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Contact: Frank Quimby 202-208-6416
David Quick, (202) 452-5138 (BLM)
Ivette E. Torres, (703) 605 4792 (FS)

Kempthorne Launches Initiative to Spur Geothermal Energy and Power Generation on Federal Lands

PHOENIX, Arizona – Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne today announced a plan to make more than 190 million acres of Federal land in 12 western states available for development of geothermal energy resources, an initiative that could increase electric generation capacity from geothermal resources ten times over.

“Geothermal energy will play a key role in powering America’s energy future,” Kempthorne said, “and 90 percent of our nation’s geothermal resources are found on Federal lands. Facilitating their leasing and development under environmentally sound regulations is crucial to supplying the secure, clean energy American homes and businesses need.”

Under the development scenario outlined in the plan – known as the Final Geothermal Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement – the initiative could produce 5,540 megawatts of new electric generation capacity from geothermal resources by 2015. That’s enough to meet the power needs of 5.5 million homes. The plan also estimates an additional 6,600 megawatts by 2025 for a total of 12,100 megawatts – enough to power more than 12 million homes.

When put into action by a Record of Decision, the plan would identify about 118 million acres of Bureau of Land Management-managed public lands and 79 million acres of National Forest System lands for future geothermal leasing. It would provide a list of appropriate stipulations to be applied to leases and amend 122 Bureau of Land Management land use plans to allow for geothermal development.

Kempthorne noted the strong interest states, local communities, industry and environmental groups took in the development of this plan. “This process has benefited greatly from the involvement of both governmental and non-governmental stakeholders, and from the clear direction Congress gave in the 2005 Energy Policy Act,” the Secretary said. “It’s really a model for working together to make decisions about our energy future.”

The United States is already the world leader in generating electricity using geothermal energy, with about 16,000 gigawatt-hours of electricity generated in 2005. Almost half of this production and 90 percent of U.S. geothermal resources occur on Federal lands. (One megawatt of geothermal energy provides enough power to meet all the electricity needs of more than 1,000 homes. A gigawatt, which is 1000 megawatts, can power more than 1 million homes.)

Geothermal leasing revenues and royalties are shared with the States and counties where the leases are located, with 50 percent going to the State; 25 percent to the county and the remaining 25 percent to the Geothermal Royalty Fund of the Bureau of Land Management for investing in further geothermal planning and development.

Under Interior's plan, future geothermal leasing will be subject to all existing laws, regulations and orders, as well as stipulations and terms and conditions. To protect special resource values, the plan identifies a comprehensive list of stipulations, conditions of approval and best management practices required for approval of future leases.

Lands withdrawn from or administratively closed to geothermal leasing will remain so. For example, lands within a unit of the National Park System, such as Yellowstone National Park, will continue to be unavailable for leasing. The PEIS also excludes wilderness areas and wilderness study areas from analysis. It will allow discretionary closure of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern where the BLM determines that this is appropriate. The BLM may also implement discretionary closures of units of the National Landscape Conservation System.

The Forest Service will use information in the plan to facilitate leasing analysis to determine whether or not geothermal leasing is appropriate and to evaluate its land use plans and amend them as needed through a separate environmental review process.

In addition to laying the foundation for environmental analysis of future geothermal leasing, the plan also provides site-specific environmental analysis of 19 pending geothermal lease applications in seven geographic locations. These leases were filed before Jan. 1, 2005 for specific lands in Alaska, California, Nevada, Oregon and Washington managed by the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management. Decisions on the issuance of these 19 leases could proceed as soon as the Record of Decision is signed.

The governors of the 12 states in the plan's project area will each have the opportunity to review the final document to ensure consistency with state plans, programs, and policies. The Bureau of Land Management will wait until the end of the Governor's consistency review period before signing and issuing the Record of Decision approving the land use plan amendments. Any inconsistencies will be resolved before a Record of Decision is issued.

