

National attention may have boosted the protesters’ egos

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The national attention may have boosted the protester’s egos, but it also created a backlash against using the threat of violence to influence federal land policy, Miller said.

“What they’ve done is really hurt those with legitimate beefs with the federal government about how the land should be managed,” he said.

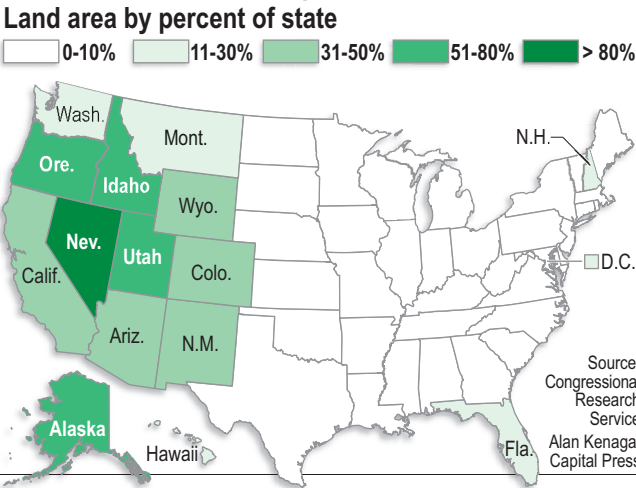
In the public’s mind, the protesters’ hostile tactics have been conflated with the goal of increasing local control over federal property, which weakens their case in the political arena, he said.

“If they wanted an uprising in Congress, they just made it that much harder,” Miller said.

The protesters’ actions won’t bolster attempts to transfer federal land to the states, which already had legitimacy among conservative lawmakers in multiple state legislatures before the refuge takeover, said Martin Nie, a natural resource policy professor at the University of Montana.

“They’re less of a spectacle and should be taken more

Federal land by state



seriously,” Nie said.

The philosophy of Bundy and his followers, meanwhile, is entangled with far-right interpretations of the U.S. Constitution and the power of county sheriffs but does not offer any serious proposals for changing federal land policy, he said.

“I don’t think this spectacle has helped that cause at all,” he said.

Among people who were uneasy about excessive federal authority, though, recent events will likely reinforce the notion that the government is out-of-control, said

Mark Pollot, an attorney who is fighting federal agencies in court on behalf of deceased Nevada rancher Wayne Hage.

Left-wing protests, such as “Occupy Wall Street,” invaded private property and were more disruptive than the refuge standoff but did not elicit a similarly strong-armed reaction from the federal government, he said.

Pollot said that distrust of the government will particularly rise if there are indications that federal agents overreacted during the arrests and did not have to shoot the protesters’ spokesman, La-

Voy Finicum.

If nothing else, the confrontation will show that Western land policy is more than a minor issue and deserves Congressional attention, Pollot said.

“It will add some weight to the debate,” he said.

On the other hand, there’s the risk of a shift away from the political and legal channels that critics such as Wayne Hage have traditionally used in the “Sagebrush Rebellion” against federal land policy, he said.

“I’m concerned there will be people who will now think that’s worthless,” Pollot said.

The restrictions placed on ranchers have gained visibility in Washington, D.C., Salem and Portland, but that doesn’t mean they will be changed, said Bruce Weber, director of Oregon State University’s Rural Studies Program.

It’s unclear how the existence of a perceived “martyr for the cause” will change the situation, Weber said.

“People who believe the Constitution prohibits federal ownership and management of those particular lands won’t change their minds,” he said.

Concerns about growing federal restrictions on public lands long predate the refuge occupation and will likely continue even if the current conflict is resolved.

Bob Skinner, a fifth-generation cattle rancher in the Jordan Valley area, heads a group opposed to the proposed Owyhee Canyonlands wilderness and conservation area, which would cover 2.5 million acres in Oreogn’s Malheur County.

The designation would severely regulate or prohibit grazing and other activities on an area that is bigger than Yellowstone National Park and covers 40 percent of Malheur County.

Skinner said his worst fear is that the arrests of several protesters and the death of Finicum will “activate” people who hold similar anti-government views.

Even so, the incident has brought more visibility to Western concerns over public land.

“I can’t help but think it’s brought some awareness to government over-reach, that might have some impact,” Skinner said.

Rep. Kurt Schrader, D-Ore., compared the stand-

off in southeast Oregon to the “Black Lives Matter” movement, which arose in reaction to conflicts between law enforcement and the black community.

