

FOREST NEWS

The Newsletter of Forest Service Employees For Environmental Ethics

Winter 2016

A Rebellion Reignites

How the occupation of a federal wildlife refuge in a remote corner of Oregon reshaped tensions over public lands.

Inside

Collaring Wolves in Wilderness / New Rules for Ski Areas / Saluting Bravery



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Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Our mission is to protect National Forests and to reform the U.S. Forest Service by advocating environmental ethics, educating citizens and defending whistleblowers.

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Lightning Strikes, Again



In 2014, Cliven Bundy led an armed standoff in Nevada to dispute government regulation of public land grazing. Many commentators saw it as a resurgence of the Sagebrush Rebellion, a movement launched in the 1970s by western conservatives who sought to remove public land from federal ownership. Politicians and personalities endorsed Bundy's battle cry (at least until his true colors appeared in racist commentary that had most supporters running for the hills).

At the beginning of 2016, two of his sons followed in their father's footsteps by leading the armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Their demand: transfer federal lands to state and private ownership.

But something unexpected happened this time around. While a small contingent of radicals did flock to the remote outpost in Oregon, the local community, editorial boards across the country, members of law enforcement and the public at large opposed the militant occupiers. People from around the nation expressed their support for our public lands and the idea that we are all owners and trustees of this splendid estate.

While the occupation has caused great grief for those closest to it, it is our hope that a sliver of good comes from the national conversation that has arisen about the importance of protecting and preserving our public lands.

Sincerely,


Andy Stahl
Executive Director

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Even in the face of violence and threats, thousands of federal employees work each day to protect our public lands. FSEEE salutes their bravery.



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Featured Forest

White River National Forest, Colorado

The White River National Forest, in Denver’s back yard, is a place of superlatives. It is the most visited national forest in the country, attracting more than 10 million people per year. Many come for the world-class skiing; the forest boasts a dozen resorts, including destinations such as Vail, Breckenridge and Snowmass.

This is the spine of the continent. Ten peaks in the White River exceed 14,000 feet. There are eight wilderness areas, offering important habitat for lynx, moose, black bear and many other species.

Some of the most iconic Rocky Mountain scenery is found on the White River’s 2.3 million acres. Massifs ablaze with alpenglow rise above golden aspen slopes, their angles mirrored in high, pristine lakes.

All that scenery—and all those people—lead to passionate debates over how the forest should be used.

In 2014, Forest Supervisor Scott Fitzwilliams shut the door in the face of Big Oil, protecting a cherished slice of the forest called Thompson Divide from exploratory drilling.

Fitzwilliams took to heart the deeply held convictions of thousands who weighed in against the drilling plans. The most valuable attribute of this place isn’t the oil and gas beneath its surface or the timber in its forests.

The White River National Forest remains a profoundly wild place—even with millions of visitors. The people come for the skiing, to be sure. But they also come for the chance to witness some of the most spectacular mountain terrain on the planet. **FN**



In Depth

The Takeover

When the two Bundy boys, Ammon and Ryan, led an armed takeover of a bird sanctuary in Oregon this winter, they had revolution on their minds. They may indeed have sparked a mass movement—but not the one they intended.

For decades, klatches of constitution-wielding activists have railed against federal ownership of land in the West. The so-called Sagebrush Rebellion of the 1970s and 1980s captured the imagination of a handful of disaffected Americans, but simmered outside the larger national consciousness.

The Bundys, along with their father, Cliven, who led a 2014 armed standoff against federal agents over unpaid grazing fees, have gone a long way toward changing that.

On January 2, the Bundy brothers joined a rally in the town of Burns, 30 miles north of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in remote southeast Oregon, in support of Dwight Hammond and his son, Steven, who had been convicted of burning federal land next to their ranch. A judge had recently sent the Hammonds, who had already spent a few months in prison, back to prison to finish mandatory five-year sentences.

At the end of the rally, the Bundy brothers and a handful of heavily armed cohorts drove to the wildlife refuge headquarters and took over several administrative buildings. They vowed to stay until the Hammonds were released and the 300-square-mile refuge was “returned” to the county government or to local residents.

