BOISE, Idaho – Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Director Neil Kornze was briefed today on the severe drought gripping much of the West and preparations for the coming wildfire season at the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise. The briefing was his first stop on a tour focused on areas impacted by severe drought conditions and on the coming wildfire season, which peaks nationally from May through July.

Kornze and BLM Deputy Director Steve Ellis will hold a series of meetings with local officials and stakeholders in Nevada and Utah to discuss how they can best collaborate and continue ongoing efforts to address drought, which is affecting most of the West.

“This fire season could be quite challenging, and we need to be coordinated and prepared,” Kornze said after his briefing. “I grew up right here in the Great Basin, and I’m glad to have this opportunity to see familiar country and to visit with local ranchers, county commissioners and other key stakeholders. I look forward to discussions about how we can best collaborate to address drought issues in a way that allows for continued uses of the public lands and responsible management.”

Among the issues expected to be discussed are collaborative efforts to protect remaining greater sage-grouse habitat from wildfire and the Secretary of the Interior’s recent Secretarial Order on Rangeland Fire Prevention, Management and Restoration. Fire operations have become a large component of sage-grouse habitat preservation. Once wildfire burns sage-grouse habitat, invasive weeds such as cheatgrass often take over, crowding out native plants and sagebrush, which sage-grouse need to survive.

Of the five Great Basin states, three -- Nevada, Utah, and Oregon -- are in 99 percent drought status, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor. More than 80 percent of Idaho is in drought status.

From Idaho, Kornze will travel to northern Nevada where he is scheduled to meet with ranchers, public officials, and other stakeholders in Elko. He will also tour the Vineyard Ranch, where he will be briefed on sustainable management practices and ongoing sage-grouse conservation efforts. Later in the week, Kornze will meet with agency partners and elected officials in White
Pine County during a tour of the Cave Valley Allotment, where conservation measures have benefitted the greater sage-grouse.

After touring the Fire Center, Ellis will be on the ground in Box Elder County, Utah. He will meet with local elected officials and ranchers to see first-hand restoration of areas of cheatgrass reduction and juniper removal to benefit sage-grouse at Dove Creek and other areas in the county. Ellis will also be in Juab County in Utah where he will meet with county commissioners and law enforcement officials to discuss local issues.

The BLM manages more than 245 million acres of public land, the most of any Federal agency. This land, known as the National System of Public Lands, is primarily located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The BLM also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's mission is to manage and conserve the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations under our mandate of multiple-use and sustained yield. In Fiscal Year 2014, the BLM generated $5.2 billion in receipts from public lands.

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