Experienced federal administrator to lead agency serving 567 Tribal communities

Media Contact: Interior_Press@ios.doi.gov
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WASHINGTON – U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke today announced the selection of Bryan Rice, a veteran federal administrator and citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, as the new Director of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the federal agency that coordinates government-to-government relations with 567 federally recognized tribes in the United States.

"Bryan has a wealth of management expertise and experience that will well serve Indian Country as the BIA works to enhance the quality of life, promote economic opportunity, and carry out the federal responsibility to protect and improve the trust assets of American Indians, Indian tribes and Alaska Natives," **Secretary Zinke said**. "I have full confidence that Bryan is the right person at this pivotal time as we work to renew the department's focus on self-determination and self-governance, give power back to the tribes, and provide real meaning to the concept of tribal sovereignty."

"Secretary Zinke's naming of Bryan Rice as director of the BIA brings an accomplished individual to that post who is well-versed in the Bureau's mission and has extensive knowledge about its work, particularly in the area of forestry and combatting wildland fires," **said Acting Assistant Secretary – Indian Affairs John Tahsuda**. "Bryan will be a strong leader for the Bureau and closely follow the Secretary's plans for reforming the BIA into a top-notch service delivery agency for tribes and tribal leaders."

"Native Americans face significant regulatory and bureaucratic hurdles to economic freedom and success," **Rice said**. "I am honored to accept this position and look forward to implementing President Trump's and Secretary Zinke's regulatory reform initiative for Indian Country to liberate Native Americans from the bureaucracy that has held them back economically."

Rice, who will start his new position on Monday, October 16, 2017, recently led Interior's Office of Wildland Fire, and has broad experience leading Forestry, Wildland Fire, and Tribal programs across Interior, BIA, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture. His federal government career has spanned nearly 20 years, beginning with service on the Helena Interagency Hotshot Crew for the U.S. Forest Service in Montana. He served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Nepal, working in both community forestry and rural development and supervised numerous timber operations as a timber sale officer on the Yakama Reservation as well as a forester on the Tongass National Forest in Alaska. Rice also served in leadership capacities internationally in Tanzania, Mexico, Brazil and Australia for both Interior and the U.S. Forest Service.

Rice has served in two Senior Executive Service natural resources management leadership positions, including as Deputy Director for the BIA Office of Trust Services from 2011 to 2014, and as Director of Forest Management in the U.S. Forest Service from 2014 to 2016.

Rice spent his school years in the Midwest in Whitewater, Wisconsin and Peoria, Illinois.
He holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Forestry from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champagne and a Master of Business Administration from the University of Alaska – Southeast, focusing on rural development and transportation systems. He is a licensed pilot, and enjoys time outside hunting and fishing.

Secretary Zinke also announced that Jeff Rupert will be the acting Director of the Office of Wildland Fire starting on Monday, October 16. Rupert was the chief of the Division of Natural Resources for the National Wildlife Refuge System, overseeing the Fire Management, Refuge Resource and Private Lands programs. He has been an active member of the Interior Fire Executive Council for the last several years. He is a graduate of Class #18 from the Interior Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program and holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from Baker University and a Master of Science degree in Biology from the University of Texas – Pan American.

The BIA carries out its core mission through four offices: the Office of Indian Services operates the BIA's general assistance, disaster relief, Indian child welfare, tribal government, Indian Self-Determination, and reservation roads programs; the Office of Justice Services directly operates or funds law enforcement, tribal courts, and detention facilities on Federal Indian lands; the Office of Trust Services works with tribes and individual American Indians and Alaska Natives in the management of their trust lands, assets, and resources; and the Office of Field Operations oversees 12 regional offices and 83 agencies which carry out the BIA mission at the tribal level. In Fiscal Year 2017, the BIA had 4,794 employees and a budget of $1.9 billion.

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