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NEWS RELEASE

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Award Given for Wildland Fire Protection

(BOISE) –Idaho Department of Lands State Forester, David Groeschl, extends congratulations to the Saylor Creek and Three Creek Rangeland Fire Protection Associations (RFPAs) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Boise and Twin Falls Districts on winning the prestigious Pulaski Award for their accomplishments during the 2013 fire season.

This is an important recognition and a testament to what ranchers and agencies can do when they work together says Groeschl. The Pulaski Award is a collective recognition by seven federal agencies and the National Association of State Foresters representing the 50 state fire programs for outstanding contributions to wildland firefighting and America’s wildland firefighters.

Governor C.L. “Butch” Otter was key in supporting the creation of these RFPAs. The Governor, along with the Idaho Legislature, supported changes to Idaho Code and funding to assist new RFPAs with one-time start up costs. These funds pay for associated training materials, purchase of personal protective equipment and radios, acquisition and refurbishment of firefighting equipment, and ongoing support by an IDL employee dedicated to working with the RFPAs.

In forming the RFPAs, the BLM, IDL and ranchers worked together to determine roles and responsibilities, and forged a path forward to establish the associations. Since 2012, Idaho has formed four RFPAs –Mountain Home, Owyhee, Saylor Creek and Three Creek. One more, Black Canyon is working to be operational for the 2014 fire season.

Together, these five RFPAs protect more than 675,000 acres of private rangeland and 2.9 million acres of federal and state rangeland. To date, 250 RFPA members have been trained and six more groups have expressed interest in forming future RFPAs.

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An RFPA is a nonprofit organization governed and directed by its members and is funded by membership fees and grant dollars. The RFPA members primarily use their own ranch equipment to prevent and suppress range fires.

Benefits of forming an RFPA include taking advantage of the quick initial attack efforts of local ranchers that have an interest in protecting the forage needed for their livelihood. In addition, RFPA members go through wildland fire training, wear protective clothing and become well versed in the use of radios that improve the safety, effectiveness and coordination of initial attack efforts between ranchers and federal agency personnel.

While this is a young program, the success in the formation and effectiveness of Idaho's RFPAs is being considered as a model by other western states. As we head into the 2014 fire season, we are thankful for the commitment by the many volunteers that form the RFPAs and our agency partners in working to protect all Idahoans from the threat of wildfire.

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