Editorial boards across the country were quick to condemn the occupation. The *Los Angeles Times* labeled the Bundy gang “anti-federal-government zealots,” *The Washington Post* called them “flagrant lawbreakers” and *The New York Times* judged their

arguments to be “amusing hyperbole.”

The constitution, wrote *The Washington Post* editorial board, “explicitly allows the federal government to own and manage land; moreover, states ... explicitly waived any rights over federally owned land when they became states. The arguments otherwise are nothing but self-serving nonsense, and the courts have consistently said so.”

It wasn't just the media literati that condemned the takeover. Conservationists were united in outrage. The occupiers' claim that their actions were necessary for the cause of liberty garnered little support among the general public.

“This country really cares about these places,” Bob Sallinger, conservation director of the Audubon Society of Portland, Oregon, said at a January 19 rally. “This illegal armed occupation needs to end. It needs to be prosecuted and these lands need to be returned to the people.”

Even in Harney County, one of the most conservative in Oregon, (Mitt Romney outpolled Barack Obama 73.5 percent to 23.5 percent in 2012), consensus formed quickly. Many condemned the Hammonds' sentence as overly harsh. Many accused federal land managers of being heavy-handed. But a clear majority wanted the Bundy gang to leave town.

At a January 6 community meeting at the county fairgrounds in Burns, Sheriff David Ward drew loud applause when he told the gathering, “I'm here today to ask those people to go home and let us get back to our lives in Harney County.”

The occupation had a jarring impact on local routines. Schools closed for a week. Law enforcement—FBI agents, state police and officers from adjoining counties—poured into town. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages the refuge, told its 17 employees to stay home indefinitely, as did the local Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management offices.

Outsiders were everywhere. Members of the media and a motley assortment of activists, conspiracy theorists and voyeurs filled the few motels in Burns and the adjoining town of Hines.

At the Silver Spur Motel, on the north side of town, a car carried a message on the driver's door: “IF YOU WERE BORN IN 1980 AND AFTER YOU MAY BE IMPLANTED WITH A GOVERNMENT MICROCHIP WITHOUT YOUR KNOWLEDGE.” A middle-aged man wearing a heavy camouflaged coat stood in the motel parking lot and delivered a rapid-fire soliloquy condemning “the corrupt grand jury system.”

At the wildlife refuge headquarters, on an icy morning less than a week after the occupation began, the scene was even more carnival-like. An eclectic array of vehicles lined the snowy shoulders of the two-lane road that leads to the headquarters. There were television news vans, pickup trucks, road-grimed rental cars. A black SUV with tinted windows and Ohio license plates cruised past, followed by a battered flatbed pickup truck. A dog bawled inside a parked sedan.

A man wearing a vest emblazoned with an American flag rode a horse around the perimeter of the headquarters, holding high another American flag as news cameras clicked.

A tall metal observation tower, built by Civilian Conservation Corps crews, rose above the spectacle. Two men occupied a small room atop the tower. A makeshift wooden ladder leaned against the tower's first section, enabling access to a staircase. The tower

“If we have issues with the way things are going in our government, we have a responsibility as citizens to act on them in an appropriate manner. We don't arm up and rebel. We work through the appropriate channels. This can't happen anymore. This can't happen in America, and it can't happen in Harney County.”

—David Ward, Harney County Sheriff

hasn't been open to the public for years.

Four men stood next to pickup trucks at the base of the tower. A young reporter, notebook in hand, broke off from the media throng and approached the group.

“What do you want?” yelled a man halfway up the tower's stairs.

“I just want to talk to you guys,” she replied.

“Hey, nobody comes up here!” shouted one of the men at the tower's base. The woman turned and walked back to the huddle of reporters.

A protester from the group People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals held a sign urging the adoption of a vegan diet and decrying “animal agriculture” for, among other things, creating “ridiculous armed standoffs.”

