



Montana Board of Livestock Meeting Minutes

(This Meeting was Open to the Public & By ZOOM)

January 25, 2024

MT Department of Livestock Board Room #319
301 N. Roberts, Helena, Montana

Board Members Present

Gene Curry, Chairman (cattle producer)

Greg Wichman (sheep producer)

Nina Baucus (cattle producer)

(Jake Feddes attended the meeting by ZOOM)

William Kleinsasser (swine producer)

Alan Redfield (cattle producer)

Lily Andersen (dairy & poultry)

Staff Present

Mike Honeycutt, EO

Brian Simonson, Deputy EO

Evan Waters, Centralized Services

Rick Corder, Centralized Services

Tom Shultz, Centralized Services

Dale Haylett, Centralized Services

Mike Spatz, Centralized Services

Donna Wilham, Adm. Assistant to EO

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski, MT State Vet

Dr. Greg Juda, Director, MVDL

Alicia Love, Meat, Milk & Egg Inspection

George Edwards, LLB

Jay Bodner, Brands Enforcement

Public Present

Max Grebe, LPW Architecture

Trey Patterson, Padlock Ranch

JD Hill, Padlock Ranch

Chase Hibbard

Dalin Tidwell, USDA Wildlife Services

MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

(:02) 8:00 AM

Chairman Gene Curry called the meeting to order at 8:00 AM

CALL TO ORDER AND INTRODUCTIONS

(:02) 8:00 AM

Chairman Gene Curry said the first order of business was Introductions:

- Alan Redfield, Cattle Representative, Paradise Valley
 - Mr. Redfield said that it was one of those years where you don't understand what was going on but, took advantage of it and get all the work done that you could

- With the cold, Mr. Redfield said that they packed a lot of firewood, but that everything was fine and that they would not be calving until the middle of March
- Greg Wichman, Sheep Representative, Hilger, North of Lewistown
 - Mr. Wichman said that they had frozen up the well house and were working on it so his son could bring his cows home
 - With the cold, Mr. Wichman said they burned up a lot of coal and wood keeping the shop warm. Both the animals and themselves came through it all
 - Mr. Wichman reported that they had been having some coyote problems, picking up 13 of them within a mile of their house
- William Kleinsasser, Swine Representative, Augusta
 - Mr. Kleinsasser reported that it had been a cold, cold week and that even with the pigs inside the barn, everything got tested to its limits
 - The 40 below temperatures, Mr. Kleinsasser said, tripped the breaker, misshaped the outside plastic moulding, making the ventilation fan run, adding that it was expensive when it was that cold outside
 - Pork prices were slowly starting to come up, he reported, and the last three days looked very good, Mr. Kleinsasser added that he hoped they would get above the break-even point one of these months
 - Forecasters were reporting that the pork industry was losing \$100 million a week, Mr. Kleinsasser said and that it couldn't continue to go on like that. He said he was optimistic, though, and hoping there would be better prices
 - Mr. Kleinsasser was not certain of why prices were like they were because he said there was a lot of supply, but a lot of demand as well
- Lily Andersen, Dairy & Poultry Representative, south of Livingston
 - Ms. Andersen reported that they survived the cold, putting a couple propane heaters in their parlor
 - A couple of the pregnant milk cows were due during that cold period, she said, but, they held them in
- Nina Baucus, Cattle Representative, north of Helena
 - Ms. Baucus said that they were fine through the cold as they were only at 43 below zero. She said that at the summer range they had an official 53 below and not too far from it, it was 61 below
 - She reported that the town of Lincoln barely saved their school during the cold spell because someone went in and opened every door to make the air move around
 - Ms. Baucus said that they had only a couple water tanks where the propane gelled up and they had to chop the ice out
 - During a weed meeting that her husband John attended, Ms. Baucus said it was discussed that during the very first part of January this year, grasshoppers were found hatching at Lewistown during a warm spell they had. She said they also talked about this past summer where pilots were hitting grasshoppers at 11,000 feet in the air

- Jake Feddes, Cattle Representative, Manhattan
 - Mr. Feddes apologized for not being at the meeting but that there had been some positive tests for Influenza A at his house in the last few days
 - Calving during the cold spell wasn't fun, Mr. Feddes said, but they had not lost any calves, only a few ears
 - The cattle market, he reported, had been continuing to trickled up and that there was optimism about where things would be and what the market would look like again for this year
 - Mr. Feddes said that they really needed moisture and were going to have to have irrigation water next summer
- Gene Curry, Cattle Representative, Valier
 - Mr. Curry said they were in a warmer climate during the cold spell but their son had problems during that time at the ranch with a blown hydraulic line in their truck
 - Mr. Curry reported that since the last meeting they had sold quite a few bred heifers, with some that had sold in Great Falls for \$2650, which he thought was a pretty good price
 - On their return from Phoenix, Mr. Curry reported that there was more snow in Helena than any other place they drove in Montana, adding that it was going to be a short irrigation water supply this year if we didn't get some mountain snow

BOARD ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

(9:40) 8:10 AM

(9:40) 8:10 AM – BOARD APPROVAL OF PAST MEETING MINUTES

Gene Curry requested approval of the minutes of the last BOL meeting

MOTION/VOTE

(9:44) 8:06 AM

Nina Baucus moved to approve the minutes from the Montana Board of Livestock December 14, 2023 meeting. William Kleinsasser seconded. The motion passed.

OLD BUSINESS

(10:01) 8:10 AM

(10:04) 8:10 AM – UPDATE ON GOVERNOR'S OGSM STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND EXECUTIVE OFFICER STRATEGIC GOALS

Mike Honeycutt reported on the first OGSM meeting of 2024 that had just occurred the previous week:

- The quarterly slaughter figures reported to the Governor for the first half of Fiscal Year 2024 (through December 31, 2023), Mr. Honeycutt said, were outpacing last year by a long shot and on track with Fiscal Year 2022, a big slaughter year
 - Driving those slaughter numbers, Mr. Honeycutt reported, were the poultry numbers, which had a big Thanksgiving of items being processed and sold across the state

- Although years ago there were semis full of chickens headed west to be made into chicken soup, William Kleinsasser said that right now, there was no market for them
- Mike Honeycutt explained that where he was from in North Carolina, the hatchery, the processor and contract grower were all within a 30-mile radius of each other and that in most parts of the country, everything in the poultry industry happened within a very, very short geography
- In Montana, Mr. Honeycutt said the many of the Colonies had custom exempt processing licenses and some of them actually did inspected processing and sold the chicken locally, that that was what was really driving the poultry slaughter numbers
- Mr. Honeycutt explained that the number of cattle being marketed through commission companies was not quite at the level of Fiscal Year 2022, which was a big drought year, but they were online with last year
- Vacancies in the DOL were not as high as they had been, Mr. Honeycutt said, with those numbers moving back into the normal range of 7 or 8 vacancies across the whole department this past month, and hiring outpacing people leaving
- Through the first half of the year, Mr. Honeycutt said that the DOL had not spent more than the appropriated budget. He went on to explain that it was reasonable to expect that revenue would take some hits over the next couple of years because there was less livestock out there to pay per capita. During this per capita time of year, though, the majority of the lagging revenue would come up as budget and expenses would even out
- An internal three-year audit of meat product labels would be happening, Mr. Honeycutt said
- There was a pretty robust pipeline for meat processing with Mr. Honeycutt reporting 19 potential new processors coming online in the spring and three applications currently in for the CIS (Cooperative Interstate Shipping Program) program
 - Although there were 19 in the pipeline for CIS, Mr. Honeycutt reported that some who had applied for a Grant of Inspection do not yet have a building and were pretty far away from being a new processor until they got other things sorted out
 - Mr. Honeycutt explained that once the final walkthrough was done for an establishment on the hook to be in the CIS, everyone had said, well, I've gone this far, I'll just go to USDA. He said that it would be nice to see a Montana establishment meet the criteria and still operate under the CIS program as Alicia Love and her team had done the work to get them to that point
 - He explained that even though a CIS establishment could not engage in international marketing, they could do internet sales across any state in the United States
- Mr. Honeycutt reported that Swank Enterprises, the contractor for the new Combined Lab Complex, had asked for a pause on construction of the building

because of the winter conditions, and so, even though things continued to move forward to keep it on budget, keeping it on-time might be hard

- With word from Montana State University that they were doing some enhancements in their Microbiology Department, Mr. Honeycutt said that the DOL should press forward with them doing more research on Brucellosis and having more collaboration between MSU, the VDL and the DOL Animal Health staff
- With an IBMP meeting scheduled within the next six months, Mr. Honeycutt said that he, Dr. Szymanski and Alan Redfield had discussed trying to introduce some new language into the agreement to reinforce the Brucellosis as one of the major reasons the DOL was in the situation. He said the current agreement hardly mentioned what was being done to mitigate Brucellosis but talked a lot about bison movement and habitat
- Mr. Honeycutt said that Nina Baucus had alluded to the DOL working with FWP and Tribal Partners to see if there could be more Brucellosis surveillance done in South-Central Montana, particularly in the area around the Crow Reservation and the Big Horn Mountains
- Livestock Dealer renewal of licenses would be conducted by the DOL later this spring, Mr. Honeycutt said. It had been discussed to put a list of those Montana-licensed Dealers on the website
- Mr. Honeycutt said that the Field Training Officer Program in Brands would be having a little more formality added to it so that when a new Law Enforcement Officer or new Investigator was hired, they would get training, especially if they were hired from outside the Agency, through Investigators out in the field
- On the docket for the next six months in the IT area of the DOL, Mr. Honeycutt said, was continued work on the Data Storage Project, which would allow information from different systems in the DOL to flow together and be queried and searched. He further explained that data from USAHerds, VADDS and ServiceNow could be exported into one location called Snowflake where Brands, Animal Health and VDL information could be searched and queried
- The USAHerds software currently utilized in Animal Health would be analyzed to decide if the DOL would continue to utilize it or get something new
- The Google AI program that would allow the scanning of the backlog of inspections in the Brands area of the DOL, continued to be worked on as well, Mr. Honeycutt said
- The per capita education discussion that had begun at the previous meeting was again discussed, with the possibility of working with FFA and with Realtors to educate new folks moving into the state that there was a tax on livestock
- Alan Redfield suggested having the information presented at Realtor license renewal meetings so that if someone bought a ranch the buyer would be made aware that they needed to do that. He also suggested that DNRC should be making people aware of it as well
- Mr. Redfield expressed concern that many of the people attending meetings on watersheds were not producers, but government-employed people
- Per capita inventory date was February 1st, Mr. Honeycutt explained, saying that less inventory was expected to be reported this year than last year. He said that

going back to 2021 until now on cattle in Montana, numbers were down 15% to 20%, going from just over 2 million cattle reported to 1.8 million that were reported

