



Written by [Selwyn Duke](#) on January 4, 2016

Armed Bundys, Friends Battle Feds Over Two Ranchers Imprisoned

The Bundys are back. After prevailing in a grazing-rights standoff with Bureau of Land Management (BLM) agents last year, the Nevada ranching clan is again locking horns with the feds. This time Ammon Bundy (shown) is leading an armed group of protesters, which includes his two brothers, who have occupied a federal building at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near Burns, Oregon; the men are taking up the cudgels for a pair of ranchers they claim have been unjustly imprisoned by the central government.



The ranchers, Dwight Hammond, 73, and his son Steven Hammond, 46, have been in conflict with the feds for decades and recently were sentenced to five years in prison. Reports the [Washington Post](#):

Prosecutors accused the Hammonds of committing arson on federal land in 2001 and 2006. The men and their attorneys argued that the fires had been set on their own property — once to prevent the spread of an invasive species of plant and once in attempt to prevent the spread of a wildfire — and had inadvertently burned onto public lands. But prosecutors said the fires were set in attempt to destroy evidence that the Hammonds had been illegally hunting deer on the federal lands.

The two men have previously served prison time for the crimes, but earlier this year a federal appeals court concluded that their initial sentences had been too short — arson on federal property carries a mandatory minimum sentence of five years — and ordered the men back to prison.

The armed protesters were part of a larger rally for the Hammonds on Saturday. Afterwards, writes CNN, the armed group “broke into the refuge’s unoccupied building and refused to leave.” CNN [continued](#):

“We will be here as long as it takes,” said Ammon Bundy, a spokesman for the group. “We have no intentions of using force upon anyone, [but] if force is used against us, we would defend ourselves.”

Bundy is the 40-year-old son of Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy, [who drew national attention last year after staging a standoff](#) with federal authorities over a Bureau of Land Management dispute.

Ammon Bundy said the group in Oregon was armed, but said he would not describe it as a militia. Bundy declined to say how many people were occupying the building.

“We are not terrorists,” he said. “We are concerned citizens and realize we have to act if we want to pass along anything to our children.”

... A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service spokesperson said the agency and the Bureau of Land Management are aware of the armed protesters ... [and] will continue to monitor the situation.”



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Whatever the facts of the Hammond case and whatever the outcome of this protest, critics such as *American Thinker's* Rick Moran point out that "the larger point being made by Bundy et al needs airing." To wit, [writes](#) Moran, "The federal government owns too much land — especially in the western US. Even more to the point, the government manages that land stupidly. Wildlife refuges are a fine idea — within reason. But reason, logic, and intelligence is sorely lacking as the government gives into the demands of greens who weep when a tree is cut down, and thinks saving every insect, varmint, and weed should override the needs of human [sic] beings."

And the amount of land the feds own is staggering. As the Congressional Research Service [reports](#), "The federal government owns roughly 635-640 million acres, 28% of the 2.27 billion acres of land in the United States." And with the vast majority of Uncle Sam real estate lying in the West, it's not surprising fed-citizen range wars arise there. The [central government owns](#) only 0.4 percent of Connecticut and Rhode Island, 0.8 percent of Iowa and New York, and only three states east of Colorado are above the 10-percent mark. Yet the lowest figure among states west of Kansas is just under 30 percent (Montana). In Oregon, where the current controversy rages, the feds own more than half the state. And the Bundys' Nevada holds the record, with the central government laying claim to a whopping 84.5 percent of the land.

Perhaps this suits some state governments, as they receive federal payments for the acreage to compensate them for lost real-estate taxes. Yet it certainly doesn't suit all their residents. As CNN also reported, Bundy stated that "the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge has taken over the space of 100 ranches since the early 1900s. 'They are continuing to expand the refuge at the expense of the ranchers and miners,' Bundy said. He also said Harney County, in southeastern Oregon, went from one of the state's wealthiest counties to one of the poorest."

While CNN wrote that it has not "independently corroborated Bundy's claims," federal land grabs truly are nothing new. As an example, *The New American's* William F. Jasper [wrote](#) last year in "War on the West: Why More Bundy Standoffs Are Coming":

[Chief Judge Robert C. Jones of the Federal District Court of Nevada last year ruled](#) [that the BLM] had been engaged in a decades-long criminal "conspiracy" against the Wayne Hage family, fellow ranchers and friends of the Bundys. Among other things, Judge Jones accused the federal bureaucrats of racketeering under the federal RICO (Racketeer Influenced and Corruption Organizations) statute, and accused them as well of extortion, mail fraud, and fraud, in an effort "to kill the business of Mr. Hage." In fact, the government's actions were so malicious, said the judge, as to "shock the conscience of the Court." Judge Jones granted an injunction against the agencies and referred area BLM and Forest Service managers to the Justice Department for prosecution.

And such trespasses will inspire opposition. As for the current protest, estimates of the number of people at the refuge range from 15 to 150. And while Bundy would not disclose how many are militia members, citing "operational security," some of the protesters are merely local residents.

Yet not everyone in the Burns area supports the effort. The Hammonds have said they don't want the protesters' help and that the group doesn't speak for them. Local resident Monica McCannon [told](#) KTVZ that she doesn't "like the militia's methods." "They had their rally," she continued. "Now it's time for them to go home. People are afraid of them." And the *Washington Post* [quotes](#) Harney County sheriff David Ward as stating, "These men [protesters] came to Harney County claiming to be part of militia groups supporting local ranchers. When in reality these men had alternative motives, to attempt to overthrow the county and federal government in hopes to spark a movement across the United States."



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Whatever the wisdom of the current protest, however, it itself merely reflects a wider, already vibrant movement to resist federal constitutional trespass and tyranny. This has manifested itself in state nullification efforts — in which states recognize federal actions as unconstitutional and thus null and void — targeting central government laws dealing with matters from gun control to ObamaCare. And with Washington trampling states underfoot as it aggregates ever more power, this push-back will only become more intense.



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