-25-08

The committee members voted to send to print a bill which would separate the **Ag in The Classroom** program from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture. The support that comes to the program through the agriculture licenses plates means that Ag in The Classroom does not need the \$28,000 from the ISDA budget that it had been allocated in previous years. The program would still be subjected to periodic audits.

Members also agreed to print bills that increase financial responsibility for **commodity dealers** licensed as Class I and Class II dealers and require a report to ISDA if net worth ratio drops below 1:1. A second bill along the same lines dealing with **warehouses** was sent to print as well.

The President of the Idaho Association of Soil Conservation Districts and the Manager of the Ada Soil and Water Conservation Districts reviewed the history of the **Idaho TMDL process**.

This program was enacted by the Idaho Legislature in response to lawsuits in the early 1990's that were filed by several environmental groups asserting that Idaho's list of water-quality limited stream segments was inadequate. The result was that a judge determined that Idaho had 962 segments rather than the original 31 water bodies that DEQ submitted to EPA.

In response, The Idaho Legislature passed SB 1284 which created Basin Advisory Groups (BAG's) and Watershed Advisory Groups (WAG's) to gather data on these stream segments and determine the Total Maximum Daily Load that could be allowed before water quality was impaired and what needed to happen to increase the water quality in those that were not up to standards. The first efforts required gathering data since some streams had been added to the list without any testing to show that water quality was degraded. Some streams were found to be dried up in nine of ten years.

So now over a decade later with millions of dollars spent, the speakers could report that 67 of 72 agriculture/grazing TMDL plans will be completed by the end of the year. Local land owners and operators are working in a voluntary role with the Idaho Soil Conservation Commission and soil conservation district staff in partnership to accomplish the necessary cleanup projects. Over \$32 million has been spent with 24% of that coming from the federal government, 34% from the state and 42% coming from the private sector.

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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.*

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