A group stood around a bonfire, hands plunged deep in their pockets. Nearby, a sign leaning against a clump of ice-rimed sagebrush offered a description of the U.S. Bureau of Land Management: “Another Intrusive Tyrannical (sic) Government Entity Doing What They Do Best ABUSING POWER & Oppressing the Backbone of America.”

The party ended on February 11, when the final four occupiers surrendered to federal agents. (More than two weeks earlier, authorities had arrested the Bundy brothers and other leaders of the occupation on a remote stretch of Oregon highway. The group's de facto spokesperson, LaVoy Finicum, was shot dead by state police.) Also in custody was the Bundy patriarch, Cliven, who was arrested upon arrival in Portland, where he had traveled to



Bye Bye “Bundystan?”

Nearly two years after leading an armed standoff against federal agents, the law finally caught up with Cliven Bundy. The 69-year-old Nevada rancher was arrested February 11 after stepping off of a plane in Oregon, where he had traveled to show support for the final four occupiers of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge.

In 2014, federal agents rounded up Bundy's cattle after he racked up more than \$1 million in unpaid federal grazing fees. In the confrontation that ensued, heavily armed Bundy supporters aimed their weapons at the agents.

Fearing violence, federal officials backed down. They released Bundy's cattle, which have been roaming freely ever since on tens of thousands of acres administered by the U.S. Park Service and the Bureau of Land Management.

During that time, a wide swath of public lands northeast of Las Vegas was essentially a lawless zone. Some local residents took to calling the area “Bundystan.”

Last summer, scientists under contract with the BLM abandoned their research after shots were fired in their direction. Visitors to the region have described BLM markers torn down and illegal off-road vehicle routes snaking through the desert. Ancient petroglyphs have been marred by gunfire.

As the months went by, federal officials said they had not giving up on enforcing land-use laws in Bundystan. “The wheels of justice move at their own pace,” Interior Secretary Sally Jewell said last summer. “I am confident this issue is going to be appropriately resolved.”

The elder Bundy was a vocal supporter of the Malheur occupation. Even after his two sons were arrested, Cliven Bundy remained defiant. Shortly before his own arrest, he sent a letter to Harney County Sheriff David Ward. Bundy declared that the “Harney County Resource Center”—the militants’ name for the refuge—would not be surrendered.

“This is notice that We the People of Harney County and also We the People of the citizens of the United States DO GIVE NOTICE THAT WE WILL RETAIN POSSESSION OF THE HARNEY COUNTY RESOURCE CENTER,” Bundy wrote.

The day after Cliven Bundy's arrest, authorities filed a six-count criminal complaint alleging he had led a “massive armed assault” against government employees and had let his cattle trespass on public land for more than 20 years. **FN**

support the final four occupiers. The elder Bundy was held on charges related to the 2014 standoff.

After his arrest, Ammon Bundy issued a statement urging his supporters “to use the national platform we have to continue to defend liberty through our constitutional rights.”

“The world is listening,” he said.

The Bundys and their supporters claim ranchers do not need permits to graze their cattle on public land because the federal government is not the legal owner of that land. During the occupation, they carried copies of the constitution in their shirt pockets; their interpretation of the constitution, held with ironclad conviction, lies at the heart of their antigovernment dogma. Cliven Bundy frequently cites the constitution in maintaining that the federal government has no jurisdiction over the land where he grazes his cattle.

The Bundy's interpretation of the constitution has been soundly rejected by the courts and by legitimate constitutional scholars. So has the claim that the federal government has no legal right to manage grazing on public lands.

The most recent rejection came in a case involving another Nevada rancher, Wayne Hage, who grazed cattle on federal land without permits. In mid-January, as the Malheur siege dragged on, the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals resoundingly rejected Hage's claims.

It's not just scofflaw ranchers, however, who buy into the anti-federal-government convictions held by the Bundys and their supporters. Powerful interests have been working for years in an attempt to accomplish the same outcome, albeit in quieter fashion.

Legislators in several western states, including Utah, Idaho, Wyoming and

Public land supporters showed up at demonstrations to oppose the Malheur occupiers. Even on a rainy day in Oregon, conservationists and their allies gathered to express gratitude for federal workers and the lands they manage.



