

**Statement of Neil Kornze
Nominee for the Position of
Director, Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior
Before the
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources**

December 17, 2013

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Murkowski, and Members of the Committee. I am deeply honored to be here today as President Obama and Secretary Jewell's nominee to be the next Director of the Bureau of Land Management. Before we begin, I would like to take a moment to introduce my wife, Mara Gassmann, who is here with me. I am grateful for her support and that of our extended family who are watching today from Nevada, Idaho, Utah and Georgia.

My family's connection to the land goes back generations. From my great grandparents who homesteaded on the Great Plains, to my grandparents who grew, picked and packed apples in the Pacific Northwest, to my father who spent his career exploring Nevada and other states for gold and copper deposits, the bounty of the land has always been central to my understanding of our nation's greatness and its potential. As an individual, I am a hunter, an angler, a hiker, a recreational shooter, and a mountain bike rider. I am also a consumer of fossil fuels and renewable energy. Through these pursuits and practices and through my work both here in the U.S. Senate and at the Bureau of Land Management, I have come to appreciate our nation's natural heritage from a wide range of perspectives.

During my time working here in the U.S. Senate, I had the privilege of helping to craft critical national legislation like the Omnibus Public Lands Act of 2009 and a long-term reauthorization of the Secure Rural Schools and Payment-In-Lieu-of-Taxes programs. As Majority Leader Harry Reid's advisor on public land and natural resource issues, I worked closely with Members from both parties and this committee to move forward statutory improvements that recognized both the need for responsible development of our natural resources and smart conservation in places where it makes sense.

Over the last three years I have worked at the Bureau of Land Management in a number of leadership positions, including my current role of Principal Deputy Director. Through this position – which I have held for the past year – I have been the functioning head of the Bureau of Land Management. In this role, I have strived to bring both a continuity of leadership and vision to the organization as well as a willingness to innovate and to approach our many responsibilities with fresh eyes.

Many of the accomplishments of the first-term, including oil and gas leasing reforms and the Western Solar Plan, are still a work in progress. Limited budgets coupled with the long-term nature of the work we do means that successful implementation of programs often takes years. This reality makes long-term stability in the organization's leadership and philosophy a critical component of achieving our shared goals.

While at the Bureau of Land Management, I have worked with my colleagues to find new ways of connecting with the public, our partners, and our own internal team. We have

made some strides in this area, but much more needs to be done to provide clearer, more user-friendly information about the resources that exist on the public lands and the both long and short-term plans for management.

The issue of communication is a particular challenge for the Bureau because, unlike some of our sister agencies, the resources that we manage are scattered across all 50 states, and there is rarely a clear demarcation of where the public lands stop and start. We are proud of the way that this land pattern places us as a key partner to so many communities, both rural and urban, but it also gives us an added responsibility to harness available tools to better inform the public about where we are and what we do.

Right now at the Bureau we are in the process of using technology to break down barriers. In the oil and gas realm, we have made strong improvements in our reviews of drilling permits in recent years, but we can and will do better through the use of an online permitting system that will be tested and rolled out over the next several months.

Similarly, we have a unique responsibility for surveying and conveying millions of acres of land to native corporations and to the State of Alaska. This work has historically been done through a relatively slow and expensive process. By looking at this particular challenge with a new perspective, we have found ways to fulfill our commitment to the State of Alaska literally decades ahead of the current schedule, at a fraction of the cost, and with a greatly improved product.

In the face of declining budgetary resources and increasing demands on our nation's public lands and minerals, I am committed to exploring new approaches with the public, our stakeholders, and Congress so that the Bureau of Land Management can become a more effective and more responsive organization. Through these efforts and through greater use of science in our decision-making processes and by moving to a more nimble, landscape-level planning approach, we have incredible opportunities in the years ahead.

As you know, the challenges we face are also substantial. Fire, drought, and the decline of critical species like sage grouse are all situations that we must adapt to and help address. We must also do more to understand the most durable ways to mitigate development impacts and to restore the public lands so that we can truly live up to the agency's dual mission of multiple use and sustained yield.

If confirmed, I will work with my dedicated colleagues, Congress and the public to tackle these issues directly and to ensure that the Bureau of Land Management continues to play a vital role in the American economy and in sustaining public lands for this and all future generations to use and to enjoy.

Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the opportunity to share these thoughts with you and your distinguished colleagues. I consider it a great privilege to be here with you today. I look forward to answering any questions you might have.