

STA: Holm was a key figure in creating speaker series

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Country from Alaska and became a pillar of the Sisters Trails Alliance. More than all this, he was a wonderful friend, who buoyed us with his vigor, optimism, energies, spirit, wisdom and ready smile. STA is larger from his presence and smaller from his passing."

Humphreys went on to say that Holm "drew on his vast well of experience to the benefit of us all – such as creating the STA Speakers Series on trails, outdoor recreation, water, environment and conservation."

In fact, when Holm started the speakers series back in the spring of 2014, he made sure it would get off to a good start by giving the inaugural talk himself. That first presentation was titled "Changing Climate with Impact on Recreational Opportunities in Central Oregon." Holm's talk focused on an historical look at climate change from a geological perspective, with a look at the growing impact of human activity on the environment.

Holm discussed factors that contribute to climate change and devoted a significant portion of the discussion to geophysics, the study of the physics of the Earth and its environment in space. He stated that climate changes have been apparent on Earth over much of the planet's history and that climate change will continue to occur.

He noted, however, that there is considerable evidence to indicate that some of the changes are being exacerbated by human activity. For example, he stated that, in addition to rapidly rising levels of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, methane levels in Earth's atmosphere



PHOTO PROVIDED

The Sisters Trails Alliance has named their speaker series in honor of the late Bjarne Holm.

have risen 150 percent – mostly due to human activity just since the dawn of the Industrial Revolution.

As a geologist, he worked much of his career in Alaska for the oil and natural-gas industry. Because of his extensive geological work there, he personally observed some of the significant effects of climate change in Alaska and had a front-row seat to some of the changes being wrought by warming temperatures on Earth.

These were things of great concern to Holm, and he did his best to help others understand the issues and their impact on the earth and our way of life. But he didn't just talk about it. He was a tireless volunteer and spent countless hours, not only "getting the word out," but also spending time in the trenches as a trail volunteer, working to construct and maintain trails in the Sisters area.

One measure of his dedication is the fact that, even after learning of his diagnosis with a fatal disease, he made sure that all arrangements were in place for the next speaking event in the speaker series he founded – an event he would not live to see. That the series would be named in his honor is keenly appropriate.

Those who took plea deals weigh options

By Andrew Selsky
Associated Press

SALEM (AP) — When Jon Ritzheimer learned that seven fellow occupiers of a national wildlife refuge in Oregon had been acquitted of federal charges last week, he celebrated a thousand miles away.

"I was kind of jumping up and down in the house, singing 'Praise the Lord,'" Ritzheimer said in a telephone interview late Wednesday from his Arizona home.

Ritzheimer pleaded guilty to the same conspiracy charge in a deal with prosecutors two months ago, and he hopes the federal jury's stunning Oct. 27 verdict to acquit key figures in the armed standoff could affect his case.

Ritzheimer said his attorney is talking with prosecutors and withdrawing his guilty plea is a possibility. Lawyers for the 10 other defendants who agreed to plea bargains are having similar discussions, he said.

Seven others face a February trial. Prosecutors are likely considering how to proceed, legal experts say.

They might expect a different outcome in the next trial or they might be more rigorous in jury selection, sweeten plea deals or even go for lesser charges instead, said Tung Yin, a law professor at Lewis & Clark Law School in Portland.

"I would expect the government is thinking long and

hard how to respond to this very surprising verdict, and what should we do going forward," Yin said.

Those who went to trial beat the odds by winning, but for those who opted for plea deals, the acquittals do not justify a request to withdraw a guilty plea, Yin said.

Kevin Sonoff, spokesman for the U.S. attorney's office in Portland, said he could not comment because of ongoing litigation.

The armed group seized the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge on Jan. 2 and occupied it for 41 days to oppose prison sentences for two local ranchers convicted of setting fires and protest federal control of public lands in the Western U.S.

Ritzheimer said the acquittals "put my faith back into the justice system."

But the leaders of the occupation are still in legal turmoil. Brothers Ammon and Ryan Bundy were taken to Nevada this week to face charges stemming from a 2014 armed standoff with federal agents near their father's ranch. Many of those charged in the Oregon occupation also face trial next year in the Nevada case.

Ritzheimer pleaded guilty in August to conspiring to prevent federal employees from doing their jobs at the refuge by threats of force or intimidation. In exchange, prosecutors dropped two other charges. His sentencing is set for May, and prosecutors are

recommending 2-1/2 years in prison.

Even before last week's verdicts, occupier Ryan Payne asked to withdraw his guilty plea.

Yin, the law professor, said Payne might have a case because the foundation of his plea bargain was the ability to reach a deal in Nevada on the charges he faces there. But the deal didn't materialize.

Payne's lawyer also noted that when the deal was made, the federal government had not yet revealed it used informants at the refuge, which could have caused him to evaluate the strength of the case differently.

Ritzheimer said he looks forward to seeing the government's response to Payne's motion.

"I am holding up my end of the deal, to continue to demonstrate that I accept responsibility," said Ritzheimer, a U.S. Marine veteran who lives in suburban Phoenix. "If I do change my plea, it'll be an educated decision down the road."

Ritzheimer told AP that he has seen news stories that the acquittals might embolden militias and that government officials are concerned.

"The government, yeah, they should be afraid," Ritzheimer said. "This act of civil disobedience, if you will, I would compare it to the Boston Tea Party. They were engaging in this kind of behavior two years before the revolution."

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