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**Senate Activity Report | House Activity Report**

**COMMISSION APPROVES FIRST PLANT BAN:**

In its first use of its authority to ban possession of invasive plants and insects, the Commission of Agriculture and Rural Development approved a prohibition against water soldier.

The order prohibits introducing the plant to the state or distributing it within the state. The aquatic plant was the last of the Least Wanted list developed by the Council of Great Lakes Governors and Canadian Premiers to be added to the state's list of prohibited plants.

The plants are native to Europe and Asia, but have been found in Ontario. It was unclear how the plant, which forms dense mats on water surfaces that can interfere with boating and other activities as well as crowd out native plants, arrived in North America, officials said. There were no indications that it is being sold as a decorative plant as it is **in Europe**.

GAAMPS: The commission approved the Generally Accepted Agriculture and Management Practices for 2015 after making some changes at the behest of some small bee keepers. The guidelines include a six-foot barrier between hives and neighboring properties to ensure the bees fly above neighbors instead of through their activities.

But some small bee keepers were concerned that the language would require that they put the barrier around their entire property. They noted that bees generally fly some distance straight from the opening to the hive before climbing to an altitude where they can begin searching for food and so are not likely to be a hazard to anyone beside or behind the hive. The language adopted by the commission clarifies that the barrier need only be by the opening to the hive.

But officials said the language would likely come back next year with further clarifications on the required setbacks. Current guidelines call for 250 feet, but Janice Swanson, chair of the Animal Care Subcommittee, said that does not work for some of the smaller facilities because they might not have sufficient space to allow that setback.

The rest of the GAAMPs were approved with few changes from the review committee and no discussion from the **commission**.

LEADERSHIP: The commission elected new leaders Wednesday, its first meeting of 2015. Trever Meachum of Hartford was elected chair. Fred Walcott of Allendale is vice chair and Dru Montri of Bath is secretary. The board followed its tradition of moving the vice chair to chair and secretary to **vice chair**.

**BUDGET CUTS:** Department Director Jamie Clover Adams said it was not clear yet what cuts the department might see as a result of the budget shortfalls projected at the Revenue Estimating Conference.

Commission members urged her to push for those cuts to be minimized, particularly as officials have said the budget cuts will not be across-the-board. "It seems to me in the past MDARD has taken more of a percentage cut than other departments," Mr. Meachum said.

Ms. Clover Adams said the cuts would be based on the value of the program. "It's focusing, from his perspective, on what adds value," she said of Governor Rick Snyder.

The department had not asked for much in the way of increases for the coming fiscal year, departmental Budget Officer Maria Tyszkiewicz said. The department is seeking to have sunsets removed from a couple of fees, she said.

The commission did, though, approve Wednesday an increase in nursery inspection fees. Law allows the commission to increase the fees if increases in the consumer price index shows the need.

The fees rise \$1 effective February 1 under the commission's action, so inspections billed by the hour would increase to \$58 and those billed by the acre would increase to \$53 for the first acre and \$32 for each succeeding acre.

Ms. Clover Adams said the fees still would not cover the costs of the inspections, but she said there was value in having the general public contribute to the costs, since the nursery goods contributed to the overall **economy**.

**FRUIT FUNDING:** While the Legislature is looking for ways to cut back the budget, at least one group will be looking for additional funds for the coming year. Mr. Meachum said fruit tree farmers will raise \$800,000 through the assessment they approved on themselves last year and are now looking for the Legislature to match those funds.

Mr. Meachum, who raises apples among other crops, said the funds would be used for a variety of projects to improve access to markets for those raising orchards. "The goal from the beginning was to get a legislative match," he said. "If we can get a legislative match, we feel we can get accomplished what we need in five years." The request would not be an official act of either the department or the commission.

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