

**Idaho Fish and Game Commission
Special Meeting – February 19, 2026
Idaho Department of Fish and Game
Legislative Conference Call
Boise, Idaho**

A meeting of the Idaho Fish and Game Commission was held by telephone conference, attended by Commissioners Dave Bobbitt, Don Ebert, Tim Murphy, Mike Roach, Jordan Cheirrett, Brody Harshbarger, and Ron Davies.

IDFG staff present: Director Jim Fredericks, Deputy Director Amber Worthington, Deputy Director, Jon Rachael, Ellary TuckerWilliams, Elizabeth Page, Owen Moroney, Deputy Attorney General, Jon Oswald, Adam Park, Justin Williams, Lance Hebdon, Shane Roberts, Tricia Hebdon, Craig Mickelson, Rick Ward, Sal Palazzolo, and Tara Reichert.

IDFG staff participating via phone: Carson Watkins, JJ Teare, Josh Royse, Craig White, Dan Garren, Matt Pieron, Ryan Hilton, TJ Ross, Chasity Tritz, Clay Hickey, and Brian Pearson.

Members of the public in attendance: Nick Fasciano, Idaho Wildlife Federation, Michael Gibson, Trout Unlimited, and Alex Watt, Idaho Conservation League.

Chairman Bobbitt called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. MST.

LEGISLATION

Legislative Update (Commissioner Confirmations, IDFG Presentations, Bills, budget, Rulemaking, etc.)

Director Fredericks, reiterated key upcoming dates:

Chairman Dave Bobbitt's Commission confirmation was on Monday, February 16th, 2026. The Senate Resources Committee unanimously advanced his appointment.

The Department's budget will go in front of JFAC on February 25th, 2026, at 8:00 a.m., and the budget will be set on Friday, February 27th, 2026.

The Department will present: Chapters 3, 16, and 19, on Monday, March 2nd, 2026, in the Senate Resource Committee; Chapters 4, 17, and 8, on Tuesday, March 3rd, 2026, in the House Resource Committee; and Chapters 4, 17, and 8 on Wednesday, March 4th, 2026, in the Senate Resource Committee.

New Bill Analysis for Discussion/Update on Pending Legislation / Action for Policy Position

Ellary Tucker Williams provided the following update on legislation.

House Bill 652 (Hunting, State Sport) would designate hunting as the official state sport of Idaho. In 2012, Idaho voters approved a constitutional amendment affirming the right to hunt, fish, and trap, with more than 73% voter support, underscoring the significance of outdoor

sporting heritage in the state. While 19 other states have official state sports, Idaho currently does not. The bill is intended to reaffirm the importance of hunting to Idaho citizens. There is no anticipated fiscal impact to the Department. The bill has passed out of the House Resources and Conservation Committee.

26-10 Commissioner Cheirrett made a motion that the Commission support and testify, on House Bill 652. Commissioner Murphy seconded the motion. Motion carries.

House Bill 651 concerns funding for big game depredation claims. The Expendable Big Game Depredation Fund has \$1.8 million in spending authority, but annual revenue is approximately \$1.1 million, requiring license fund transfers in high-claim years. In FY 2023, a \$125,000 cap per claimant was implemented to distribute funds more equitably. In four of the last five fiscal years, claims exceeded spending authority, resulting in proration and no carryover funds.

House Bill 651 would prohibit unspent funds from rolling over in any year when a claim reaches the \$125,000 cap. This would likely increase the need to transfer approximately \$700,000 in additional license revenue annually and does not address the underlying shortfall between revenue and claims. The bill has been introduced and referred to the House Resources and Conservation Committee.

26-11 Commissioner Cheirrett made a motion that the Commission not support and testify, on House Bill 651. Commissioner Davies seconded the motion. Motion carries.

House Bill 653 would establish new notification, approval, and reporting requirements for both “planned” and “responsive” wildlife movements. Under current law, the Director has broad authority over wildlife relocation, and the Department operates under established public safety policies and evaluation criteria when addressing human-wildlife conflicts or conducting planned translocations. The bill would require advance notice to county commissioners, grazing permittees, and landowners within a five-mile radius of a proposed planned release site. Upon written objection, the county commission would hold a hearing and have final authority to approve or reject the relocation. For responsive movements, the bill imposes location restrictions, a 72-hour notification requirement to multiple entities, and ongoing public reporting obligations.

The Department has identified concerns with the bill’s broad definition of “wild game,” which would apply to routine research and management capture-and-release activities, potentially resulting in thousands of notifications annually. The bill could also affect game bird stocking, rehabilitation facilities, and ESA recovery efforts, create significant administrative costs for both IDFG and county commissions, and shift wildlife management authority from the state to county governments. The bill has been introduced and referred to the House Resources and Conservation Committee.

26-12 Commissioner Davies made a motion that the Commission not support and testify, on House Bill 653. Commissioner Ebert seconded the motion. Motion carries.

