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News Release

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Vale BLM Completes Owyhee Canyon Fire Assessment

Vale, Ore. – The Owyhee Canyon Fire that burned nearly 22,000 acres along the Owyhee River Canyon started on June 5, 2016. Vale District Bureau of Land Management (BLM) fire suppression personnel, along with the Jordan Valley Rangeland Fire Protection Association (RFPA) and contracted resources contained the fire on June 8.

Bureau policy requires BLM staff to create a draft plan for Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation of the area within seven days of containment. A more comprehensive final plan will be submitted by June 28.

“This initial plan includes the best and most effective treatments we can suggest at this point in the process,” said Pat Ryan, Malheur Resource Area Field Manager at the Vale District. “Once the plan is submitted, we’ll move forward with National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) procedures which will allow for public review and comment.”

The initial plan states that of the 21,776 acres burned, 21,075 acres of it is BLM managed land and 701 acres is privately owned. The fire area is identified as general sage-grouse habitat as well as mule deer winter range. One sage-grouse lek (a mating area for sage-grouse) was identified as being within the burn perimeter. The fire also burned 4,120 acres of the Owyhee Canyon Wilderness Study Area (WSA), one livestock grazing allotment and damaged 16 miles of livestock management fences.

The burned areas will adversely affect sage-grouse and other sage-obligate species. Invasive species such as Scotch and bull thistle, whitetop species, Russian knapweed, and rush skeletonweed have all been documented in the area. With the burning of competing native vegetation, these species are highly likely to spread into the affected area unless they are treated.

Potential treatments include:

- Inventory and treatment of noxious weeds in and around the fire perimeter
- Repair of fences, gates and livestock management infrastructure
- Temporary deferment or closure of affected grazing allotments
- Construction of temporary fences to keep livestock out of the affected area
- Herbicide application to prepare for planting and/or to remove invasive annual species competition
- Sagebrush restoration
- Ongoing monitoring to determine treatment effectiveness and appropriate time to reopen grazing allotments

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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 sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of America’s public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. In Fiscal Year 2015, the BLM generated \$4.1 billion in receipts from activities occurring on public lands