“Rural America faces the same lack of recognition,” Schrader said.

There’s a “palpable sense” that government policy has focused on the economic welfare of urban areas while overlooking rural areas, he said.

As to the effect of the occupation on the federal land debate, Schrader said the impact was uncertain.

While people sympathize with the hardships faced in the rural West, the occupation has also shown they have no appetite for lawlessness, he said.

Schrader said he and other members of Oregon’s Congressional delegation are pushing to reform overly restrictive rules on grazing and logging while protecting the environment on federal property.

“The scales have tipped so far to the left that you can barely do anything there, it’s so cost-prohibitive,” he said. “We’ve got to change the federal policy.”

Supply of H-2A workers from Mexico won’t last, lobbyist says

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — Immigration reform is dead in Congress, but agricultural industry advocates are still pushing the issue as they foresee fewer farmworkers coming from Mexico on guestworker visas in the years ahead.

Mexico’s birth rate is declining, its economy is improving and the Pew Research Center reports 1 million Mexicans returned to Mexico from the United States between 2009 and 2014 while an estimated 870,000 came to the U.S.

That’s what Craig Regelbrugge, senior vice president of AmericanHort in Washington, D.C., told the Washington Growers League’s annual meeting in Yakima on Jan. 26.

A longtime leading agricultural lobbyist on immigration reform, Regelbrugge said the working-age populations of advanced nations are declining, China will become a “fierce competitor” for labor in Southeast Asia and that “unless U.S. baby boomers are able to work beyond death,” immigration reform must allow for more permanent and transitory workers.

“Mexico will continue to



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Craig Regelbrugge, senior vice president of AmericanHort, prepares to speak in Yakima, Wash., on Jan. 26. He says the supply of H-2A foreign farmworkers from Mexico will diminish.

be relevant for us for labor for a number of years, but the writing is on the wall,” he said.

Regelbrugge is involved in the Center for Global Development, which believes labor mobility can lift under-developed countries.

The group believes that in the near term the U.S. and Mexico have an interest in a bilateral approach to labor and that the administrations of both countries could reach an agreement solving issues hampering the U.S. H-2A agricultural foreign visa pro-

gram without action by Congress.

“The politics around labor have gotten so entrenched that we end up with a left-right alliance that kills us. Anti-immigration voices on both sides say foreigners are stealing our jobs and

employers just want cheap labor,” he said.

Anything that is not spelled out in the Immigration and Nationality Act is subject to regulatory interpretation for an administrative agreement with Mexico, Regelbrugge said. It could include a housing allowance, a pilot portable visa, interpret seasonality and even wages, he said.

However, rule-making is not as stable as legislation, he said.

Bush administration H-2A changes were thrown out by the Obama administration, which has been “very hostile” to H-2A, he said.

U.S. H-2A employers should look for workers from other countries, such as Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua that have surplus agrarian workers, he said.

Haiti is another possibility. Cooperatives there are interested in sending workers to the U.S. to earn money and bring back expertise, he said, adding that he visited those cooperatives with some U.S. growers, including Washington apple growers, last June.

It’s a “coin toss,” Regelbrugge said, as to how the Supreme Court will rule in June on President Obama’s executive action deferring

deportation of millions of illegal aliens and granting them work permits.

If the court upholds Obama, the administration will make a “mad dash” to implement the action to “box-in” the next administration, he said. That could force the next administration to address immigration reform early, instead of waiting for its second term, he said.

Regelbrugge credited Rep. Dan Newhouse, R-Wash., for leading 60 of his colleagues in signing a letter a year ago that stopped an E-verify and enforcement-only bill that would have been “devastating to agriculture.”

House Judiciary Chairman Robert Goodlatte, R-Va., has shown some openness to improving visa programs, he said.

“Our politics are very divided. We can all pound the table, but if we don’t figure out how to thread the bipartisan needle we get nothing,” Regelbrugge said.

“We have to keep educating and agitating. If we sit back and wait to 2017, if people don’t talk about this issue and educate lawmakers, we won’t have a basis of support to get something done,” he said.

‘Historically, every single solid time, it starts collapsing on the uses’

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Skinner, a fifth-generation rancher who leads the opposition group, said one faction believes ranchers and other landowners should “settle” with those pushing for establishment of the canyonlands.

