

# **Benson: Sun Belt must decide whether to keep Idaho, New Mexico State in mix**

**Theo Lawson/Lewiston Tribune**

Idaho has never been quite "at home" in the Sun Belt Conference - geographically speaking at least.

Now, it seems, the Vandals could be without a football home altogether pending a review from SBC commissioner Karl Benson.

Idaho and New Mexico State, the only football-only schools in the Sun Belt, are both signed to four-year contracts with the conference, but are subject to reviews following the 2015 football season with the option of renewal.

The conference may also decline that option, which would leave UI and/or NMSU homeless for the time being.

"There will be an evaluation and an assessment and a decision made whether to extend the football-only memberships for New Mexico State and Idaho," Benson said Tuesday in a teleconference after announcing Coastal Carolina as the conference's 12th full member. "And I think it's premature now to even speculate as to whether, what that decision is."

The Vandals and Aggies are both guaranteed spots in the Sun Belt through the 2017 football season, which would leave them time to find a new home should their contracts be terminated.

That decision, Benson said, will determine whether the conference will remain a 12-team league, or drop down into an 11- or 10-team league.

"I hope that by the middle of January we will know what the future football structure will be," Benson said.

Idaho and NMSU are the westernmost members of the conference. UI is nearly 1,500 miles northwest of its old Western Athletic Conference foe and nearly 2,000 miles away from Texas State, its next-closest neighbor.

The Vandals and Aggies each snared only one win during conference play last season.

Idaho accepted an invitation into the SBC in 2013, after denying a football invitation to drop down into the FCS and play in the Big Sky Conference. The school's other athletic programs participate in the Big Sky.