



# Oregon's rural radical right

REUTERS/JIM URQUHART

Members of the Oath Keepers provide security at the Sugar Pine Mine outside Grants Pass on April 22, 2015. The owners of the Oregon gold mine called in armed activists, the Oath Keepers, to protect their claim amid a bitter land-use dispute with the U.S. government, which had issued a federal stop-work order.

## How the right-wing Patriot movement is organizing throughout Oregon's rural communities

BY JOANNE ZUHL  
MANAGING EDITOR

Oregon's scenic Harney County, never known for seeking the spotlight, drew the gaze of nearly every Oregonian in January when armed militants occupied the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge south of the small town of Burns.

Over the weeks that followed, as the occupation by out-of-state ranchers continued, we began hearing more about the nationwide movement they represented, a movement with right-wing interpretations of the U.S. Constitution, a belief in the supreme rights of property owners and the sovereign power of local sheriffs. The movement also comes with a disdain for federal authority – to the point of disregard – and a preoccupation with unrestricted gun ownership.

But Harney County was only a flashpoint in what the Rural Organizing Project sees all across the state. The so-called Patriot movement, with armed paramilitary offshoots, has connections to white nationalist groups, radical gun rights organizations, and anti-globalization and anti-environmental movements. They come with names such as the Oath Keepers, The Pacific Patriot Network, The Central Oregon Patriots, Three Percenters, and the

Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association. And like the Cliven Bundy clan of Nevada, many are coming here from other states.

Jessica Campbell is the co-director of Rural Organizing Project, or ROP, a statewide organization helping empower local groups to build communities around human dignity and justice. Her organization has been on the front lines in small, under-resourced communities encountering greater numbers of people, often from out-of-state, looking to recruit them to their ideology.

It's not happenstance the movement is taking hold in Oregon's rural areas. Years of stagnant incomes and poverty, government neglect and economic isolation have left some communities desperate for infrastructure support, Campbell said.

That's why ROP created a toolkit for communities, lawmakers, the media and every other Oregonian to better understand the Patriot movement, its history and ideology, and its tactics. "Up in Arms: A Guide to Oregon's Patriot Movement" was produced with Political Research Associates and the assistance of University of Oregon professors, among others, to create a comprehensive picture of what's happening across the state – Harney County and beyond.

Campbell said these groups are an extension of the militia movement but, perhaps more so than their predecessors, "are really intentional and pretty sophisticated around race politics."

**Joanne Zuhl:** Explain the difference between the Patriot movement we see today and the militia movement of years past.

**Jessica Campbell:** The militia movement is really what we saw in the '90s throughout the Northwest, and the Patriot movement is kind of the academic classification for this newest revival of the movement. It is a different ideology, a different motivation for people who are joining, and the white nationalism isn't the draw or the entry point as it was in the militia movement.

In terms of the threat, what we're really seeing is that a number of counties are suffering pretty serious economic hardships and that's combined with the lack of federal

**"We have worked with communities where people of color are leaving because their children are being threatened, and when their parents try intervening, they're also threatened. They've been told that their kind aren't welcome."**