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Star-News

Land Board says ‘no’ to Warren Wagon gravel pit, for now – IDL directed to update public notice policy

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The Star-News

A lease for a gravel pit off of Warren Wagon Road was not approved by the Idaho State Board of Land Commissioners on Tuesday, following concerns about public notices for the proposal.

The board plans to reevaluate and redo the lease advertising process and could consider other uses for the 41-acre property in the future.

IDL Division Administrator Jim Elbin told the board that any other lease or use of the area would require that the pit be reclaimed, likely at the state’s expense.

Because of that requirement, Elbin said a recreational lease or other use was unlikely.

“I don’t think somebody that wants to do a different activity really wants to reclaim a mine,” he said.

The Land Board is comprised of the state’s highest elected officials, including the governor, secretary of state, attorney general, superintendent of public instruction and controller. The director of IDL serves as the board secretary.

The lease up for consideration on Tuesday would have awarded the McCall-firm Seubert Excavators with a 10-year lease to extract basalt from a roughly seven-acre area on the property.

Under the terms of the now defunct lease, Seubert would pay a one-time fee of \$400,000, plus annual rent of \$500, a minimum royalty rate of \$3,000 and a fee of \$1.75 per ton of material removed.

With the lease not accepted, the state will miss out on those payments, which would total about \$350,000 in royalties in addition to the one-time fee, as well as reclamation of the site paid for by the bidder, Elbin said.

Revenue generated on IDL endowment land like this property funds Idaho schools, jails and veterans services.

Elbin warned the board that if the state re-advertises the same mineral lease for mining basalt, the bids may not be as high as the Seubert bid.

The pit has been mined since the 1980s, but has not been in operation since 2023, IDL officials said.

Prior to the Land Board meeting, IDL Land Resource Specialist Ryan Waite said the Seubert operation would have a “small operation,” likely consisting of “a single excavator, loader, screen, and haul truck.”

“This operation would be seasonal and active for eight to 12 weeks a year. At that rate they would have it mined out in three to four seasons,” Waite said.

“The 41-acre lease area does not equal a 41-acre hole in the ground,” he said.

There is a second active gravel pit lease next to the 41-acre property that is leased to the Idaho Transportation Department that mined 1000 tons of gravel in 2025, Waite said.

Seubert’s proposal was the high bid at an auction on May 28 at Idaho First Bank in McCall with five bidders participating.

Elbin told the Land Board that the agency “reported what we would normally report” as far as legal notices, but the location off of Warren Wagon Road attracted more concern from the public.

The auction was noticed in The Star-News, running in the editions of April 30, May 7, May 14 and May 21 and immediate neighbors to the proposal were notified, IDL officials have said.

Still, several residents contacted the Land Board to complain of a lack of notice.

IDL Director and Land Board Secretary Dustin Miller detailed the agency’s public notice policy, which was adopted in 2019. The policy requires four weeks of legal notifications in the newspaper of record, a notification posted to the IDL website and supervisory office. Some leases require notifications in industry-specific publications.

IDL is allowed to notify neighbors and post signs on the property up for lease-and often does-but is not required to do so, according to the policy.

No changes to the current policy were made at Tuesday’s meeting but Land Board officials advised the agency on what improvements should be made moving forward.

“The focus of that conversation (in 2019) was on making sure communication was to potential bidders to increase profit, it had an entirely different focus than the concerns that we’re presenting now,” said Idaho Secretary of State Phil McGrane.

“I think our concern is more, right now, concerned with information going out to the public, specifically neighbors,” McGrane said. “We can’t lose sight of the public at large.”

Governor Brad Little, who chairs the Land Board, said the agency’s communication policy needs improvement.

There needs to be enough outreach to detail the proposal including dust, hours of operation, the number of trucks and impact on the road, Little said.

Little also advocated for a system where public feedback submitted to regional managers is passed up the chain of command to the Land Board for review.