

**MINUTES OF THE  
NATURAL RESOURCES, AGRICULTURE, AND ENVIRONMENT INTERIM  
COMMITTEE**

Wednesday, September 18, 2002 – 9:00 a.m. – Room 303 State Capitol

**Members Present:**

Sen. Parley G. Hellewell, Senate Chair  
Rep. Bradley T. Johnson, House Chair  
Sen. Leonard M. Blackham  
Sen. Mike Dmitrich  
Sen. Bill Wright  
Rep. Eli H. Anderson  
Rep. Roger E. Barrus  
Rep. Jackie Biskupski  
Rep. Craig W. Buttars  
Rep. David N. Cox  
Rep. Margaret Dayton  
Rep. Glenn A. Donnelson

Rep. Fred J. Fife III  
Rep. James R. Gowans  
Rep. Thomas Hatch  
Rep. Darin G. Peterson  
Rep. Michael R. Styler  
Rep. Stephen H. Urquhart

**Staff Present:**

Mr. Brian Allred, Research Analyst  
Ms. Jeanenne B. Larson, Associate General Counsel  
Ms. Joy L. Miller, Legislative Secretary

**Note:** A list of others present and a copy of materials can be found at <http://www.image.le.state.ut.us/imaging/history.asp> or by contacting the committee secretary, Joy Miller, at 538-1032.

**1. Committee Business**

Chair Hellewell called the meeting to order at 9:15 a.m.

**MOTION:** Rep. Donnelson moved to approve the minutes of the June 19, 2002 meeting. The motion passed unanimously. Sen. Blackham, Sen. Wright, Rep. Buttars, and Rep. Gowans were absent for the vote.

**2. Update on Drought Conditions in Utah**

Mr. Randy Julander, NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service) explained that with the drought Utah has been experiencing there will be long-term effects across the watersheds. Although the state has received a substantial amount of moisture recently, it came too late to help agriculture and other areas. However, the precipitation plays a huge role in the soil moisture situation. He stated that in the past, much of the snowpack has only replaced the soil moisture rather than going into runoff. Mr. Julander updated the committee on the reservoir storage which is very low in many areas. Bear Lake is as low as it has been since the 1930s and 1940s. He indicated that the Jordanelle and Strawberry reservoirs have been managed such that they are still above 70 percent of capacity which indicates that the Central Utah Project is working very well. He noted that current streamflow is as low as it has ever been. He displayed a satellite image which showed the extreme effects the drought has had on vegetation.

Mr. Dennis Strong, Division of Water Resources, distributed information regarding the water basins in the state. He stressed the need to practice water conservation all the time. He said the state prepares for drought by building dams, drilling wells, recharging the groundwater, and when necessary restricting water use. Because the state has constructed water storage projects and drilled wells to take advantage of the groundwater storage, the effects of the drought have been reduced significantly, particularly for drinking

water systems. He stated that many agriculture producers have connections to dams and reservoirs and store water in years of excess. Those who have that ability are at less risk than agriculture producers who rely on streamflows. Mr. Strong complimented Utah water users for doing their part to reduce water use. He showed a comparison of Wasatch Front total water use which is down this year from 2001 and 2000.

Commissioner Cary Peterson, DAF (Department of Agriculture and Food), said the effect of the drought has not been the same in all Utah counties. He said farm organizations have appealed to Congress and the Secretary of Agriculture for assistance. He distributed a summary outlining the counties' forage production loss, pasture loss, and range loss and the number of farms with losses over 30 percent. The standard for qualifying for federal assistance is at least 30 percent or more loss. Commissioner Peterson stated the environmental effects are extreme in drought. The lack of green growing plants has a severe affect on air quality. He pointed out that the U.S. Senate recently passed a bill which would provide \$5.9 billion in grants for disaster relief and assistance to cover 2001 and 2002. A \$621,000 federal grant was given to Utah to reestablish growth where there have been fires and watershed destruction. Commissioner Peterson stated many county producers are currently out of the ranching and livestock business. He said 75 percent of Utah agriculture is the livestock industry. He emphasized the importance of helping agriculture producers get back into business.

Rep. Johnson introduced Mr. Mark Ward who is working for the Attorney General's Office on natural resource issues. Mr. Ward gave a brief review of his work experience.