- Mr. Honeycutt said that the number of swine reported had remained more stable because they were not as drought-affected as cattle or bison, who did landscape grazing, and swine were maybe not as market-affected as some other things either
- Poultry numbers reported for per capita over the last 10-12 years had tripled, Mr. Honeycutt reported, going from just over 400,000 to over 1.3 million that got reported last year
- Sheep did not oscillate very much, Mr. Honeycutt said, and had stayed in the same range
- Jake Feddes reported that eventually there would not be a whole lot more cattle to sell. He said that as ranches had sold and moved from the hands of producer families to hobby ranchers, which was happening at a high rate across the west, the number of cattle would go down and he felt the numbers of cattle would never rebound to where they were three years ago. He said if there were any rebuilding of herds, it would not be until late 2025 or 2026
- Because of increased input costs and the higher prices being received when they were sold, Mr. Feddes said that fewer heifers were retained this year and producers were keeping their older cows
- The bred cattle market was off around 30% this fall, from where people thought it would be, Mr. Feddes reported, and he thought the feeder cattle prices would be really good this year
- Gene Curry requested that Mr. Feddes share any contributions for his ideas of where DOL focus should be for the next six months
 - Mr. Feddes said that the DOL needed to continue to monitor numbers and per capita so that the DOL did not get into a bad situation
 - He said that Montana would, at some point, hit a max on capacity on meat processing, because there were only so many consumers in the state
 - Concern was raised again about the Local Inspector situation he had brought forward at previous BOL meetings
 - Mr. Feddes felt that biosecurity should also be kept at the front of our minds
- Mr. Honeycutt said that the Governor also wanted the State Agencies to come up with some big-picture items to address for the next 3-5 years down the road
- Mr. Honeycutt said that one item being requested by the Governor's Office was that the DOL have 80% of the state's livestock under some sort of biosecurity disease preparedness traceability program or to have at least 80% of livestock exposed to the components of those programs to ensure resiliency if there was a major foreign animal disease outbreak
 - The Secure Beef Supply program just started this year and was presented to the MSGA and Cattlemen in December by Dr. Szymanski. It was well-attended and was one way to address biosecurity disease preparedness traceability in the state

- Also, Montana had been part of the National Poultry Improvement Program for a while already
- William Kleinsasser and Dr. Tahnee Szymanski both attended the meeting of the Swine Health Improvement Program. Mr. Honeycutt said that the DOL already worked closely with the Montana Pork Producers Council to help enhance biosecurity in the state
- A Secure Wool Program had been discussed by Dr. Tahnee Szymanski back in November with the Woolgrowers
- Mr. Honeycutt said he would also put Secure Dairy on his list of what should be addressed for biosecurity in the state, but he wasn't sure if there was an equivalent that the dairy industry had been working on
 - Lily Andersen said the DFA already required SOPs for everything they do, which included biosecurity measures and she added that Darigold probably had something very similar in place
- Nina Baucus said, regarding a Secure Food Supply, that no public access to private lands might be something to think about because of people possibly bringing infectious diseases in on their boots from wherever they came from in the United States
- Mr. Honeycutt said that another item to be addressed in the next 3-5 years in the DOL was having the capability of online and paperless capability for all services
- He said that because of a lack of good broadband access statewide and a mix of desires by the general public, it was not reasonable to say that you would do no paper at all, at least at this point
 - Alan Redfield there were four in the room that weren't very good at technology, but there were a lot of Veterinarians changing over with some more willing than others to make that change. He questioned whether the mobile app the DOL used was good enough for the CVI, because some Vets had been struggling with it
- Because of the trend of less and less Federal money coming to Wildlife Services, Mr. Honeycutt felt that the DOL would need to continue to grow the amount of funding provided to Wildlife Services for predator control
 - Mr. Honeycutt expressed concern about retention of "tools in the toolbox" for predator control, referring to the Fed's taking of the use of M44s on BLM lands. Those were used in coyote control in Montana. He said that Montana was one of four states left that continued to register use of sodium cyanide with the EPA and that Wildlife Services were the only people who could utilize M44s. The burden of registering M44 use may eventually be on the DOL, Mr. Honeycutt said, as predators were a major issue for producers and the DOL may need to be more aggressive in trying to maintain the tools left to deal with that problem
 - To maintain the same level of service to producers regarding predator control in the future, Mr. Honeycutt said there would be more of the DOL pot of funds given to help Wildlife Services do and complete their mission
- Alan Redfield stressed the importance of educating the public regarding the producer needs and practices because there were less and less people knowing what and how they do things and what the standard was

- Even in predator control, Mr. Redfield said that people should be educated on why a predator program was needed and to help them understand that putting flaggers up doesn't function as a total deterrent for grizzly bears
- Greg Wichman praised the FWP donation for wolf funds which he said had gone up every year and hundreds were realizing what the wolf was doing, adding that the general public wanted to go out and see the wildlife and it was no longer there because the wolf had eaten or dispersed it. He said that public donation was the direction we needed to go with this
- Mr. Redfield said that when you go to meetings and they talk about bison or anything or Brucellosis, the standard statement was, it makes cows abort and they never talk about the human health side of it. He said the reason we haze bison was because of the human health side of it
- An MIT student working on her doctorate came to the Redfield Ranch and Mr. Redfield said she had never been on a ranch and he took her through feeding, etc. and he was able to share with her about the human health side of Brucellosis, and gave her a copy of a range management report done by Hal Hunter and others. When she called Yellowstone Park to ask about their soil and plant health, Mr. Redfield said that they refused to talk to her
- Nina Baucus suggested that the Mayo Clinic discussion about Brucellosis and the human health issues it could cause, such as heart issues, could be part of what was shared with groups when explaining the DOL's handling of bison
- Mike Honeycutt agreed, adding that, why was there an effort to eradicate Brucellosis from the continent in the first place? He said that when people say there had been no Brucellosis transmissions that was because the last 100 years had been spent in time, money and effort keeping infected animals from being in the same spot at the same time
- Alan Redfield said the DOL website should include an educational piece listing talking points and some background info regarding each area of the DOL
- Mr. Honeycutt expressed concern about an article he had read in the last two weeks where it was announced that some NGO groups received \$5 million in grants from USDA to work on predator mitigation, non-lethal mitigation. He said that the State's LLB only received \$300,000 a year and that could mean that the LLB would not have as much impact or as much connection as we'd like because of the lack of funding
 - Mr. Honeycutt said that whether it was virtual fencing projects or paying people to maybe, stock less to provide more habitat for wildlife, the DOL was going to have to step up their game otherwise the ones with the most funds would be the ones controlling messaging of what people outside of our industry thought about our industry
- Mr. Redfield said he thought that Brucellosis mitigation was good to help somebody who had an infection get through a period of time when they were losing their income

NEW/BUSINESS/EXECUTIVE OFFICER UPDATES

(1:27:21) 9:27 AM

(1:27:24) 9:27 AM – HUMAN RESOURCES UPDATES

Mike Spatz, Human Resource Officer for the DOL, introduced himself saying that what he had prepared for the BOL was pretty brief

(1:27:39) 9:28 AM – Staff Openings, Recruitment and General Updates

Mike Spatz updated the BOL on staff openings, recruitment and some general updates in the DOL:

- Mr. Spatz reported that there were currently 11 active positions that the DOL was recruiting for, a number down from the previous month
- There had been an uptick in applications for recruitment according to Mr. Spatz, and with the holidays past us, that was expected
- Mr. Spatz said that there had been five new hires since the last BOL meeting and two vacated positions that were due to internal transfers
- The Attorney position had been reposted with first review of the applicants set to take place that day. He added that the submitted applications looked promising. Mike Honeycutt said that he hoped to do some interviews the following week
- Regarding the Assistant State Veterinarian position, Mr. Spatz said there had been an in-person interview held for that position with staff being able to talk to the applicant and see them work in the field
- Mike Spatz said that the Brands team had set up interviews for some open Investigator positions. He said that the Investigator positions were some of the most popular ones to apply for in the DOL

(1:30:24) 9:31 AM – End-of-Year Performance Evaluations

Mike Spatz reported that the year-end performance evaluations were taking place:

- Mr. Spatz reported that completion rate by employees of their evaluations was 98% as of that morning, which he said was a very good percentage
- In the process, Mr. Spatz explained that the employee filled out their own evaluation, submitted it to their Supervisor, who then provides feedback back to the employee and that was followed by a meeting to discuss or answer any questions regarding the evaluation
- Mike Honeycutt said that with a Market Inspector, the employee would be evaluated by that Market Inspector. The Market Inspector in turn was evaluated by Ty Thomas and Ty Thomas was evaluated by Jay and Jay was evaluated by Mike Honeycutt and then Mike Honeycutt was evaluated by the BOL
- The online system for evaluations that was provided by the Department of Administration, according to Mr. Spatz, was set to shut down for these evaluations on January 31, 2024
- Mr. Spatz said that even with changes in Managers, those Managers should be communicating and sharing Management Notes that the new Managers can

view. He said though, that he can see the entire evaluation and that he wouldn't share the personal information that was on file

- Mike Honeycutt said that each week he had an hour-long meeting with each of his direct reports. He said that in his interview with the BOL last year, their comments were not a surprise to him because he also communicated with them

(1:43:12) 9:44 AM YELLOWSTONE BISON EIS UPDATE/IBMP OPERATIONS UPDATE

Mike Honeycutt updated the BOL on the Yellowstone Bison EIS and the IBMP Operations Plan:

