

BUSINESS AFFAIRS AND HUMAN RESOURCES
AUGUST 17, 2012

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO

SUBJECT

Request for authorization for independent scheduling of football games and for the President to explore and accept an invitation to the Big Sky Athletic conference .

REFERENCE

December 4-5, 2003	Board approval for President of BSU, or his designee, to make the final decision regarding pursuing and accepting an invitation to the Mountain West Athletic Conference. Also to authorize the President of the University of Idaho, or his designee, to make the final decision regarding pursuing and accepting an invitation to the Western Athletic Conference (WAC).
June 17-18, 2004	Report by the University of Idaho that an invitation to join the WAC had been received.
August 15, 2012	Discussion of certain matters in executive session.

APPLICABLE STATUTE, RULE, OR POLICY

Idaho State Board of Education Governing Policies & Procedures, Section III.T (Intercollegiate Athletics).

BACKGROUND/DISCUSSION

The University's current conference, the Western Athletic Conference (WAC), is currently unable to support intercollegiate football after the end of the 2012-13 athletic season, with only two of the 4 current members (University of Idaho and New Mexico State) running football programs. As a result, the University is currently unaffiliated with a conference for football scheduling beyond the 2012-13 football season. Institutions are currently engaged in scheduling football games for the 2013-14 season and beyond, and it is imperative that the University begin doing so as well in order to ensure a full schedule of games. Consequently, the University seeks authority to commence scheduling football games as an unaffiliated, independent Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institution.

In light of the inability of the WAC to currently support football the University has been considering other conference affiliation options. One of those options is an affiliation with the Big Sky Conference for the University's non-football intercollegiate sports. The Big Sky has expressed interest in having the University as a member for non-football sports. The University seeks a grant from the board for the President to have authority to proceed in the best interests of the University to explore and accept an invitation from the Big Sky Conference.

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IMPACT

The primary impact of the University scheduling intercollegiate football as an unaffiliated independent FBS institution is enhanced revenues. Game payments to the University from scheduling as an FBS institution are estimated to exceed payouts from scheduling as an FCS institution by approximately \$1.5 million annually.

Additionally, this is currently a time of great instability in conference alignment among FBS institutions nationwide, driven by conference revenue dollars stemming from television and football. The domino effect of conference realignments in the last 12 months continues to engender change and unpredictability in the conference landscape. By scheduling football as an unaffiliated and independent FBS institution, the University retains the ability to react to conference changes should an opportunity appear with an FBS football conference in the future.

The impacts of an affiliation with the Big Sky Conference for the University's non-football sports include re-establishment of historic rivalries in the region (Montana, Montana State, ISU for example) with the resulting increase in fan interest in these sports as well as a more regional travel schedule which will reduce costs and reduce loss of academic class time for student athletes participating in these sports. The Big Sky Conference is a strong, established Division I conference which sponsors 14 of the University's 16 non-football sports (with only Men's Golf and Swimming/Diving not sponsored).

STAFF COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the result of volatility in intercollegiate conference alignments, the WAC will no longer sponsor football after the 2012-13 season. This leaves the University of Idaho without a conference for its football program. As a result, the UI is requesting approval to schedule games for the 2013-14 season as an independent Football Bowl Subdivision (FBS) institution.

With the weakening of the WAC, the UI is also considering conference affiliations for its Olympic sports. The Big Sky Conference is a possible affiliation for non-football sports.

Staff recommends approval.

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BOARD ACTION

I move to authorize the University of Idaho to commence scheduling intercollegiate football games for the 2013-14 football season and beyond, as an unaffiliated, independent FBS institution; and further, to authorize the President of the University of Idaho to negotiate the final terms and determine whether to accept an invitation to the Big Sky Conference, and in doing so to comply with all Board policies and procedures.

Moved by _____ Seconded by _____ Carried Yes _____ No _____