Mr. Bill James, DWR (Division of Wildlife Resources), distributed a handout "Drought Response Plan for Wildlife." He stated it will be years before the state recovers from the impacts the drought has had on rangelands, wildlife populations, and livestock herds. Wildlife habitat conditions, rangeland health for the benefit of livestock production, and the stability of the watershed are three major issues impacted by the drought. He said there has been a moderate influx of federal aid money that the state has not had access to before. It requires DWR to find private livestock producers who are able to partner with them in implementing large scale projects in order to have an impact on these habitats. If a large scale effort can be brought together, many things can be done to improve the landscape in Utah. Mr. James stressed the need to look at long-term restoration of rangelands.

Mr. Bob Morgan, DNR (Department of Natural Resources), stated there will be significant problems if groundwater networks are not replenished. He said a committee was formed with representatives from the Division, the Washington County Water Conservancy District, Utah Farm Bureau, Anglers Coalition, Audubon, and Sportsmen for Fish and Wildlife. Discussions during the meetings stressed the need to take a serious look at the state's watersheds for production of forage, wildlife, livestock, and for preserving the quality of water in the state. He proposed that the committee consider cooperative efforts that may be available to put partnerships together with federal, state, and private concerns. He requested that the committee dedicate a meeting to discuss watershed protection. The DNR will assist the committee in the process.

The committee discussed the possibility of meeting in October to tour watershed sites.

### **3. Chronic Wasting Disease**

Dr. Earl Rogers, Assistant State Veterinarian, distributed a handout "Fact Sheet/Chronic Wasting Disease." He said the disease has become a pervasive issue in the hunting community. CWD (Chronic Wasting Disease) is an infectious disease caused by a prion protein and has been present in deer and elk in northeastern Colorado and southeastern Wyoming since the late 1960s. The disease has been discovered in free ranging deer in six states. Since 1997, the disease has been detected in privately owned elk on 24 ranches. Dr. Rogers indicated that Utah identified 34 animals imported to Utah that had connection with the herds in the endemic area. They were tested and found negative for CWD. To date, there has been no diagnosis of CWD in Utah. He reviewed the efforts being taken by the DAF to prevent the disease from entering the state.

#### **4. School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration Report**

Mr. Kim Christy, SITLA (School and Institutional Trust Lands Administration) distributed a handout "Block Management Report." He reviewed the school trust lands that were granted at statehood and gave an historical background of the process that was followed. Mr. Christy explained that currently there are 69 blocks that are 5,000 to more than 100,000 acres in size, combining both mineral and surface interest. Each block has its own history of how it was developed. One of the strongest motives for the creation of the Book Cliffs block was for mineral development. He indicated that SITLA uses a careful and disciplined approach to inventorying its resources on a case-by-case basis as well as formulating management decisions. Its attention has largely shifted to maintenance and enhancement of value where possible. He noted that stewardship costs money. He said one of the components of SITLA's strategies they are working through on a case-by-case basis is the formulation of exit strategies. He said SITLA is proud of the fact that they are trying to be more proactive in conservation management. Significant funding has been secured through the Endangered Species Mitigation Fund to assist in trying to partner with counties to move forward with meaningful development.

#### **5. Rural Development Fund Grants**

Mr. Keith Burnett, DCD (Division of Community Development) briefed the committee on the RDF (Rural Development Fund). The source of the revenues for the RDF and the RDFB (Rural Development Fund Board) are mineral lease royalties that are paid on trust lands exchanged from the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument. The RDF is controlled by the RDFB which is a five-member board composed of a governor's designee and a mayor or county commissioner from each of the four participating counties. It was established to provide grants to local communities. He reviewed the guidelines that have been adopted by the RDFB and the projects that have been approved. The total cost of these projects is over \$4 million.

#### **6. Rural Electronic Commerce Communications System Fund Grants**

Mr. Burnett explained that the source of revenues for the REC (Rural Electronic Commerce Communications System Fund) and the RECB (Rural Electronics Communications Board) is also mineral lease royalties that are paid on trust lands exchanged from the Grand Staircase Escalante National Monument. The REC is controlled by the nine-member RECB composed of a governor's designee, four county commissioners from four different rural counties, and four mayors from rural counties. Mr.

Burnett noted the goal of the REC is to provide grants for programs or projects which preserve or promote communications systems within the rural areas of the state. A \$3.2 million project has been approved to upgrade the statewide TV translator system which will be financed with a revenue bond issued by a consortium headed by the Utah Association of Counties. He reviewed the payment requirements for the bond.

**7. Other Items / Adjourn**

Sen. Hellewell requested staff to work with the DNR to schedule a date when the committee could tour watershed sites.

**MOTION:** Rep. Donnelson moved to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously. Chair Hellewell adjourned the meeting at 12:00 p.m.