- Mr. Honeycutt said that no Record of Decision had yet been released, and he didn't really expect one to be released in the near future
 - The Park Service, Mr. Honeycutt said, had all the information from the people who made public comment and with the comment period over on the EIS, he said the DOL was waiting for Yellowstone to come back with the decision of, this is the alternative or parts of the alternatives that were chosen with regard to future bison management in the Park
- Regarding the Winter Operations Plan, Mr. Honeycutt said that one had not been signed since 2018 or 2019 because all partners had to be in agreement. There were some disagreements between two partners for the Plan proposed for this year that led to again not getting a signed Operations Plan
- The disagreement was over hunt/trap coordination, with one partner wanting to see the trap at Stephens Creek not operated until bison had a chance to get by it. The other group said, no, especially with the weather conditions that had played out and that if there was an opportunity to trap bison that needed to happen
- Mr. Honeycutt said that even with no Winter Operations Plan in place, the DOL continued to operate, carrying out what the laws in Montana said needed to be done regardless of what IBMP said. As an example, Mr. Honeycutt said that if buffalo were found outside of the Zone 2 Tolerance Area, they would be removed by hazing or whatever was appropriate for the case
- The winter season had been very, very mild so far, Mr. Honeycutt said, much different than last year and there had been nothing to really push the bison to migrate, meaning only a little bit of hunting on the West side of the Park by West Yellowstone. He said there had not been much happening on the Gardiner side of the Park either
- Dr. Tahnee Szymanski said that the only side of the Park that hunting had occurred, at this point in time, was on the West side with about a half dozen animals having been taken. She reported that a single female had come up to the Gardiner Basin on the North side of the Park, but she had not exited the Park yet. Weekly hunt calls, however, had begun the previous week

(1:47:26) 9:48 AM PREPARATION FOR EO ANNUAL REVIEW

Mike Honeycutt announced that he had put this particular item on the agenda for the Chair, reminding him of his commitment at the last meeting to get information documents out to the BOL for the annual Executive Officer Evaluation:

- Mr. Honeycutt said that the evaluation should be something that would take place at the next BOL meeting and could have probably been done at this meeting, but the Chairman was not expected to be attending this meeting in person
- Gene Curry said he hadn't been where he had good internet service or a good computer and so he would get information out to the BOL this weekend

(1:48:58) 9:50 AM DISCUSS LONG-RANGE GOAL SETTING

Mike Honeycutt said that the Long Range Goal Setting had already been addressed earlier in the meeting during the Old Business segment

(1:49:07) 9:50 AM UPDATE ON BLM ACTIVITIES AND PROCESSES (SAGE GROUSE AND GRAZING RULE)

Mike Honeycutt updated the BOL on some of the Bureau of Land Management activities that the DOL was a cooperating agency on:

- Mike Honeycutt said that with Jay Bodner's 20 years of working on sage grouse issues, he had included him on BLM emails regarding sage grouse
- Mr. Honeycutt reported that there was some concern by some of the cooperators about the BLM taking a range-wide rather than a state-level planning approach to the sage grouse issue, as the sage grouse situation in northern Nevada or Arizona was very different than central Montana
- With the increase in numbers of sage grouse and their habitat in the state, Mr. Honeycutt said he felt that the Montana state plan had worked, so, he wanted the BLM to leave Montana alone regarding the sage grouse issue
- Mr. Honeycutt said that even though no final decision had been made, he suspected that at some point we would see some sort of EIS, based on all the feedback the BLM received from cooperators regarding some sort of alternatives regarding sage grouse
 - With the information FWP presented to the BLM along with the DOL's comments, Mr. Honeycutt said he was a little more positive that information would challenge the BLM, and show them that there were certain areas of the West that weren't experiencing a sage grouse problem and that you couldn't paint all states with the same broad brush strokes
- Mr. Honeycutt reported that the grazing rule had been suspended and the BLM was moving forward with looking at changes that they could make through policy that wouldn't be public rulemaking, and those changes could happen effective immediately with no public comment whatsoever
- Regarding grazing, Mr. Honeycutt said that a call had been received that was focused on drought management and rolling out a new drought monitoring tool in BLM field offices that would be able to drill down to individual BLM allotments across the United States and find what types of drought decisions had been made and how it had been stocked
- Mike Honeycutt explained that, regarding protection of sage grouse from predators, the conversation that had come into play was how many more sage grouse do we need to have to make sure to account for the fact that there would be loss because of take by other species. He added that some cooperators had

put forward that the drop in the population of sage grouse had not been because of grazing

- Federal partners, Mr. Honeycutt thought, were feeling the pressure to get things moving and wrapped up before the Presidential election

(1:58:41) 9:59 AM NORTH AMERICAN WOLVERINE LISTING DESIGNATION CONVERSATION

Mike Honeycutt said that the listing designation for the North American Wolverine topic was not a BLM issue, but for the awareness of the BOL, he wanted to bring it forward:

- Mr. Honeycutt said that in the last week he had written a draft comment that went across to the Governor's legal team who were still reviewing it. The comment came because of a request from FWP that the DOL comment specifically to the fact that the listing designation for the North American Wolverine did not include an exemption for grazing. This was referring to the initial rule being put out for the US Fish & Wildlife Service
- There was not a lot of conflict between wolverines and livestock, only two documented cases in the last 10 years that were listed in the Federal Register and the breeding habitat did not really overlap with grazing, Mr. Honeycutt said, and so listing an exemption for grazing should be part of the listing designation
- Nina Baucus shared about the loss of forest allotments for the Sheep Experiment Station because of grizzly bears. Mike Honeycutt said that the Experiment Station had been placed into an endangered species polygon where the managers wanted to close it down because of the conflict the sheep were causing with the bears. They wanted the domestic sheep removed because if not, they might have to do something with the bears

(2:03:27) 10:04 AM LEGISLATIVE INTERIM ACTIVITIES UPDATE

Mike Honeycutt gave an update of the Legislative Interim Activities:

- Mr. Honeycutt reported that the DOL, just the week before, had attended a meeting of the Economic Affairs Interim Committee, the Interim Committee that had oversight over the Departments of Livestock, Agriculture, Commerce, Transportation and several other Departments during the interim and was chaired by Representative Josh Kassmier
- Along with a Legislative Analyst who had done some work on agricultural production in Montana and who presented some mostly USDA-NASS numbers, Mr. Honeycutt said that he and some representatives from the Department of Ag came and spoke specifically to things happening in Montana
- Mr. Honeycutt said he presented brand inspection numbers going back to 1984, reporting that there was a slight decline in those numbers that he thought correlated to a slightly downward trend line in the number of cattle. He reported to them that the dips in the wave came the years following things like a drought and indicated a lot of livestock leaving the state, such as in 1984 and 1989 and that even though the numbers slowly crawled back, the trend line was declining
- Meat processing numbers were something the Committee was very interested in and were pleased to see processing numbers rising, Mr. Honeycutt said, as

Representative Brandon Ler and Senator Ken Bogner were people who ran bills during the 2021 Session on meat

- Dairy industry numbers over the last 8 years were also presented, Mr. Honeycutt said, which had gone from 61 dairies in the state down to 36 and pounds of milk production each month was down about 30%

(2:07:20) 10:08 AM AWARENESS OF UPCOMING NEEDS REGARDING RULES, LEGISLATION AND BUDGETING FOR 2025 SESSION

Mike Honeycutt reminded the BOL that the next Legislative Session was just 12 months away, beginning on January 6, 2025, and that this spring, any Legislative changes the DOL wanted to make would be coming before the BOL for review and approval:

- Mr. Honeycutt said that there was still a backlog of items left on the Red Tape Review from the last Legislative Session that staff was currently working on that might need attention, but, he welcomed any of the BOL's ideas on laws that should be changed
- Although the Legislative calendar had not yet been received, Mr. Honeycutt alerted the BOL that there would be deadlines coming up to submit items to the Office of Budget and Program Planning (OBPP) and staff would be busy during the months of March, April and May preparing items for the BOL's approval before submission to OBPP. Mr. Honeycutt said that the Governor's deadline was at the beginning of December to submit his budget to the Legislature and so the DOL's deadline to get our budget information to OBPP for evaluation was usually sometime in August
 - There was not a long window to make a decision on milk inspection fees, Mr. Honeycutt said, because of those being part of the budget that goes to OBPP. He said that at the Board of Milk Control meeting held the day before, he had presented to them several options that could be taken in regard to those, that might even include making a fund switch to general fund
 - Mr. Honeycutt explained that if there was a fund switch to general fund for milk inspection fees, the producer would no longer pay a milk inspection fee. It would be paid for by State general taxpayer dollars. He further explained that if the fund switch was not listed in the OBPP budget and was still funded by State Special Revenue and then the industry decided to make a case to the Legislature to switch funding to general fund, he could not support that switch because he had to support what the Governor's budget requested
 - Lily Andersen said that the industry wanted to see numbers from the DOL and would not come up with anything without some sort of generic numbers in front of them
- Mr. Honeycutt reminded the BOL again that rulemaking was on a deadline this year and that if rules were not adopted by September, they would be put on hold until 2025, except in the case of some sort of temporary rule needed because of a natural disaster or something

(2:21:07) 10:22 AM RECESS

(2:21:11) 10:35 AM RECONVENE

Gene Curry called the meeting back to order

CENTRALIZED SERVICES DIVISION REPORTS

(2:21:07) 10:35 AM

Gene Curry requested that Brian introduce himself, for the record

Brian Simonson, Deputy Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer for the DOL, introduced himself

(2:21:40) 10:36 AM – FISCAL BUREAU

(2:21:40) 10:36 AM Aerial Hunting Permits

Brian Simonson reported that the Public Announcement for Aerial Hunting Permits went out each January and he was presenting it here to provide another opportunity to get it out in case there were any aerial hunters so they could spread the word:

- Mr. Simonson said that aerial hunting permits were an annual \$50 cost and also required a twice-a-year hunting harvest report for coyotes and fox, one of which was due in January. He added that reminders were sent out, requesting those hunter harvest reports
- There were about 30 aerial hunters on file from last year, and Brian Simonson reported that a couple new ones had come in

(2:23:46) 10:38 AM December 31, 2023 State Special Revenue Report

Brian Simonson reported that it was reassuring at this halfway mark of the year that in his six years of being at the DOL, numbers were still looking similar and coming in as expected:

- Mr. Simonson reported that New Brands and Transfers were ahead of last year's numbers by \$34,652 due to another year in that 10-year revenue cycle, and that number would grow every year until the next rerecord where it would start all over again
- Security, Interest, Lien and Fees was down \$20,910 because that was the first year of a five-year cycle, and so that first year of that cycle usually tracked lower
 - Mike Honeycutt said that for some reason the lien filings, which were every five years, started on an eight, meaning the last one was in 2018 and then 2023 was a lien renewal year. An anomaly in State law meant that lien holders could leave liens on for five years, even though lien holders were supposed to remove liens as soon as the lien was satisfied
- The Field and Market Inspection Fees, Mr. Simonson said, were down, tracking with what Jay Bodner had reported to him that the markets were down about 5.5%