Montana have pushed proposals to study the feasibility of transferring ownership and management of federal lands to the states.

Their arguments are essentially the same as the Bundys': The federal government owns too much land, and vast areas now in the public domain should be given to the states and opened to logging, ranching, mining and other commercial pursuits. Those efforts, and the overall movement to transfer ownership of federal lands to local and private interests, have garnered relatively little national attention—until now.

Evidence abounds that Ammon Bundy is right about one thing: The world is listening. The occupation of the Malheur refuge made people pay attention.

But the Bundys and their lot may be surprised by the reaction from the nation at large. Outside the echo chamber of pseudo-militias and self-taught constitutional scholars, a clear consensus formed: Americans want their public lands to remain public. Those include national parks like Yellowstone and Yosemite, national forests like the White River and the White Mountain, and national wildlife refuges like Malheur, a bird haven established more than a century ago by an overreaching federal land manager named Theodore Roosevelt. **FN**

Land & Water Conservation Fund Restored

It's back. The Land and Water Conservation Fund, which a divided Congress had allowed to lapse last fall, was renewed as part of the omnibus spending bill. The program uses royalties generated from offshore oil and gas drilling for a wide array of conservation efforts. Approximately 7 million acres have been protected with LWCF revenue over the past 50 years.

The fund allows the federal government to purchase private inholdings in national parks and forests from willing sellers. It has also been used to protect historically significant sites around the country.

Reauthorization of the fund was derailed last fall by far-right conservatives led by Utah Republican Rep. Rob Bishop, who is chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee. Bishop criticized the LWCF as a way to "expand the footprint of the federal government."

The fund's revival was widely praised by conservationists and by lawmakers on both sides of the aisle. However, supporters of the popular program want Congress to make the fund permanent.

The spending bill calls for maintaining the fund for the next three years. Federal law allows up to \$900 million to be spent through the LWCF each year.



Fracking Proposed for Ohio National Forest

More than 31,000 acres of Ohio's Wayne National Forest could be opened to oil and gas drilling under a plan announced by federal officials last fall.

Opponents were quick to allege that the new proposal seems virtually identical to plans for hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, on the Wayne that were made in 2011 and 2012. Federal officials backed away from that proposal in the face of widespread public criticism. Those opposed to fracking on the Wayne are again mobilizing.

The Bureau of Land Management, the agency in charge of overseeing underground mineral rights, will prepare environmental assessments as it considers whether to lease land for oil and gas development. "The BLM is committed to the responsible development of oil and gas supplies in a thoughtful and balanced way," the agency announced, "and will work with the Wayne National Forest which manages the surface areas."

A coalition of environmental groups including the Buckeye Forest Council and Heartwood have raised a bevy of concerns. The groups believe the agency has received about 80 "Expressions of Interest" to drill on the national forest. "If even a percentage of those requests are cleared and recommended by the BLM, there will be sizeable footprint and environmental effects," the groups reported.



Forest Service Launches Bottled Water Review

The Forest Service has launched an environmental review of a controversial bottled water operation on California's San Bernardino National Forest.

Nestlé Corp., the largest bottled water company in the nation, taps millions of gallons of water from a well complex near Strawberry Creek even though its permit to do so expired in 1988.

Company officials maintain that the permit remains valid because the Forest Service has failed to process a renewal application. Nestlé pumped about 25 million gallons from the national forest in 2014, according to information posted on the company's website.

Last fall, a trio of conservation groups filed a lawsuit against the Forest Service for allowing Nestlé to withdraw the water without a valid permit. The groups allege that the withdrawals harm plants and animals in the Strawberry Creek watershed.

San Bernardino National Forest officials have formed an interdisciplinary team to examine Nestlé's operations on the forest. They expect to make a decision on a new permit sometime in 2017.



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Helicopters Land in Idaho Wilderness

State wildlife officials have completed an operation using helicopters to track elk in Idaho's Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Area, despite efforts by conservationists to stop them.

