

# Otter's Fish and Game saga unfolds for all to see

## Marty Trillhaase/Lewiston Tribune

Last month, Idaho Gov. C.L. "Butch" Otter fired Fish and Game Commissioners Will Naillon of Challis and Mark Doerr of Twin Falls.

But if the governor had any notion that the two would leave quietly, he's been sorely disappointed. Before their terms end this month, Naillon and Doerr seem intent on pulling back the curtain and showing their fellow citizens the political world they've discovered these past four years.

As the Tribune's Eric Barker reported recently, Doerr accuses a minority of influential rural lawmakers with seeking privilege for themselves and others - such as giving large landowners the right to sell controlled tags to Idaho's prized hunts or putting those opportunities up for auction to the highest bidders.

But they lack the votes. During the past decade, Idaho's increasingly urban-oriented Legislature has not been all that receptive to such ideas. In fact, the latest attempt at auctioning off the best hunting opportunities - sponsored by Senate Resources and Environment Committee Chairman Steve Bair, R-Blackfoot, and House Majority Leader Mike Moyle, R-Star - barely managed to get printed and then languished in Bair's own panel for the rest of the session.

Likewise, the Fish and Game Commission - backed by the state's hunting and fishing community - has resisted those ideas. So odds are these lawmakers are pressing Otter to reorganize the Fish and Game Commission in their image.

But Otter has been the one naming members to the Fish and Game Commission for nine years. If Fish and Game has a viewpoint, it certainly reflects the governor's.

In fact, Otter has defended the commission's independence.

Now he's knuckling under.

Is it because he fears another humiliating confirmation battle? Three years ago, what passes for this Senate's version of "Sirloin Row" rejected Otter's Fish and Game Commission nominee, Joan Hurlock of Buhl, because she lacked a Y chromosome.

Once defeated, Otter tends to back off. After his bruising 2009 highway funding loss, he waited six years to try again - and let lawmakers take the lead.

Others believe this is all about political quid pro quo. Otter wants something from these lawmakers. He'll trade a pair of Fish and Game appointments for political support elsewhere.

Or is this part of a genuine political conversion? Does the governor now believe the state should abandon eight decades of egalitarian wildlife management in favor of a new "trickle down" approach? Is he willing

to abandon the direction Idahoans set for Fish and Game when they passed a 1938 initiative creating a commission free from political pressure?

When the answer comes, it won't be in hushed tones and ambiguities.

You'll hear loud, declarative sentences.

Otter offered Naillon and Doerr a slot on the committees charged with sifting through the list of people who want to succeed them - and then submitting three nominees to the governor.

By taking that deal, both outgoing commissioners will have a seat at the table - and will be the first to sound the alarms about any attempt to stack the Fish and Game Commission. The message will not be lost on a public already sensitized to the cronyism of Otter's tenure.

All of which may explain the final lines in Doerr's recent statement: "I have confidence that the current members of the Idaho Fish and Game Commission and the two new appointees will stand up to legislative influence, act with integrity and continue to provide sound leadership and thoughtful policy for the wildlife, the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and the sportsmen they represent in the great state of Idaho." - M.T.