- Investment Earnings were listed at \$114,251 better than last year, with Evan Waters reported that for December last year, Investment Earnings were making 4% and this year were making 5.4%
- Per Capita Fee numbers, the \$35,000, were pretty normal looking, Mr. Simonson said, but would take off in the next months, especially with a good chunk of early electronic filers coming in already. Mike Honeycutt also mentioned that some money was being returned to the DOL because of some people who had filed a per capita report and had not paid. When their tax rebate check came in, the unpaid money was taken from it by the Department of Revenue and paid to the DOL
- Mike Honeycutt shared that there had been several calls into the DOL regarding the electronic per capita paying system that the Department of Revenue had put in place and that those people were directed to the DOR for help
- Mr. Honeycutt said he wondered what effect the Legislative change that per capita reporting and payment occurred at the same time would have, even though, before that change, most people did pay when they reported rather than waiting until May
- Indirect Cost Recovery rate from last year to this year went down a few percentage points, which accounted for the negative number in the report, Mr. Simonson said
- Mr. Simonson said that both Milk Inspection Fees and Egg Grading numbers were tracking as expected
 - The assessment fees listed in Eggs was almost 100% paid by Wilcox at Montana Egg Products and not the producers, because Wilcox was the one marketing the eggs and the DOL was doing the USDA Shield Grading, Mr. Honeycutt explained
 - The assessment fee rate was set by USDA, Mr. Honeycutt said, and the DOL collected more money than was spent, but was not supposed to spend fees except for the purpose for which they were collected
 - Brian Simonson said the cash balance for that fee account could possibly be used in the future for more Egg Graders if Wilcox decided to operate 24 hours/7 days a week because right now, there were only 2 people working 12-hour shifts at the plant
- November 2023 was a good month at the Lab, Mr. Simonson said, and they were tracking \$36,477 better than this time last year

(2:37:31) 10:51 AM January 2024 Through June 2024 Budget Projections Report

Brian Simonson reported that with the exception of Overtime, there was positive movement across the board in Budget Projections for Fiscal Year 2024

- Mr. Simonson explained that the Overtime of \$37,000 in December was dominated by Brands operational tempo, which drove that negative \$33,044 projection. He added that even though the Brands operational tempo was up the total projections for Personal Services was still in the positive by about \$40,000
- There was nearly a \$320,000 positive projection for the end of the year for the whole DOL

- In Contracts, Mr. Simonson said there was excess authority there of \$185,000, coming especially from the Egg Plant and also in CSD and Brands
- The Supplies number was dominated by the VDL and was less than this time last year
- Communications was listed as a positive number, Mr. Simonson said, and that was probably due to timing and that number may come down. He said that a big chunk of the Communication money was tied to ITSD
- The Rent number was a negative figure, Mr. Simonson said, because Meat & Poultry Inspection received a supplement from the Feds that was used in Operation Expenses, putting nearly \$80,000 into Rent
- Total Expenditures were projected to be \$470,000 to the good, which was an improvement of \$65,000 from the month of November
- The number listed under Budgeted Funds for the DSA general fund was positive, with less testing being projected
- The \$300,000 listed under Per Capita Fee was predominantly in CSD and Brands
- The \$246,802 negative number listed under the Diagnostic Laboratory Fees was where all the over-budget expenses went. The \$1.57 million for the Fiscal Year 2024 Budget in the Diagnostic Laboratory Fees was what was projected to be taken in revenue, and if that revenue does materialize, the VDL should be tracking pretty well, Mr. Simonson said
- Gene Curry questioned if the VDL generated more revenue itself, would that affect the DOL's ability to ask for general fund monies, Brian Simonson explained that general fund would be increased based on present law adjustments in general fund, per capita fees and lab fees. He added that we're not there yet, but at some point, the VDL would generate enough funds in lab fees that the money could be put into a capital replacement plan and slush fund
- In the VDL, Brian Simson said that in the next budget cycle what probably would be done is to get that \$1.3 million up to \$1.5 million because that was what was being spent on predominantly Supplies and Operations
- Mike Honeycutt explained that there were certain tests offered at the VDL for the benefit of the livestock industry, requiring that a rate be charged for each test, similar to competitors' rates. Those competitor's rates may not be enough to cover the cost of conducting the test at the VDL, but to avoid losing business to another lab those rates are charged to the producer and most of the slack was picked up by another funding source. Excess costs of tests run because of a public health concern might be covered by general fund or per capita might be utilized to fill in the gap for tests run that were economically important to the livestock industry
 - Mr. Honeycutt said that general funds paid for the operation of the Milk Lab because of public health concerns

(2:52:12) 11:06 AM December 31, 2023 Budget Comparison Report

Brian Simonson reported that he was predominantly going to address the year-to-year comparison in this report:

- Personal Services were listed as \$485,000 over this time last year in expenditures so far, Mr. Simonson said, mostly because the budget increased, coming out of the last Session by \$1 million, and we were halfway through the year. He added that there were also two FTEs that were being paid for in Milk and Poultry Inspection that were not there last time because they were vacant. Also in Meat & Poultry, Mr. Simonson said that there were rampant vacancies last year, but that was not the case this year with an increased operational tempo in the Brands area of the DOL
- Mike Honeycutt explained that the \$1.50 or 4%, whatever was greater, salary increase that would be coming at the middle of this year, was already in the budget and accounted for
- Mr. Honeycutt said that 45% of the Personnel budget was expended with 46% of the payroll complete. Brian Simonson said that Operations was 1% greater than the budget year, but the first half of the year is when we catch up to that number and as we move through the second half of the year, we go past it
- Contracts were listed as \$42,000 better than at this time last year, Mr. Simonson said, and there was an insurance premium holiday that amounted to somewhere in the \$50,000 range and that was probably why that money was not spent
- Mr. Simonson reported that Supplies were \$32,000 better than this time last year, and that was because the VDL had not been spending as much in supplies this year
- Communications were \$32,000 more than last year, an inflationary figure, Mr. Simonson explained, predominantly tied to State ITSD
- There was \$31,892 less spent in Rent this year than last year because HB2 money had been transferred into the supplemental received from the State. Mr. Simonson said that Rent costs were still rising, especially with more vehicles and vehicle costs on the road
- There was \$23,000 more in Repair/Maintenance expenses and that was at the VDL
- Meat & Poultry had \$37,000 more in Other Expenses this year than last year
- Mr. Simonson explained that the next section of numbers showing \$275,000 was new expenses that were skewing total figure numbers. He said that some of those new expenses were one-time-only, but said that LLB's \$150,000 was new
- Mr. Simonson said that the Indemnity Fund was brand new with \$10,000 approved through the Legislature for paying producers for indemnification
- Mike Honeycutt explained that the \$1 million in NAHLN money that the VDL was given three years to spend, had not shown up in the budget as of yet. Evan Waters said it had not been reflected in the BOL report and that he would be putting in a BCD for the incinerator very soon and that would be showing in the BOL report
- Mr. Honeycutt reported that APHIS had told the DOL to expect a "haircut" in the Federal umbrella funding for the next Federal Fiscal Year, but had not heard what the final amount would be as of yet
 - Evan Waters had noticed some subtle language changes regarding funding saying, funding up to 50%, which Mr. Honeycutt said might mean they would be leaving room to fund less than 50%. Mr. Honeycutt said if

they don't pay that full 50%, the DOL did not have the appropriate authority to make up the difference

(3:10:18) 11:25 AM Update on Current Status of Milk Inspection Fee Conversations

Brian Simonson said that Mike Honeycutt had added the Milk Inspection Fee piece to the agenda, and since there had already been a discussion about it, he wasn't sure where the BOL wanted to go with the conversation:

- Lily Andersen said that there had to be some numbers to share with the industry so they could come to the table with some ideas
- Krista Lee Evans, Ms. Andersen said, had asked for the cost of the State and wanted to know where the funding sources were coming from now and when the shortfall would occur
- Brian Simonson said the packet containing the budget and talked about each month talks about the revenue that was expected to be brought in for the year and the expenditures, in pretty detailed categories, that was expected for the year
- Gene Curry wondered if those numbers could be brought together on a sheet or two because finding the right numbers from the BOL budget packet might be harder to find for some. Lily Andersen said that maybe add in even more detail, of time spent with each processor and dairy
- Brian Simonson said that Ms. Andersen's request was not a budget question as operational time spent per establishment might be difficult. Mike Honeycutt said that might be something Alicia Love would have, but wasn't sure how much that would be detailed. William Kleinsasser said he sensed some hesitancy to provide the information
- Mike Honeycutt said there was a minimum number of times per year that Inspectors were to be at those establishments, but perhaps Ms. Andersen was looking for additional follow-up visits and whether or not they were equal across the board. Mr. Honeycutt said it was hard to pay for a regulatory program by paying "per visit," because new businesses coming online take more time to get started and charging per visit might deter the industry and it still left a problem not solved
- Ms. Andersen said she didn't feel the numbers requested needed to be that detailed but without some information, she didn't foresee the industry coming to the table
- Mr. Honeycutt said that the report for the entire Milk & Egg group that Mr. Simonson puts together was reflective of authority, not cash coming in the door. He said the numbers could be gathered pretty simply, but putting that information together to a group without context could be a waste of time because there were certain things in the budget outside of the DOL's control, like the State raises given or the cost of vehicles to drive. He said that 75% of the budget was the number of people hired and only 25% of the budget was Operational Expenses that the DOL could dig into
- Gene Curry said to get the information put into an easier form for the industry, give it to them and see where it would go

Nina Baucus asked if the cost information for Starlink use in some of the Livestock Markets had been done

- Brian Simonson said he thought the cost was \$130/month with a \$500 or \$600 investment fee, but he thought the costs were shared with the market itself. He said that the markets weren't doing anything that required some kind of exceptional bandwidth beyond what they got from cable
- Gene Curry said that in the Brands Update, there was an agenda item referencing the GlideFast/ServiceNow and he thought that would probably be the best place to get answers on how each market was able to do business and stay with the speed of commerce

(3:28:07) 11:42 AM PREDATOR CONTROL

Update on Activities of USDA Wildlife Services – (Presented by Dalin Tidwell, Montana State Director)

Dalin Tidwell, State Director for USDA Wildlife Services introduced himself and gave an update of their activities:

- Mr. Tidwell said that they were coming off their slow end of the season after hunting season and the Fall shipping season, giving them time to update helicopters and make any major improvements set up for the new flying season
 - They had been starting to fly most every good day, Mr. Tidwell said, as they were getting calls pretty consistently now
- The DOL helicopter, 6926 Charlie, was about 230 hours out for a complete engine overhaul, but, Mr. Tidwell said the spare engine they had was overhauled and ready to be switched out when that time came, something that should just take about a week of down time because of the switch out and coinciding with a 300-hour inspection. He said that then, that engine they removed from 6926 Charlie would be overhauled, but not for a while
 - Mr. Tidwell said that all the other machines were probably 400-450 hours out from needing anything major done to them
 - Mr. Tidwell complimented the maintenance staff at Stapleton Aviation out of Lewistown, who had been doing the helicopter work
- Luke Peebles would be transferred to a part-time seasonal job in the Chouteau/Teton County area and Logan Sinclair would be taking Mr. Peebles' old position in the Harlowton/Golden Valley/Wheatland area as a full-time employee starting in the February 11, 2024 pay period
 - Mr. Tidwell said that Luke Peebles requested to move to the part-time, seasonal position for his personal schedule and life. Mr. Peebles, Mr. Tidwell said, was a great hand and they did not want to lose his expertise
- Blaine County, Mr. Tidwell said, was right on the level of their cattle petition having enough signatures. He said they decided to go with the \$2 cattle petition expecting their own Specialist and Trapper
 - Mr. Tidwell said getting that petition through would be good because there needed to be a lot more work done along the Hi-Line. He added that the petition would be managed through the Montana Stockgrowers Association

- Mr. Tidwell said they were expecting the Federal budget to remain at the 2023 level plus having to absorb a 5% pay increase across the board. He said that the IT support and computer systems were paid directly from their State budget
- Interviews for John Steuber's job were held this week, Mr. Tidwell reported. He said he wasn't sure if John would know what to do with himself in retirement
- Mr. Tidwell said that negative 10 below zero was the temperature limit at which Wildlife Services would not fly, due to human safety concerns. He said that they did carry safety kits with them when they did fly
- The US Fish & Wildlife, Mr. Tidwell said, had established the recovery zones of grizzly bears and known areas of grizzly bears and could be found through their IPAC system. He said that Wildlife Services did align themselves with that, even with the use of M44s, as the IPAC system was able to determine if they were at risk. Mr. Tidwell said though, that there were some outliers at times and they were aware of that and used the correct tools regardless of what the map said

(3:45:33) 12:00 PM LLB PREDATION CLAIMS REPORT AND GENERAL UPDATES

Mike Honeycutt said that it had been a slow month for the Livestock Loss Board claims, but that George Edwards was still processing claims from last year:

- Claims for 2023 were down, according to George Edwards' report, but he had not found an explanation for that yet
- Mr. Honeycutt said that the LLB was revising their prevention grant form and the target for that to go out was April 1, 2024, followed by a summer meeting for LLB to make decisions and distribute those grants
 - George Edwards reported that there was more than adequate grant money this go-round, adding that if anybody had a larger project, this would be the time to apply, but to wait until the new grant form went out
 - The cutoff date for submitting grant forms, Mr. Edwards said, was May 31, 2024 and tentatively, he said there would be a board meeting held in Choteau or Conrad where they would announce the recipients of the grant monies
- Gene Curry said they had seen very few grizzlies or black bears in the same range pasture as last year and he wondered if they had moved more towards Valier. George Edwards said they were out of Augusta as well

(3:49:58) 12:04 PM LUNCH

(3:50:04) 12:59 PM RECONVENE

BRANDS ENFORCEMENT DIVISION

(3:50:10) 12:59 PM

Gene Curry announced that they were going to change the itinerary, moving the Padlock Ranch agenda item to the front

(3:50:45) 12:59 PM – PADLOCK RANCH (Board Member Agenda Item)

Gene Curry requested that, for the record, the two Padlock Ranch representatives introduce themselves:

- Trey Patterson, CEO of Padlock Ranch Company introduced himself and JD Hill, Livestock Manager for Padlock Ranch introduced himself
- Mr. Patterson said that the Padlock Ranch was headquartered near Dayton, Wyoming, which was northwest of Sheridan, but most of their cow/calf country was in Big Horn County in Montana. He said that three units of their ranch were on the Crow Indian Reservation. Above and beyond reported death loss of cattle, Mr. Patterson reported that they had written off, in the last 10 years, 988 cows and 99 bulls. In 2021 alone, he said they wrote off 179 cows and this year were missing over 200 cows and about 50 bulls
- There was electronic identification records kept on their cows, Mr. Patterson said and they used EID tags and also hot-iron brands
- Mr. Patterson said that DOL District Investigator Matt Noyes had been doing his due diligence in helping them with the situation and he continued to work on it, chasing leads, but so far, was not able to find any missing cows
- Some of the other larger ranches in the region, Mr. Patterson said, communicated that they also had issues, but he was not willing to speak for them
- Mr. Hill shared that one of their cows had shown up at the Miles City sale barn, consigned by a Northern Cheyenne person, packing the Padlock Brand and ear tags. Checking their electronic records, Mr. Hill said that eight years previous when they had pregged her and turned her, she was in a management group next to the Northern Cheyenne line and then had never showed back up
 - Dealing with the FBI first, Mr. Hill said that they said it wasn't their problem and that Padlock would have to go through the Northern Cheyenne. Mr. Hill said that when he got through to the Northern Cheyenne Investigative Services, the gentleman there told him that they did not want to deal with the issue and Padlock would need to talk to the Northern Cheyenne Police Department. Mr. Hill said in speaking with them, Padlock was basically told they were not willing to investigate or prosecute this and to talk to their Legislators
- Mr. Hill said he hoped the DOL would be willing to support Padlock and put more of an effort into trying to get more collaboration and cooperation between County law enforcement, the DOL and the sovereign nations
- Gene Curry said that in their dealings with running cows on the Blackfeet Reservation they had some loss as well. But, he said the Blackfeet required an inspection to come onto their reservation and then an inspection to come off their reservation. There was a District Investigator in that area, but there were a lot of Local Inspectors who were Tribal members. He said one Local Inspector who was getting older, could tell you just about any cow's location
- Although the Padlock Ranch used EID, Mr. Hill said, it was found out that with traceability, unless there was a disease detected in those carcasses, the slaughter house they utilized, were just discarding those tags

- Jay Bodner said that Montana had pretty good relationships with adjoining states that had brand laws and most likely, that would be a direction to move with neighboring states
- Mike Honeycutt said that if it was an organized operation, the EID tags wouldn't make it to a feedlot or processor and perhaps some of those feedlots and processors were part of the scheme. He wondered if there was a way to share brand and tag information with USDA in other states that if a cow with those came through a slaughter plant for them to call the DOL immediately.
- Mr. Patterson asked if there was any way to get more law enforcement focus on their area because of the losses. He said Matt Noyes was spread pretty thin because of the large area he would have to cover and had given him full access to the ranch to look around
- Gene Curry shared that a year ago, after a substantial loss in one of their pastures, they employed another Range Rider and had much less loss this year
- There were quite a few different tire treads on their ranch, but those were hard to identify because there were quite a few people out hunting and driving around the ranch
- Mr. Honeycutt shared that the DOL had been down the road before of entering into conversations with the Northern Cheyenne about a Tribal MOU because of some issues with Local Inspectors. The MOU never came to be because of the differences in what the DOL thought it should read versus what they thought it should read. He said there were conversations with the Crow Chairman about cooperation within their jurisdiction but it never got to the final step of an MOU.
 - Mr. Honeycutt said without Tribal cooperation, the DOL did not have ability for jurisdiction on the reservation. Gene Curry said that you could talk to a Legislator, but the Montana Legislature didn't have a lot of authority either in the situation
- Mr. Patterson said that they were willing to put up a cash reward for a tip that led to prosecution to find out where the cattle were going. Mr. Honeycutt said that the BOL was considered the Livestock Crime Stoppers Board after a decision made during the last Legislative Session and there was power of provision within that State law to establish an award. The BOL could make that decision and it would be posted on the DOL website and widely communicated to other states
 - Dr. Tahnee Szymanski said that if Animal Health had access to the list of missing tags they could run them through their systems to see if anything could be found on them. She said that she could see if she could work with her counterpart in Wyoming, Dr. Hallie Hasel on traceability and biosecurity
- Gene Curry said that the details about a cash reward would have to be worked on, but that maybe there would be something that could be discussed at the next BOL meeting

**(4:38:10) 1:47 PM REQUEST FOR HIRE – Livestock Market Auditor/Dealer
Licensing Position**

Jay Bodner said that he was requesting to hire the Livestock Market Auditor/Dealer Licensing position because an internal move in the DOL:

- Mr. Bodner said that the person in this position conducted on-site market audits, renewed market and dealer licenses and was the primary point of contact for any of the markets or dealers when they had those kinds of questions
- Mr. Bodner said that he tried really hard to keep the previous person in that position, but that she moved into the Milk Control area of the DOL. He said she had done a fabulous job for them

MOTION/VOTE

(4:39:02) 1:48 PM

Alan Redfield moved to authorize Jay Bodner to fill the Dealer Licensing position in the Brands Enforcement Division. Lily Andersen seconded. The motion passed.