In January, the Forest Service gave the Idaho Fish and Game Department permission to land helicopters in the wilderness area, which is the largest in the Lower 48 states. With few exceptions, motorized equipment is not allowed in wilderness areas.

The helicopter landings took place in a three-day span following the Jan. 6 approval. A total of 60 elk were tranquilized and then fitted with collars.

Shortly thereafter, however, Idaho wildlife officials revealed that one of the helicopter crews had captured and collared four wolves, a move that they labeled a "mistake."

"We made a mistake in not clearly communicating mission limitations to one of our helicopter crews," Fish and Game Deputy Director Ed Schriever said. "We will refine our procedures to make sure this doesn't happen again."

Officials with the Salmon-Challis National Forest released a statement saying that capturing wolves "was not part of the authorization by the Forest Service."

"We are fact finding to learn what happened, and how this happened," said Chuck Mark, supervisor of the national forest. "As the authorizing official, I take this matter very seriously."

The wolves were released unharmed, according to state officials.

On January 7, a trio of environmental groups—Wilderness Watch, Friends of the Clearwater and Western Watersheds Project—filed a legal challenge in an attempt to stop the helicopter landings in the wilderness area.

Representatives of the groups said

they believe state wildlife officials want to confirm that wolves are preying on elk and therefore some of them should be killed.

In 2014, Idaho created a Wolf Depredation Control Board with the goal of culling the wolf population. That year, Idaho Fish and Game contracted with a trapper to kill two wolf packs in the wilderness area.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Department estimates there were 770 wolves in Idaho as of April 2014. State wildlife officials have stated that no wolves will be killed in the wilderness this winter, a concession made to resolve a previous lawsuit.

Conservationists contend an increase in wolf populations in recent years has brought the number of elk in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Area into a more natural balance.

"This proposal violates everything that makes wilderness unique," said George Nickas, executive director of Wilderness Watch. "It's an unprecedented intrusion with helicopters for the sole purpose to make wildlife populations in wilderness conform to the desires of managers rather than accept and learn from the ebb and flow of nature." **FN**

NEW RULE FOR SKI AREA WATER USE

The Forest Service has backed away from efforts to secure ownership of water rights on ski areas located on national forests. Instead, the agency will require operators to prove they have access to sufficient water to run a resort.

About four years ago, Forest Service managers released plans to gain control of the water rights, saying they wanted to ensure that the water would not be diverted for non-recreational purposes.

That prompted an outcry from ski area owners and from state and local officials who complained that the agency was attempting a heavy-handed water grab. Resort owners argued that a federal takeover of water rights would diminish the value of their holdings and dissuade them from undertaking necessary, but costly, improvements.

Final terms published this winter in the Federal Register make no mention of transferring water rights to the federal government. Instead, the new directive requires Forest Service managers to ensure that would-be ski area owners have access to sufficient water for snowmaking and other purposes before receiving special-use permits from the agency.

Throughout the four-year controversy, Forest Service managers have insisted that their main objective is to ensure that water springing from national forests is not sold to the highest bidder—a growing concern as populations expand in the arid West.

“Long-term, viable recreational opportunities are an important part of the public benefits derived from national forests,” Leslie Weldon, deputy chief of the Forest Service’s National Forest System, said in a news release. “Ensuring water is available for snowmaking at ski areas operating on our nation’s forests provides for world class winter recreation, which support jobs and strengthen communities.”

In 2012, the National Ski Area Association sued the Forest Service after the agency announced its plans to require ski resorts to transfer water rights to the federal government. A federal judge sided with the ski industry.

The new directive requires applicants to hire hydrologists to demonstrate “sufficiency of water to operate the permitted ski area before permit issuance.”

Ski industry representatives praised the new rule.



“This benefits the recreating public,” Geraldine Link, director of public policy at the National Ski Areas Association, told *The Denver Post*. “The goal here is improving the long-term sustainability for ski areas on federal land. This will encourage further investment by ski areas in water resources and that provides stability and certainty for the local communities in which they operate.”

According to the Forest Service, a total of 122 ski areas operate on about 180,000 acres of national forests around the country. Those resorts attract about 23 million visitors each year.

