

Police say man arrested in US vehicle stolen from refuge

By Keith Ridler
Associated Press

BURNS (AP) — Authorities arrested a man they said was driving a government vehicle stolen from a wildlife refuge being occupied by an armed group protesting federal land policies as the standoff in Oregon's high desert hit the two-week mark.

Kenneth Medenbach, 62, of Crescent was arrested by Oregon State Police at a grocery store in Burns for investigation of unauthorized use of a motor vehicle. It was unclear if he has a lawyer. Medenbach is already facing charges in U.S. District Court in Medford after authorities said he illegally camped on federal land between May and November last year, according to federal court records.

Authorities also say they recovered a second stolen vehicle from the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge but provided no other details. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service previously reported the vehicles had been stolen.

So far, authorities have not tried to remove the group from the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. As the situation drags on, people in the local area are growing increasingly weary and wary of the group.

Cement barriers have been

erected to block streets around the county courthouse in the small eastern Oregon town of Burns, where police from around the state have set up a command center.

About 30 miles to the south at the refuge, other protesters carrying what appear to be military-style rifles scan the snow-covered rangeland from atop an old fire lookout that gives them a sweeping view of roads leading into the area.

"If we all keep a calm about us everything will be OK," Brenda Pointere said Thursday as she exited a Burns restaurant. "It started out calm, but the longer it goes on — you start to hear rumors."

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The occupation started January 2 as a protest over two area ranchers who had been convicted of arson being returned to prison to serve longer sentences.

Afterward, a group led by Ammon Bundy traveled to occupy the refuge to protest the ranchers' return to

prison and demand that the 300-square-mile refuge be turned over to local control.

Bundy said he understood the frustration of Harney County residents. "They have been suppressed to the point where they're ready to act," he told The Associated Press on Thursday inside a heated wildlife refuge building while his brother, Ryan, and two women sat nearby.

Burns, nearby Hines and the local area have been in an economic tailspin for decades after the loss of a lumber mill that some blamed on federal restrictions involving timber harvests. Restrictions on other federal lands are a common theme of frustration.

The Bundys had planned a meeting with community members Friday night, but it was in limbo after county officials said they couldn't use the fairgrounds.

Arizona rancher Robert "LaVoy" Finicum, a spokesman for the group, told reporters Friday that protesters were still hopeful the meeting might occur next week, perhaps Monday, if they can find a location. He criticized local officials for "making sure we have no access to facilities to talk to the residents."

The group has said they won't leave until the ranchers jailed for arson are freed and

the refuge is turned over to local control.

Locals who agreed to be interviewed were themselves conflicted, expressing anger toward federal land policies but bothered by the armed takeover. "I don't agree with anything they're doing right now," Ben McCanna said about the occupiers at the refuge.

But McCanna, 54, also said the ranchers' return to prison was wrong, and that he was irked that the U.S. Forest Service closed off access to one of his favorite camping spots in nearby Malheur National Forest.

Also Friday, the chairwoman of the Burns Paiute Tribe asked federal officials to bring criminal charges if any ancient artifacts are damaged or missing from the refuge currently occupied by the group.

Thousands of ancient artifacts and maps to prehistoric sites are kept at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Tribe Chairwoman Charlotte Rodrigue sent a letter to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service urging federal prosecution, if warranted.

Ryan Bundy has said the group isn't interested in the artifacts, but it wants the refuge land opened to ranchers and loggers.

UCC: memorial planned for students

WINCHESTER (AP) — Officials at Umpqua Community College, where a gunman in October killed nine before turning the gun on himself, say a memorial is being planned for the victims.

UCC Interim President Walter Nolte told the UCC Board of Trustees on Wednesday the memorial will be built in front of the Pacific Power office in Green, just south of Roseburg. A huge flag pole, which will be visible from Interstate 5, will also be erected.

Officials said Pacific Power has already cut down the trees and the company is waiting on one more permit before it begins construction. Other businesses located near Pacific Power will also help with the memorial.

The *News-Review* also reports UCC Strong, a fund created after the shooting, has raised \$1.3 million with United Way. It distributed over \$400,000 so far to families of the deceased and to injured students.

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