Replenished by heat sources deep in the earth, geothermal energy is a renewable resource that generates electricity with minimal carbon emissions. Direct use of geothermal energy supplies heat for buildings, greenhouses, aquaculture, and other activities. It offers additional possibilities for reducing the need for conventional energy sources. As many as 270 western communities could benefit from such direct uses.

Growing interest in developing these resources is seen in the results of recent Bureau of Land Management geothermal lease sales in areas where current Resource Management Plans already allocate lands for such use. An August 2007 sale drew the highest-ever per-acre bid for a lease in California's famed Geysers field. And a sale of leases in Nevada brought a record-breaking \$28.2 million in August 2008

A total of 29 geothermal power plants currently operate on Bureau of Land Management lands in California, Nevada and Utah, with a total generating capacity of 1,250 megawatts – enough to supply the needs of 1.2 million homes.

The Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service will publish the final version of a plan in the *Federal Register* on Friday, Oct. 24, 2008. It will be available online at http://www.blm.gov/Geothermal_EIS

BLM Land-Use Plans Proposed for Amendment under the PEIS

State	Land Use Plan(s)
ALASKA	Central Yukon RMP Kobuk-Seward RMP
ARIZONA	Ring of Fire RMP Arizona Strip RMP Kingman RMP Lake Havasu RMP Lower Gila North MFP Lower Gila South RMP Phoenix RMP Safford RMP Yuma RMP
CALIFORNIA	Alturas RMP Arcata RMP Bishop RMP Caliente RMP Cedar Creek/Tule Mountain Integrated RMP E. San Diego County RMP Eagle Lake RMP Headwaters RMP Hollister RMP Redding RMP S. Diablo Mountain Range and Central Coast RMP South Coast RMP Surprise RMP West Mojave RMP
COLORADO	Glenwood Springs RMP Grand Junction RMP Gunnison RMP Kremmling RMP Little Snake RMP Northeast RMP

IDAHO	Royal Gorge RMP
	San Juan/San Miguel RMP
	Uncompahgre Basin RMP
	White River RMP
	Bennett Hills/ Timmerman Hills MFP
	Big Desert MFP
	Big Lost MFP
	Bruneau MFP
	Cascade RMP
	Cassia RMP
	Challis RMP
	Chief Joseph MFP
	Jarbridge RMP
	Kuna MFP
	Lemhi RMP
	Little Lost-Birch MFP
	Magic MFP
	Malad MFP
	Medicine Lodge RMP
	Monument RMP
MONTANA	Owyhee RMP
	Pocatello RMP
	Sun Valley MFP
	Twin Falls MFP
	Big Dry RMP
	Billings Resource Area RMP
	Dillon RMP
	Garnet Resource Area RMP
	Judith Valley Phillips RMP
	North Headwaters RMP
NEVADA	Powder River Resource Area RMP
	West HiLine RMP
	Carson City Consolidated RMP
	Elko RMP
	Las Vegas RMP
	Paradise-Denio MFP
	Shoshone-Eureka RMP
	Sonoma-Gerlach MFP
NEW MEXICO	Tonopah RMP
	Wells RMP
	Carlsbad RMP
	Farmington RMP
	MacGregor Range RMP
	Mimbres RMP
	Rio Puerco RMP
	Roswell RMP
Socorro RMP	
Taos RMP	

OREGON

White Sands RMP
Brothers/LaPine RMP
Eugene District RMP
John Day River MP
John Day RMP
Lower Deschutes RMP
Medford RMP
Roseburg RMP
Salem RMP
Three Rivers RMP

UTAH

Two Rivers RMP
Book Cliffs MFP
Box Elder RMP
Cedar Beaver Garfield Antimony RMP
Diamond Mountain RMP
Henry Mountain MFP
House Range Resource Area RMP
Iso-tract MFP
Mountain Valley MFP
Paria MFP
Park City MFP
Parker Mountain MFP
Pinyon MFP
Pony Express RMP
Randolph MFP
St. George (formerly Dixie) RMP
Vermilion MFP
Warm Springs Resource Area RMP

WASHINGTON

Zion MFP
Spokane RMP