FORESTS KEY TO FIGHTING CLIMATE CHANGE

In finalizing an international agreement to combat climate change, negotiators in Paris have affirmed the importance of nurturing healthy forests across the planet.

Article 5 of the Paris accord calls on nations to “take action to conserve and enhance, as appropriate, sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases ... including forests.”

The agreement goes on to encourage “results-based payments ... for activities relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries.”

According to the United Nations, deforestation accounts for almost 20 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions—more than is produced by all the world’s cars and trucks and second only to the energy sector.

Deforestation contributes to climate change in a number of ways, according to

the United Nations, including conversion of forests to agricultural uses, infrastructure development and fires.

One way that global leaders seek to limit deforestation is by paying poor countries to leave their forests standing. A United Nations program called Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries has already attracted about \$10 billion in investment, according to *The Huffington Post*, mainly from government sources.

The Paris accord seeks to limit global warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels. However, the agreement carries no concrete penalties for countries that fail to meet their emission targets.

The agreement drew early mixed reviews from conservationists.

In a statement issued just after the final language was released, Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune called the accord “a turning point for humanity.”

“For the first time in history, the global community agreed to action that sets the foundation to help prevent the worst consequences of the climate crisis,” Brune said, “while embracing the opportunity to exponentially grow our clean energy economy.”

The Center for Biological Diversity released a statement criticizing the Paris accord for not going far enough to ensure that global warming is limited to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

“The pollution-cutting pledges in this deal won’t get us anywhere near that critical goal,” said Kassie Siegel of the center’s Climate Law Institute. “It’s like setting up a household budget and then planning to outspend it several times over.” **FN**



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Field Notes

1 **Hot Springs Reopen**
Last fall, officials on Oregon's Umpqua National Forest announced the unexpected and indefinite closure of a popular hot springs. When pushed for a reason, officials claimed that the hot springs posed a public health risk due to elevated levels of E. coli bacteria. After FSEEE pointed out that E. coli in natural hot springs poses no threat to human health (worldwide, there is not a single report of a fecal bacteria-related infection caused by natural hot springs use), the Forest Service reopened the popular recreation site.

2 **Fire Spending Accountability**
In December, the Forest Service attempted to make a bad deal. In exchange for a separate wildfire spending account, the Forest Service would let Congress gut key environmental laws. FSEEE and our members managed to stall this initial attempt (see back page for more detail), but officials have not given up. This year, FSEEE is countering the agency's fire spending rhetoric and rallying our supporters to protect our ecosystems and our laws.

3 **Defending the Lochsa**
In 2011, the Clearwater and Nez Perce National Forests in Idaho proposed swapping almost 40,000 acres of public land for cutover timber land. FSEEE joined supporters in blocking the land exchange when it was first proposed. Now, Senator Jim Risch has resurrected the plan with a proposal to push the land swap through Congress. This winter, FSEEE once again took a stand against the exchange by submitting official comments to the senator and joining forces with opponents of the proposal.

4 **Protecting a National Treasure**
The Continental Divide National Scenic Trail (CDNST) winds its way through the spectacular scenery of Wyoming's Rocky Mountains. But on the Medicine Bow-Routt National Forests, the Forest Service wants to log right along the trail. In January, FSEEE provided comments asking the Forest Service to safeguard the CDNST.



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Battle of the Brave

By Matt Rasmussen,
FSEEE Policy Analyst
and Forest News Editor



©US Fish and Wildlife

"We can have effective disagreements and either find resolution, find compromise, or simply agree to disagree. But we do it with respect for the rule of law, and know that our areas of agreement and cooperation are infinitely more powerful than the differences we may face. Mostly, we face those differences together with open dialogue and open gates—not intimidation and threats."

-Open letter from the staff of the
Malheur National Wildlife Refuge

Often overlooked in the militant occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge is its impact on federal land managers, whose lives—professional and personal—were turned upside down.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, which manages Malheur, employs 16 full-time workers and one part-time worker at the refuge. At least some of those employees—and their family members—reported receiving threats prior to the occupation.