(4:39:21) 1:49 PM BRANDS ENFORCEMENT UPDATE

Jay Bodner said he was going to give the BOL a few updates on some of the top issues in the Brands Enforcement Division:

(4:39:29) 1:49 PM GlideFast/ServiceNow

Jay Bodner reported on some changes that had occurred with ServiceNow and the GlideFast project:

- Mr. Bodner said that ServiceNow was in a production freeze from January 4th through January 20th, explaining that ServiceNow was going to do a new version 2x/year, in January and July, and that they would assure that State IT got the new version. There would be a two-week testing period to assure that there were no impacts to the Service Now program
 - Mr. Bodner said that they contacted the markets and District Investigators to let them know that the new version would be here and to be watching to see if there were any impacts to our program. He said that there were no major problems with the new version, but a couple simple issues at the markets, one with an extra button that appeared and one where a button had disappeared and so, State IT was still working with them on those issues
 - Mr. Bodner said there had been a problem with liens not showing up on the platform and thought the fix would be happening on January 20th, but it did not. Now, Brands was working with the DOL IT in ServiceNow to make sure that was the first thing on the list to get upgraded input into the system. He said there were four or five other smaller fixes as well and all would go in to be fixed tomorrow morning
- Fiber optic installation had been completed in Glendive and Glasgow, Mr. Bodner said, and a number of new routers and a couple of laptops had been sent to different markets as well. The Ramsay market, Mr. Bodner said, was on the borderline of being able to meet the market demands with the internet they had

now, but it would be one of the markets that would probably need attention the quickest if there was an alternative for them to get faster speed

- Some of the markets varied from day to day on their speed, Mr. Bodner said, and it was hard to pinpoint why that was happening because it was not consistent. He said, the question was, is it an internet issue or a ServiceNow issue
- Regarding the Miles City Market, Mr. Bodner said he hadn't received any complaints, but that he had tried to reach out to the owner of the commission company in early December, leaving a message. Staff talked to the Supervisor there regularly and there had been no issues that they raised with him, Jay Bodner said
- Mr. Bodner said that he had revisited with GlideFast about offline capabilities but that there would need to be quite a bit of work done for the system still to put offline capabilities into place
 - Mike Honeycutt said it would be an advantage once the offline capability was built because on the slow internet days, someone could work offline until the internet sped up. Mr. Bodner said with it being a cloud-based system, downloading it was pretty significant and pulling brand information from the cloud to populate the fields was sometimes difficult
- Mr. Bodner said that they would like to put the information into lifetime horse cards and have a seamless transfer of that information to State Print and Mail who were the ones who put the cards together

(4:55:23) 2:05 PM Google AI

Jay Bodner updated the BOL on the Google AI project, which allowed scanned, handwritten inspection to be input into ServiceNow:

- Mr. Bodner said that they had been meeting daily with some Department of Administration folks, Google, the Brands Team, our IT team and State IT, who moved in and out of those meetings, to see how the project was progressing
- The Brands team, Mr. Bodner said, had been testing 150 documents from three different years of forms to see if the system would pick them up. The Brands team was tracking issues in a spreadsheet that was shared with the Google folks. Google had just changed to a new application, with no additional cost to the DOL, but that would probably extend the implementation time of the project
- Mr. Bodner assured the BOL that they continue to input inspections into ServiceNow and even though they were still in the development phase of the project, it hasn't slowed down their day-to-day and that they were still getting their job done in compliance, as well
- There had been a little bit of trouble, Mr. Bodner said, with ServiceNow pulling the information out of Google and putting it into ServiceNow, and so the ServiceNow folks were working on that, too, and that had caused a bit of a delay

(4:59:09) 2:08 PM Staffing

Jay Bodner said that Mike Spatz had given a quick rundown on Brands staffing already, but he wanted to update the BOL on Brands staffing as well:

- Mr. Bodner said that there were part time Inspectors hired in both Glasgow and Lewistown
- Interviews had been held for filling the District 16 market position in Chinook
- There was a pretty good candidate pool for the District 25 District Investigator position that covered Deer Lodge, Granite, Jefferson and southern Lewis & Clark Counties and Mr. Bodner said it would probably be two weeks out for making sure there was time to conduct all those interviews
- Market Inspector positions were still open in Miles City, Great Falls and Billings
- Mr. Bodner gave a rundown of brand numbers for Montana,
 - In 2021 there were 47,669 brands, with about 1,000 new brands issued and a little over 3,000 brand transfers. This was right after the rerecord year
 - In 2022 there were 49,800 brands, 1,049 new brands issued and 1,000 brand transfers
 - In 2023 there were 50,562 brands, with 727 new brands issued and 668 brand transfers
- Mr. Bodner said that a little over a third of the new brand applications said they did not own livestock, adding that there was no requirement that you own livestock to get a brand issued, as these were fully active brands
- Regarding the ARM Rule of Records to be Kept, Mr. Bodner said that the comment period on the changes in that rule ended December 29, 2023 and that none had been received
 - An educational letter had been sent to all the markets and dealers informing them of some of the Legislative changes affecting them and also included were the proposed changes in this ARM rule as well, so that they could submit public comment on the ARM rule if they so desired. Mr. Bodner said he hoped to finalize the proposed changes to that ARM rule at the next BOL meeting
- Mr. Bodner said that the Brands area of the DOL website had been revamped in the “How to Find a Local Brand Inspector” area and complimented Kim Dallas on the nice job she did working with State IT to get it going

ANIMAL HEALTH & FOOD SAFETY DIVISION REPORTS

(5:06:44) 2:16 PM

(5:06:44) 2:16 PM – MEAT, MILK & EGG INSPECTION BUREAU

Alicia Love, Meat, Milk & Egg Inspection Bureau Chief, introduced herself

(5:07:01) 2:16 PM General Updates

Alicia Love shared some general updates from the Meat, Milk & Egg Inspection Bureau

(5:07:01) 2:16 PM New Positions Have Been Filled Since the Last BOL Meeting/Status of Newly Created Positions/Updates on Potential New Plants/Progress on CIS Plants

- Ms. Love reported that three vacant positions had been filled since the last BOL meeting and were currently in orientation
 - The three positions filled were the Eastern Relief position, the Southwest Relief position and one of the new positions which was a position out of Glendive
- Ms. Love said that there were potentially three new plants coming on in the far Eastern region and so the new Glendive position would help support that demand
 - There were three applications that had been submitted for CIS, Ms. Love reported
 - One of the three applicants for CIS was at the stage of needing a Federal Inspector walkthrough and Ms. Love said that they were working with USDA to get that walkthrough scheduled
 - The other two facilities that had applied for CIS were in need of a Food Safety Assessment before they could pursue the Federal walkthrough

(5:08:24) 2:18 PM Letter to State-Inspected Facilities Regarding Nitrate Calculations

Alicia Love reported on a letter that would be sent to State-inspected facilities regarding nitrate calculations:

- Mike Honeycutt said that his disappointment was that he had wanted Jake Feddes to be able to comment on the letter as a meat processing plant owner, but that he could attest to all of you that Mr. Feddes had seen the letter and was okay with it
- Ms. Love explained that there were a number of facilities around Montana that created cured products containing nitrates or nitrites, which were controlled substances that in proper amounts prevented pathogenic growth in food, but had also been known to cause cancer in humans if the amount was too high
- The Bureau realized, Ms. Love said, that the industry had been relying on the Label Specialist to verify compliance with the limits on these nitrates and nitrites in their product. Ms. Love said the facilities' HACCP plans should contain support for their own processes and before plants start making products and before they start presenting the Inspector with their formulations, they needed to know what their nitrate and nitrite levels were and have support for it
- Ms. Love said the letter would be sent out to the industry letting them know that the Bureau had allowed itself to be the catch for the regulatory requirements, but the Bureau was needing to correct that situation. Mr. Honeycutt said that the facilities were being given a three-month time period to get themselves in compliance
- Ms. Love explained there was a calculation that could be made for the amount of nitrates or nitrites contained in a product utilizing the percentage of cure in the cure mix used in their product ingredients. She said that for a number of plants it could mean them reformulating their recipes and their product labels and when the Inspector showed up, the hope was that they could say, yes, my parts per million of those ingredients were within the required range

- Ms. Love said that Inspectors had been presented a draft version of the letter at the beginning of this week and that she had established that they would need to have a meeting with the plants shortly after the letters went out asking if the plant received the letter and to make sure no one was caught off guard by this
- The Bureau relied on the written recipe of the plants to verify that the percentage of the cure within the blend was the correct calculation of nitrates or nitrites contained in a product, Ms. Love said, as a process authority would be needed to do actual testing of a product. She added that USDA had lab contracts set up with process authorities where a product would literally be taken from a plant, and sent to a process authority for analysis
- Manufacturers were not required to give plants prior notice when they changed their spice mix formulations, Ms. Love said, and so she was requesting that industry be more vigilant when they received these spices to protect their own products, to make sure they're not culpable
- There was only one Label Specialist to cover the entire state, Ms. Love said, and so Inspectors were relied upon to occasionally go look at a plant's recipe and say, okay, today I'm going to watch you make your product

(5:20:39) 2:30 PM Request to Hire – 2nd Meat Inspector for Ravalli County Area

Although there was currently a Meat Inspector in the Ravalli County area, Ms. Love was requesting that the BOL approve the hire of another, utilizing one of the new positions that had been granted by the Legislature:

- Ms. Love reported that there was likely going to be a jerky plant coming online in that area in the next month. The plant had already been open since April and was asking for another slaughter day and had demonstrated over and over that they had a true need for additional inspection services
- Ms. Love explained that a plant in that area that said they were going to go to Federal inspection had decided to stay with State inspection. This meant, Ms. Love said, that there was only one Inspector with five plants in that area and four slaughter days, which she said didn't seem like a realistic workload for one Inspector

MOTION/VOTE

(5:21:51) 2:31 PM

Nina Baucus moved to approve the hire of a second Meat Inspector for the Ravalli County area. Greg Wichman seconded. The motion passed.

- Ms. Love said with that hire, there was one new position remaining that had been granted by the Legislature

(5:22:38) 2:32 PM Out-of-State Travel Request – 2024 Western Milk Seminar

Alicia Love requested that the BOL approve out-of-state travel to the Western Milk Seminar, scheduled to be held in Colorado in April 2024:

Ms. Love reported that the four would be traveling to the Seminar that was completely funded, other than salary, by a grant. The four attending would be herself, the Laboratory Evaluation Officer and two Sanitarians

MOTION/VOTE

(5:23:35) 2:32 PM

William Kleinsasser moved to approve out-of-state travel for four Meat, Milk & Egg staff to attend the 2024 Western Milk Seminar on April 22-25, 2024 in Golden Colorado. Nina Baucus seconded. The motion passed.