House Bill 678 would allow wolf trappers to satisfy the current 72-hour trap-check requirement either by physically visiting traps in person or by using a transmitting trail camera, and it grants the Commission rulemaking authority to implement the provisions. Current rule requires in-person checks every 72 hours, and while transmitting cameras are not expressly prohibited, “visit” has been interpreted to mean a physical check. The bill responds in part to pending rule language limiting transmitting trail camera use for big game, with exceptions for wolves. Granting rulemaking authority would allow the Commission to address implementation details such as camera placement, response time after a capture, recordkeeping, and contingency requirements if technology fails. The bill could improve timeliness of trap response but may present enforcement challenges in verifying active transmission. Fiscal impact is unknown. The bill has been introduced and referred to the House Resources and Conservation Committee.

26-13 Commissioner Ebert made a motion that the Commission support and testify on House Bill 678. Commissioner Harshbarger seconded the motion. Motion carries.

House Bill 677 would prohibit the construction of permanent or temporary hunting blinds, pits, platforms, or tree stands within 300 feet of a water trough or stock pond on public lands in Idaho and would assign enforcement responsibility to IDFG. Current law already restricts certain blind construction methods, and federal land managers such as the USFS and BLM have existing regulations governing portable blinds and duration limits on public lands. The bill responds to concerns from the livestock industry that hunting blinds near water sources may interfere with livestock access; however, the Department believes the issue is seasonal and localized and that the bill takes a broad approach with limited consultation from the sportsmen’s community. Implementation would increase enforcement expectations on Conservation Officers and could heighten tensions between user groups on multi-use public lands. Fiscal impact to the Department is expected to be minimal. The bill has been introduced and referred to the House Resources and Conservation Committee.

26-14 Commission Cheirrett made a motion that the Commission take no position on House Bill 677 and continue conversations expressing the Department’s concerns with the bill’s current language. Commissioner Harshbarger seconded the motion. Commissioner’s Bobbitt, Ebert, Murphy, and Davies opposed. Commissioner Roach was absent for the vote. Motion fails.

26-15 Commissioner Davies made a motion that the Commission not support and testify, on House Bill 677. Commissioner Cheirrett seconded the motion. Motion carries.

Senate Bill 1300 would require the Directors of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game, Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, and Idaho Transportation Department to be appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate. Under current law, the Fish and Game Director is appointed by the Fish and Game Commission and serves under its direction, a structure that provides insulation from political transitions and promotes continuity in wildlife management. The bill would align these agencies with most other state departments by placing director appointment authority with the Governor, with the IDFG Director serving at the pleasure of the Governor while still operating under Commission direction. There is no anticipated fiscal impact. The bill has been introduced and referred to Senate State Affairs.

26-16 Commissioner Murphy made a motion that the Commission not support and testify on Senate Bill 1300. Commissioner Harshbarger seconded the motion. Motion carries.

Senate Bill 1326 would prohibit any government agent from entering private property without a valid search warrant, lawful consent, or narrowly defined exigent circumstances, with limited exceptions such as approaching a front door, welfare checks, and certain water or weed control functions. The bill would impose civil and criminal liability on individual government agents for violations, including a mandatory \$1,000 civil penalty per occurrence plus attorney's fees, though this penalty would not apply to county sheriffs, municipal police, or Idaho State Police. While wildlife is held in trust for the public and IDFG policy already limits entry onto private lands without consent, the bill would significantly restrict Conservation Officers' ability to conduct routine compliance checks on private property, potentially reducing enforcement of fish, game, and trespass laws. The Department is concerned the measure could incentivize illegal activity such as poaching or trespassing, limit proactive law enforcement in rural areas, and create substantial legal and operational risks for officers. The fiscal impact is unknown. This bill has been introduced and referred to the Senate Resources and Environment Committee.

26-17 Commissioner Ebert made a motion that the Commission not support and testify on Senate Bill 1326. Commissioner Davies seconded the motion. Commissioner's Cheirrett, and Harshbarger opposed. Motion carries.

Senate Joint Memorial 111 expresses the Idaho Legislature's support for maintaining federal public lands in public ownership and opposes efforts to sell or transfer those lands. The memorial highlights the importance of Idaho's public lands to the state's identity, economy, hunting and fishing heritage, Second Amendment rights, and constitutional protections for hunting, fishing, and trapping. It asserts that transferring or selling public lands could jeopardize public access, traditional uses, and place financial burdens on state and local governments. The memorial encourages Idaho's congressional delegation to oppose disposal efforts and to support legislation such as the Public Lands in Public Hands Act. As a joint memorial, it carries no fiscal impact. The Commission does not take positions on Senate Joint Memorials; the item was presented for informational purposes only.

Adjourn 10:40 a.m. MST

Dave Bobbitt
Chairman

Jim Fredericks
Secretary