All of them continued to receive paychecks during the occupation. But none was able to set foot on the refuge as the occupation dragged through January and into February.

"I'm afraid to go back at this point," one Malheur employee told Oregon Public Broadcasting. "I would say this is the most disrupted my life has ever been."

This is far from the first time federal land managers have been threatened for doing their jobs. But the armed occupation in remote Harney County, Oregon, cast a particularly dark shadow—one that reached federal employees across the country.

Officials with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service took steps to keep their employees safe, including moving them out of the area.

It's not just the Fish and Wildlife workers who faced disruption. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management offices in Harney County were closed throughout the occupation.

The siege took a serious emotional toll. More than two weeks after the occupation began, Malheur employees posted an open letter to Harney County residents on Facebook.

"It pains each of us that we are missing our obligations to you—as church leaders, as 4-H advisers, as friends, and as school volunteers," they wrote. "We hope to be back soon and pick up where we left off."

The clear majority of Harney County residents wanted the Bundy brigade to pack up and leave. But a majority of local residents also seemed sympathetic to a father-son ranching duo whose incarceration for damaging federal land helped spur the takeover.

But Dwight Hammond and his son, Steven, aren't exactly angels. In 2012, a jury convicted the two for setting fire to federal lands on two occasions. Federal prosecutors say the pair set the first fire to destroy evidence of deer they had poached.

A judge sentenced them both to prison—Dwight for three

months and Steven for one year. The government appealed, saying their convictions carried mandatory five-year sentences. A federal appeals court agreed and the two were sent back to prison.

On January 2, more than 100 residents attended a rally in the town of Burns in support of the Hammonds. After the event, the militants drove to the refuge headquarters and the occupation began.

The Hammonds have a history of conflicts with federal land managers that dates back to the early 1980s.

Forrest Cameron, who served as manager of the Malheur from 1989 to 1999, recently told the news website *The Raw Story* that the Hammonds made death threats to his predecessor. When Cameron was manager, the Hammonds had permits to graze cattle on the refuge. Cameron said they violated the terms of their permits repeatedly.

In 1994, federal workers tried to build a fence around a watering hole that the Hammonds' cattle had used. The Hammonds disabled government equipment to prevent construction of the fence. The two were arrested and charged with impeding, intimidating and interfering with federal officers.

Cameron said that prior to the fence incident, the Hammonds made death threats against him and his wife, as well as to two other refuge employees and their families.

"My wife would take these phone calls, it was terribly vulgar language," Cameron told *The Raw Story*. "They said they were going to wrap my son in barbed wire and throw him down a well. They said they knew exactly which rooms my kids slept in."

Cameron's family moved to Bend, a larger town more than 100 miles away. The families of other Malheur employees also relocated for a time, Cameron said.

The rabble that occupied the Malheur portrayed themselves as brave freedom fighters willing to put their lives on the line to protect ranchers like the Hammonds from an overreaching federal government.

They were right—there's bravery at work here: That shown by federal land managers who do their best to safeguard public lands like Malheur for all of us, even under threat of violence.

Now that takes guts. **FN**

Thank You Activists!

Last fall, we asked our FSEEE supporters to take a moment to call Undersecretary Robert Bonnie and urge him to stop the "Resilient Federal Forests Act of 2015" (H.R. 2647) from becoming law. As you may recall, this dangerous legislation would have gutted key environmental laws and required citizens to post expensive bonds before mounting court challenges against illegal National Forest logging.

We are so pleased to report that, due to the overwhelming response from our members and their grassroots activism, we have succeeded!

Phone calls flooded the Undersecretary's office (where they even began telling people they had the wrong number and to call the Forest Service instead). But FSEEE members were persistent in letting our federal officials know that this bill could not become law.

And this admirable effort made a difference! At the eleventh hour, the problematic environmental provisions were removed from the omnibus appropriations bill to which they had been attached as a rider.

How true are the words of Margaret Mead when she implored: "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

Thank you to all who joined us in this important fight!