(5:24:18) 2:34 PM General Updates

Alicia Love discussed with the BOL an audit finding from an FDA audit that had been done three years previous:

- The audit finding, Ms. Love reported was the FDA said that because DOL staff was not routinely accomplishing metrics required by FDA such as sampling and doing follow-up inspections when non-compliance was found during milk inspections, the FDA strongly felt that another Sanitarian would help the DOL be successful going forward
- Ms. Love said it was after that finding, another Sanitarian, Job Greenall, was hired and the FDA was relieved and said they were sure that the DOL numbers would be better at the next audit. Ms. Love expressed her concern, because of the milk inspection fee situation in the DOL, that losing that Sanitarian position might put the DOL in the situation of not being compliant with the Pasteurized Milk Ordinance and would set us up to fail with the Federal government

(5:28:32) 2:39 PM - VETERINARY DIAGNOSTIC LABORATORY

Dr. Greg Juda, Director of the Montana Veterinary Diagnostic Lab introduced himself to the BOL

(5:28:45) 2:39 PM Out-of-State Travel Request – AAVLD Audit Pool Training

Dr. Greg Juda requested that the BOL approve out-of-state travel for Dr. Steve Smith to attend a one-day AAVLD Audit Pool Training event in Las Vegas:

- Dr. Juda explained that the AAVLD Audit Pool Training gave staff an opportunity to learn more about AAVLD auditing practices and the accreditation process, which benefited the VDL as they went through the processes to maintain accreditation and also allowed VDL staff to participate in future AAVLD audits systemwide
- The only cost to the DOL would be Dr. Smith's salary, Dr. Juda said, as the travel would be funded with NAHLN grant money

MOTION/VOTE

(5:30:07) 2:41 PM

Alan Redfield moved to approve out-of-state travel for Dr. Steve Smith to attend 2024 AAVLD Audit Pool Training on January 31, 2024 in Las Vegas, NV. Greg Wichman seconded. The motion passed.

(5:30:48) 2:41 PM Siemens Dimension EXL Chemistry Analyzer Purchase Request

Dr. Greg Juda requested that the BOL approve the purchase of a refurbished chemistry analyzer:

- The chemistry analyzer was used in the Clin Path section of the VDL with 28% of the tests being done on it for livestock and livestock-related issues and the remaining 72% of use was for small animals with dogs being the largest number of tests run (1400) and horses (530) the second most run, plus testing on some other animals as well. He added that it was not a moneymaker, but was necessary for our industry and the benefits for the people of the state
 - Revenue that the Clin Path section of the Lab brought in last year was around \$68,000, Dr. Juda said, but added that the two individuals employed in Clin Path were cross-trained and performed a substantial amount of work in other Lab sections
 - Dr. Juda explained that the refurbished chemistry analyzer was a Siemens Dimension EXL, the same model that was currently being used at the VDL.
- He added that annual maintenance costs for the current chemistry analyzer was \$17,378, and he was concerned that with the repair costs of the old analyzer, they might discontinue that coverage. Purchasing the refurbished unit would allow the DOL to use the OEM manufacture to do the service agreement and it could be locked in on a five-year contract to \$14,322/year
 - Cost of the refurbished unit was \$70,000, Dr. Juda said, with a one-year factory warranty. Cost of a new chemistry analyzer was around \$100,000 to \$128,000 with a one-year manufacturer warranty
 - Dr. Juda said there was also an extra cost, a reagent shortfall that needed to be paid because of the chemistry analyzer downtime and reagent minimums that had not been met, something that was tied to a reagent supply agreement. The reagent shortfall was \$41,000, but, Siemens said if the chemistry analyzer was purchased they would be willing to settle for \$19,000. If no chemistry analyzer was purchased the shortfall would continue to accrue until another instrument was purchased, basically, Dr. Juda said or if the supply agreement was terminated
- Dr. Juda cautioned that without the chemistry analyzer, Pathology results would be impacted in costs and turn-around time due to Clin Path results, which were sometimes part of a Pathology work-up, having to be sent out for testing to an out-of-state lab. Mike Honeycutt added that the BOL had come to a conclusion several years ago to continue with the Clin Path portion of the Lab because if there was a potential of losing other veterinary clients by not having the Clin Path Services, we might be doing more harm to ourselves than good
- The cost of the analyzers, Dr. Juda explained, had been taken out of the cost to build the new Lab in order to close the gap between our estimate and what was approved for the bid that came in for the new Lab construction. Mike Honeycutt added that VDL did not feel that the current chemistry analyzer would last until the opening of the new Lab anyway

- Brian Simonson said there was cash to purchase the analyzer today, using Lab fees to do that, but that in the past couple of years, the VDL had run over budget and other sources of funding within the program had been transferred in to make up the difference

MOTION/VOTE

(5:54:56) 3:05 PM

Alan Redfield moved to approve the purchase of a refurbished Siemens Dimension EXL Chemistry Analyzer for the VDL, as presented by Dr. Greg Juda. Lily Andersen seconded. The motion passed.

(5:57:06) 3:08 PM New Lab Construction Update from Max Grebe

Max Grebe, Principal Architect, Architect of Record on the Combined State Lab Project introduced himself and gave a current construction update on that project:

- Mr. Grebe reported that on January 16, 2024, Swank Enterprises, the contractor for the combined State Lab project, requested a 90-day shutdown and that State A&E granted that request
- Work had not stopped entirely on the project, Mr. Grebe said, as there was still a lot of utility extensions and subgrade work taking place right now. He said that the elevation of the site was being brought up to the finished floor elevation and that the main push was that they were rerouting the existing sewer line that fed Marsh Lab to around the new project site and were thinking that the following week that new sewer line would be up and running. Also being done, Mr. Grebe said was bringing temporary power into the site
- Onsite work should start again in mid-March, Mr. Grebe said, but, with that 90-day pause, they were looking at an early January of 2026 opening date and a move-in date of February of 2026
- Mr. Grebe said that winter months had been anticipated before construction began, but that there were some other delays early on in the project, such as utility issues and right-of-way problems between different State entities fighting amongst themselves that caused a delay of about a month and a half. Due to those delays, concrete and subgrade work was not able to get done when expected and with trying to do that type groundwork during wintertime, that delayed the project
- The City of Bozeman required a preconstruction conference and because the easement had not been approved, the City would not allow that conference, meaning that utility work associated with it could not be done either. But, Mr. Grebe said that the process had all been resolved
- There was high groundwater in the area, Mr. Grebe said, but during the wintertime, the water table was lower and so that was why it was a good time to get some of that work done now before the spring rains. He said that was the reason there was so much earth work being done on the north end of the site to bring the elevation of the building up by nearly five feet to get out of any central groundwater. He added that the parking lot, to the northeast corner of the site would be slightly lower than the building elevation but still getting fill to bring it up as well

- Mr. Grebe said that they were still working on procuring some of those items that had to be moved out of the project budget and into the owner required requirements. He said that for the VDL, the incinerator was one of the more critical items, but, it was on track
- There were mountains of structural steel laying on the site, Mr. Grebe said and when concrete was ready to be poured, that building frame should move relatively quickly. Mechanical and electrical components had been ordered as well, because of the very long lead time associated with those type of items. Mr. Grebe added that costs for those items were locked in
- Mr. Grebe said that there would be more activity onsite during a March or April timeframe and that temperatures wouldn't be frigid for having a groundbreaking
 - Greg Wichman said he would be lambing in March. Nina Baucus said they started lambing in April. Mike Honeycutt said that the BOL had set a March time frame during their December meeting and he had been working off of that decision
- Mike Honeycutt said that he understood there had to be a Board of Regents approval regarding the easement situation to which Mr. Grebe said he would double check on that, but he thought it has been taken care of. Mr. Honeycutt said that the Board of Regents didn't meet until March, but that he had spoken with the Commissioner of Higher Education and talked him into calling a special Board of Regents meeting if that was needed

(6:13:04) 3:24 PM RECESS

(6:13:06) 3:35 PM RECONVENE

ANIMAL HEALTH & FOOD SAFETY DIVISION REPORTS (Continued)

(6:13:10) 3:35 PM

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski, Animal Health and Food Safety Division, introduced herself

(6:13:15) 3:36 PM – ANIMAL HEALTH BUREAU

(6:13:15) 3:36 PM 2024 Federal Cooperative Agreement Budget Update

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski reported that initial communication received from USDA was that the DOL would be receiving less money than they had in the last two years for the 2024 cooperative agreement funding that was set to begin on April 1, 2024:

- Dr. Szymanski explained that historically, the DOL received around \$670,000 from the Feds, but that in 2020, when the DOL transitioned from the Wrap Brucellosis screening test to the more expensive FP screening test, USDA committed to providing an additional \$88,000 per year to support running the test at the VDL. And then, over the last two years, through successfully submitting

requests, the DOL was able to receive an additional \$200,000 more in USDA funding. All totaled, this brought in nearly \$1 million in USDA funding for the DOL

- Dr. Szymanski said that USDA indications were that they would be cutting funding to around \$400,000 less and if that was not the case, what was communicated to USDA was that their budget for 2024 would be identical to 2023, but there were some mandatory Federal raises to be added into their finite budget
- The Federal cooperative agreement funding covered Cattle Health, which encompassed the Bison Program, the Zoonotic Program and Avian Influenza. Dr. Szymanski said that the DOL plan was to probably take the deepest cuts at the Avian Influenza and Zoonotic pots and try to preserve as much as possible for the Cattle Health pot, because so much goes towards the Bison Program and the DSA itself, including personnel that worked on those programs

(6:16:37) 3:39 PM Out-of-State Travel Requests

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski requested that the BOL approve out-of-state travel for staff for the remainder of the State fiscal year:

- Dr. Szymanski explained that a portion of the travel requests did not have dates and locations, but based on the budget and the Federal cooperative agreements, if those were dep cuts, they would send the lowest number of people

(6:17:34) 3:39 PM Western States Livestock Health Association Meeting

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski requested that the BOL approve out-of-state travel for staff to attend the Western States Livestock Health Association Meeting to be held in Modesto, California in June 2024:

Dr. Szymanski explained that this annual meeting was for the 19 Western State Animal Health officials, adding that she and Dr. Zaluski had over the years pared down the number of attendees from the DOL. She was requesting that one to two Veterinarians be able to attend this meeting in June

Because Western States Animal Health officials encountered similar issues, Brucellosis was a substantial topic, but Trichomoniasis, Tuberculosis and other diseases were covered as well

The \$1800/attendee cost would be paid out of two cooperative agreements, but staff salary during that time would be paid out of the DOL budget

MOTION/VOTE

(6:19:44) 3:41 PM

Alan Redfield moved to approve out-of-state travel for one to two Veterinarians to attend the Western States Livestock Health Association annual meeting in Modesto, California in June 2024. Lily Andersen. seconded. The motion passed.

