



Idaho Potato Commission

The Idaho Potato Commission will spend more on the Big Idaho Potato Truck tour this year. Last year's tour was cut short by COVID-19 concerns.

## Idaho Potato Commission approves higher budget

By BRAD CARLSON  
Capital Press

The Idaho Potato Commission's board members have approved a 7.4% budget increase for the next fiscal year, which ends next Aug. 31.

The new budget compares to a year-earlier spending plan affected by COVID-19. For example, coronavirus concerns and restrictions in 2020 prompted the commission to quickly end the Big Idaho Potato Truck national tour and to develop programs to encourage retail sale of foodservice potatoes. Foodservice disruptions also caused growers to plant fewer acres of potatoes, a key budget driver.

President and CEO Frank Muir said most of this year's increased spending involves getting the Big Idaho Potato Truck back on the road for its 10th anniversary tour. The commission also will spend more on foodservice programs and staff travel.

"Our focus year after year is to launch demand-building programs," he said.

The commission also is spending

\$100,000 for a potato-storage physiologist at the University of Idaho; it has committed a total of \$500,000 over five years.

Muir said the new budget of about \$16.65 million — up from \$15.5 million a year ago — anticipates \$14.8 million from the state potato tax and \$300,000 from other sources such as grants, seed grower contributions, and sales of merchandise and themed license plates. Some \$1.5 million is from the reserve fund, which builds if sales exceed forecasts.

The tax is 12.5 cents per hundredweight, paid 60% by growers and 40% by a first handler such as a shipper or processor. Budgeted tax collections reflect planted acres, a rolling five-year average yield — used to accommodate year-to-year changes in weather and other growing conditions — and a reduction for potatoes that are unusable.

Planted acres totaled 314,039 acres this year and 295,790 last year, according to United Potato Growers of Idaho in-person counts.

The state each year produces about one-third of the nation's potatoes, leading the country.

# Initiative targets managing forests against wildfire risks

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

The Western Governors' Association has begun a new initiative to tackle wildfires by managing for healthy forests.

Idaho Gov. Brad Little, WGA chairman, said the West faces a growing need for additional capacity, both intellectual capacity and physical infrastructure, to responsibly manage natural resources.



Idaho Gov. Brad Little

WGA's Working Lands/Working Communities initiative will expand relationships between western communities, federal and state partners and local and tribal governments to manage land and resources, he said.

"The goal is to develop bipartisan strategies to support local communities seeking to improve cross-boundary management of lands, mitigate wildfire risks and restore ecosystems," he said.

One challenge is to expand market support for active management of western working lands, he said.

"A good example is examining potential markets for the relatively low-value timber and biomass that needs to be removed to reduce the threat of uncharacteristic wildfire," he said.

The initiative highlights one of the most important lessons in land management, said Sonya Germann, Montana state forester.

"The best and most durable solutions are those that are

**'IF WE DON'T MANAGE THESE FORESTS, FIRE'S GOING TO MANAGE THEM FOR US — AND WE DON'T WANT THAT.'**

Tom Schultz, director of resources and government affairs for Idaho Forest Group

locally driven — ones that galvanize and support local leadership, encourage collaboration, promote local industries and workforce capacity and provide markets for the goods we derive from achieving our collective management goals," she said.

Lesli Allison, executive director of Western Landowners Alliance, said there are many great examples across the West of successful public-private partnerships and locally led conservation.

"We can build on these models, but scaling up will require political will and investment," she said.

Tom Schultz, director of resources and government affairs for Idaho Forest Group, said Idaho has identified more than 6 million acres threatened by wildfires due to insects and disease, and that number is more than 80 million acres nationwide.

"So through Shared Stewardship and Good Neighbor Authority, we have the opportunity to address some of these risks," he said.

"We know the threat is out there, and active management is one of the key tools that we have to address and mitigate those threats," he said.

While there have been successes, there are also plenty of challenges.

"The will is there, the getting it done is very, very difficult. We simply don't have the resources to meet the scale of the need," Germann said.

The processes and authorities are helpful tools. But there are still barriers to knitting those things together and making them work on a large landscape-style basis, she said.

"So I think it's going to take resources, policy push ... but I think the will is there and the timing is right," she said.

There's been too much war between working lands and the environment, and there's a need to work together more cooperatively, Allison said.

"I think finding the political will to come together on common ground and find those solutions and deepen mutual understanding and trust is imperative if we're going to be successful," she said.

Schultz said there needs to be a priority focus on treating forests and the agreements that need to be put in place to get it done.

"If we don't manage these forests, fire's going to manage them for us — and we don't want that," he said.



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### Idaho FFA officers prepare for a busy fall

This fall many teenagers are preparing to leave for college and start school, and the Idaho FFA state officers are preparing for this fall's leadership activities along with starting their secondary education.

They are preparing for events such as B.A.S.I.C., chapter visits and the Gem State Leadership Conference.

B.A.S.I.C. — Building and Achieving Success in Idaho Chapters — is a leadership conference facilitated by state officers from each career technical education organization. These organizations include: FFA, FCCLA, BPA, DECA, TSA, SKILLS USA and HOSA. There are four BASIC conferences scheduled for this fall. They will be held in Pocatello, Twin Falls, Boise, and Coeur d'Alene. Each conference is designed to focus on chapter officers of said organizations setting them up for a year of success and outstanding leadership.

Along with B.A.S.I.C., the Idaho FFA state officer team will be traveling all across the state of Idaho to conduct chapter visits. Chapter visits are created to be an in-classroom leadership experience full of workshops and activities for FFA members of all ages and levels. The Idaho FFA Association includes 97 chapters and the state officers aim to reach every chapter.

Rounding out fall preparation, the state officers are beginning work for the Gem State Leadership conferences held in Boise, Pocatello and Coeur d'Alene. Gem State Leadership Conference is specifically for FFA members to help them succeed as leaders and FFA members. The state officer team looks forward to the opportunities this fall and are excited to lead members all across the state.



Idaho FFA State Officer team (left to right) is Vice President Katie Hebdon, Nampa; Reporter Kennedy Farden, New Plymouth; Sentinel Cassie Morey, Deary; President Kayden Driggs, Teton; Treasurer Cassie Moody, Middleton; and Secretary Claire Shelton, Meridian.



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