But Skinner said agreements with “radical environmental groups” always turn out bad. While they say traditional land uses such as cattle

grazing could continue, such assurances soon fall apart, Skinner said.

“Historically, every single solid time,” he said. “It starts collapsing on the uses. That’s historic, I can tell you.”

Skinner said his contacts among Oregon’s congressional delegation and others in Washington, D.C. indicate Obama will establish the wilderness and conservation area under the Antiquities Act, which can

be done by presidential order and does not require approval of Congress.

A White House media staffer said the administration has “no announcement to make at this time” and did not respond to detailed questions.

Jessica Kershaw, senior adviser and press secretary with the Department of Interior, said in an email that the department has not made a recommendation to the White House,

“but we know that this is an important issue to many, and we will carefully consider all input about how to best manage these lands for current and future generations.”

Brent Fenty, executive director of the Oregon Natural Desert Association, did not respond to a telephone call and email seeking comment.

A press secretary for U.S. Rep. Greg Walden, who represents Eastern Oregon in

Congress, said Walden has repeatedly called upon the administration to say what it plans to do. Early in the wildlife refuge occupation, Walden said Obama could ease some of the tension by backing away from the canyonlands proposal.

“If they don’t plan to do it, they should just come out and say so,” press secretary Andrew Malcolm said in an email.

Skinner, the rancher, con-

sistently distances his cause from the case made by the refuge occupiers.

“I don’t agree with the Bundys at all, period,” he said. “I don’t agree with their methods, especially with grazing issues. But nobody can help but say, ‘I can understand.’ “Greg Walden said it: You understand why people have reached the end of their rope. That’s why they’ve got followers.”

Washington Farm Bureau also has concerns about WDFW driving up land prices

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habitat in the Lake Creek drainage. WDFW considers the land important for sage grouse. The property was a working ranch until three years ago and has been for sale for five years.

- Walla Walla County: 2,560 acres along and near the Touchet River. The land was once used for agriculture and is now enrolled in the federal Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, in which the owner takes land out of farm production in exchange for yearly payments.
- Pacific County: 733

Comments

Written comments on the proposed acquisitions may be submitted via email to Lands@dfw.wa.gov or by mail to Lauri Vigue, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, 600 Capitol Way N., Olympia, WA 98501-1091.

acres around Willapa Bay. The land has been used for agriculture and shellfish farming. WDFW would use the land for recreation and wildlife habitat.

- Thurston County: 343 acres of South Puget Sound prairie. Current uses include farming. The land would

be important habitat for the Mazma pocket gopher, according to WDFW.

- Snohomish County: 280 acres in the Snoqualmie Valley. Current uses include agriculture. The land would become part of the Snoqualmie Wildlife Area.
- Kittitas County: 215 acres in the Teanaway Valley. Current uses of the land include irrigated hay fields and logging. If bought by WDFW, agriculture fields would be restored to wildlife habitat.
- Klickitat County: 60 acres in the Bowman Creek area. The land would become part of the Klickitat Wildlife Area. Grazing would continue

on part of the land, according to WDFW.

- Lincoln County: 59 acres in the Seven Springs area. The land has been used for grazing, according to WDFW. The department intends to use the property for the Swanson Wildlife Area headquarters and fire station. The land would also provide sage grouse habitat.
- Grays Harbor County: 15 acres near the Wynoochee River. The property is now private timberland. WDFW says acquiring the property would improve angler access to the river and protect hatchery steelhead.
- Snohomish County: 13

acres on Ebey Island. The land is now controlled by the state Department of Transportation to offset filling in wetlands elsewhere. WDFW says it would improve access to the island.

WDFW’s property acquisitions have drawn criticism for taking private property off county tax rolls. Following a formula set by the Legislature, WDFW makes payments to counties in lieu of taxes, but the payments are less than the taxes a private landowner would pay.

A bill introduced last year in the Senate that would have increased the payments didn’t pass, nor did a bill that would

have required WDFW to sell as much property as it bought in a particular county.

The Washington Farm Bureau also has concerns about WDFW driving up land prices and gradually taking land out of agriculture production, even if some remains grazing and crop land.

“It’s death by a thousand cuts,” the bureau’s government relations director, Tom Davis, said.

The Farm Bureau, nevertheless, respects a landowner’s right to sell, he said. “We prefer that it not be to a state agency, but if that happens, you have the right to do so.”