(6:20:18) 3:42 PM USAHerds Annual User Meeting

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski requested that the BOL approve out-of-state travel for staff to attend the USAHerds Annual User Meeting in Salt Lake City, Utah in May 2024:

- Because of room rate changes, Dr. Szymanski pared down the number of staff she was requesting to attend this annual meeting to three staff, two Animal Health staff, typically Import Staff, and one IT staff person, Tom Shultz
 - Cost for attendance would be \$1,066/person with the two Animal Health staff costs being paid by the ADT cooperative agreement and the cost for sending Tom Shultz would come from the Centralized Services budget
 - Dr. Szymanski said that the two Import staff persons to attend would probably be Import Office Manager Britta Sekora and Brucellosis Compliance Specialist Jac Cima
- Brian Simonson said that the CSD travel budget had \$26,000 in it and because Mr. Shultz had been a regular attendee over the years, that travel was already in the budget
- Mike Honeycutt explained that USAHerds was under evaluation for whether the DOL would move to something different, but, until that time, USAHerds would be utilized as our Animal Health software and staff would still need to stay up-to-date on any software changes

MOTION/VOTE

(6:25:31) 3:47 PM

Nina Baucus moved to approve out-of-state travel for two Import Office staff and one IT person to attend the USAHerds Annual User Group Meeting in Salt Lake City, UT in May 2024. William Kleinsasser seconded. The motion passed.

(6:25:53) 3:47 PM USDA TB/Brucellosis Epi Training

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski requested that the BOL approve out-of-state travel for all the DOL Veterinarians to attend the USDA TB/Brucellosis Epi Training meeting in Boise, Idaho in April 2024:

- Dr. Szymanski said that the three-day training was last held in Bozeman in 2019 and spent time on all of the different diagnostics being used, how to interpret those, some of the immunology associated with the two diseases and substantial discussions about how epidemiological investigations were conducted
- With the turnover within the Animal Health Bureau and a fair number of retirements in USDA, Dr. Szymanski said that Montana was the lowest they had been in many years compared to the national level in regards to historical knowledge about Brucellosis
 - Alan Redfield and Nina Baucus said that they felt that the DOL had two people who were teachers about Brucellosis and had more knowledge than anybody coming into the meeting
 - Dr. Szymanski assured that BOL that even though all the Veterinarians would be absent from the DOL office for three days, Import Office staff was pretty capable of handling day-to-day and all the Veterinarians would be available by phone and by Teams, and with the meeting being in Boise, they could depart the meeting early and be back in short order
 - Dr. Szymanski said that bringing in new DOL Veterinarians to the meeting would help them make connections with other State Animal Health officials and that even though she and Dr. DeGroot could teach a lot about

Brucellosis, those that went to the meeting would be able to hear the conversations and see the scenarios surrounding Brucellosis that couldn't be recreated. Dr. Szymanski added that because she had already been through the technical portion enough times, she offered to not attend that portion of the meeting and free up additional spaces for the newer Veterinarians to attend so they could get into the diagnostic lab work with Pathologists and see the process of conducting the postmortem exams and the specific tissues collected for Brucellosis diagnosis

MOTION/VOTE

(6:33:02) 3:55 PM

Alan Redfield moved to approve out-of-state travel for at least two Veterinarians to attend the USDA TB/Brucellosis Epi Training in Boise, ID in April 2024, with one Veterinarian left in the office during that time. William Kleinsasser seconded. The motion passed.

Nina Baucus said that she had absolute confidence in Dr. Szymanski and Dr. DeGroot when it came to talking through Brucellosis and they were probably the best that were out there because they had dealt with it so much

(6:36:55) 3:59 PM Live Bird Market System Working Group

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski requested that the BOL approve out-of-state travel for one DOL Veterinarian, probably Dr. Merry Michalski to attend the Live Bird Market System Working Group in Miami, Florida in February 2024:

- Coming off the heels of two years of Hi-Path Avian Influenza across the United States, Dr. Szymanski said that the agenda for this particular meeting looked really good with a lot of conversation about State response to Avian Influenza with a chance to bring in multiple states' perspective talk about diagnostic testing, carcass disposal and response plan
- Funding for meeting attendance, Dr. Szymanski said, would be out of the Avian Influenza portion of the current fiscal year Federal umbrella, which would pay for all of the travel expenses, but not salary
- Although sending two Veterinarians could be considered, because it was within the budget to be able to do so, Dr. Szymanski said that we had a pretty solid knowledge base of Avian Influenza in Montana, based upon a year and a half of experience in dealing with it, but that Dr. Michalski could probably capture a lot of that at the Working Group meeting and be able to bring it back for the rest of the Veterinarians to digest

MOTION/VOTE

(6:39:24) 4:01 PM

Nina Baucus moved to approve out-of-state travel for Dr. Merry Michalski to attend the Live Bird Market System Working Group in Florida in February 2024. Alan Redfield seconded. The motion passed.

Mike Honeycutt said there had been a lot of scrutiny on State travel because of the appearance of the location of some of the meetings so it doesn't look like a paid vacation for State employees who attend. He said that was something that needed to be gotten to the planners of these conferences

(6:42:10) 4:04 PM Animal Health Updates

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski gave some Animal Health Bureau updates to the BOL

(6:42:17) 4:04 PM Veterinary Medical Loan Repayment Program & Montana Shortage Area Nominations

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski reported on the outcome of the DOL's nominations to the Veterinary Medical Loan Repayment Program:

- Dr. Szymanski said that USDA-NEPA informed the DOL that all nominations submitted by the DOL were approved, recognizing six shortage areas across the state
 - McCone, Garfield, Musselshell and Glacier Counties
 - Four counties in one: Glacier, Liberty, Pondera and Toole Counties
 - Three counties in one: Big Horn, Yellowstone and Treasure Counties
- Dr. Szymanski explained that there were two different opportunities that were opened up to Veterinarians who choose to practice in the shortage areas
 - The Veterinary Loan Repayment Program would give successful applicants \$25,000/year over three years against their student mandate and they could re-up and do six years at \$25,000/year
- USDA had a grant program where Veterinary practices could apply for the grant program and bring on additional diagnostic services, such as buying equipment with that grant program or go out and receive additional training that shows they're expanding the services that they provide to that local community
- Dr. Szymanski said they would be communicating that information to the Veterinarians around the state so they could potentially use that in recruiting. She said that she had heard from several Veterinarians around the state that they were ready to start slowing down and had been recruiting for more Veterinarians in their community for an extended period of time and it made her a little bit nervous for what was ahead for us

(6:44:59) 4:07 PM US SHIP Funding for DOL

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski updated the BOL on the outcome of the DOL applying for USDA cooperative agreement funding for US SHIP:

- Dr. Szymanski reported that the DOL received \$10,000 for use in Fiscal Year 2024 that would allow for us to pay the travel expenses for delegates to attend the annual Swine Health Improvement Program (SHIP) annual meeting, which was modeled after the National Poultry Improvement Program (NPIP)
- Based upon the size of their swine industry, each state was allocated a certain number of delegates to attend the meeting where changes were proposed to the program and each delegate got to vote. Montana was able to send three delegates last year, Dr. Szymanski said, one Veterinarian from the DOL, William Kleinsasser and Dr. Wertz

(6:46:07) 4:08 PM Secure Wool Supply/Inactivating FMD Virus in Wool & Wool Handling Equipment

Dr. Tahnee Szymanski shared that Dr. Michalski had prepared the information for this agenda item and had intended to present it to the BOL, but with her out sick today, Dr. Szymanski hoped to move it to the March meeting. She said that Mr. Feddes had previously asked for an update on emergency preparedness as well and she thought it could all be moved to the March meeting if that was okay with the BOL

(6:46:37) 4:08 PM Elk Capture Report/Indemnity Payments/Assistant State Veterinarian Candidate

Dr. Szymanski reported that FWP just finished the elk capture in the Highland Mountains located northwest of Twin Bridges:

- 150 elk were captured and results of the tests on those elk should be received in the next couple of weeks

Dr. Szymanski reported on an indemnity payment to a DSA producer with a Brucellosis cow:

- The indemnity payment for that cow, Dr. Szymanski said, had been approved by the BOL during their December meeting and a check had been cut to that producer, the producer received it and was very pleased with it

Dr. Szymanski reported on the Assistant State Veterinarian candidate who did a meet and greet in the field with DOL staff:

- Dr. Szymanski said that the Assistant State Veterinarian candidate spent nearly two days in the field with Helena staff
- Time was spent in the Brand office with the Eastern Area Supervisor, District Investigator, market personnel and at the Vet shack with Dr. Nick Johnson at the Headwaters Livestock Market. Dr. Johnson was bleeding DSA cattle that were there for the sale. Dr. Szymanski said the candidate was comfortable in that setting and asked relevant questions
- Dr. Szymanski said the candidate traveled with her to Twin Bridges and Alder where there was a chat with a DSA producer about updating their management agreement and then two other producers where follow up samples were being taken on Brucellosis suspects. Dr. Szymanski said the candidate was very comfortable in the corrals and in that setting
- A trip to Yellowstone National Park was also taken with the candidate where there was a tour of the Stephen's Creek facility. Some of the quarantine bison were being worked on and a USDA staff candidate was bleeding bison. Dr. Szymanski said there was really good conversation that day and the candidate was able to look at some really substantial issues for Montana

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS/COMMENTS FROM PRODUCER ORGANIZATIONS

(6:51:02) 4:13 PM

There were none of the public left online or in the audience for public comment

SET DATE FOR THE NEXT BOARD MEETING

(6:51:14) 4:13 PM

Gene Curry requested that a date be set for the next BOL meeting:

- Lily Andersen requested that the next BOL meeting be scheduled for February 15, 2024 as she would be in town on the 14th and in Hawaii during the last week of February
- Mike Honeycutt reminded the BOL that February 19th was a State holiday and that if the meeting were held that week to not schedule it until Wednesday or Thursday
- Gene Curry said he had an evening commitment on February 22nd. William Kleinsasser said that February 8th and 15th they were remodeling. Lily Andersen said she would not be here on February 23rd
- Several BOL members thought that February 27th would be a good date. Mike Honeycutt said that Cabinet meetings were scheduled for then but that the DOL could just send one representative that day
- Mike Honeycutt said he and his family would be on a Disney cruise February 5-9 and that there would be some moments on the trip where he would not be connected
- The BOL set the next BOL meeting for Tuesday, February 27, 2024

MEETING ADJOURNED

(6:57:15) 4:19 PM



Gene Curry, Chairman