

Firefighters ready to deal with what's expected to be busy season

By Jeff DeLong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Fifteen thousand firefighters are ready to deal with what's expected to be a busy season for wildfire, with Nevada and the Sierra among areas in the country at high risk this year, two top cabinet officers said Thursday.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar headed up a telephone news briefing on the 2012 wildfire outlook, predicting fire activity similar to last year, when more than 74,000 fires burned some 8.7 million acres nationwide.

"We believe we are prepared," Salazar said of the coming fire season.

Much of the drought-stricken Southwest is at high risk of fire, as are the western slopes of the Rockies, said Ed Delgado of the National Interagency Fire Center in Boise, Idaho.

A near record-dry winter also put the interior mountains of California, including the Sierra, and the Western Great Basin of Nevada at high potential for dangerous fire.

Representatives of the Western Great Basin Predictive Services Center recently predicted more than 600,000 acres of Nevada will likely burn during this year's fire season.

They said fire conditions typically found in mid-summer exist already. The Reno area was hit with two unseasonable fires in November and January, burning more than 5,000 acres and 50 homes.

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