

# Feds monitor armed protesters but keep distance

## Protesters occupy site to support local ranchers

By **REBECCA BOONE**  
Associated Press

BURNS — Armed anti-government protesters took over a remote national wildlife refuge in Oregon as part of a decades-long fight over public lands in the West while federal authorities are keeping watch but keeping their distance.

Demonstrators came to the frozen high desert of eastern Oregon to contest the prison sentences of two ranchers who set fire to federal land, but their ultimate goal is turn over the property to local authorities so people can use it free of U.S. oversight.

While the move isn't new to Westerners, people across the globe have marveled that federal authorities didn't move to take back the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge. Residents say they haven't seen a large presence of officers, and the government's tactic generally is to monitor protesters from afar but leave them be as long as they don't show signs of violence.

That's how federal officials defused a high-profile standoff last year with Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy over grazing rights. Now, Bundy's two sons are leading the push in Oregon.

### Hopes takeover will prompt others

Ryan Bundy told The Associated Press on Sunday that he hopes the takeover will prompt others to take action across the country to seize control of federally managed land.

"The end goal here is that we are here to restore the rights to the people here so that they can use the land and resources. All of them," Bundy said.

That means ranchers can graze their cattle on the land, miners can use their mineral rights, loggers can cut trees, and hunters and fishers can shoot and cast, he said.

Residents of the tiny town of Burns, 30 miles south of

the wildlife refuge, are concerned about the potential for violence.

Keith Landon, a longtime resident and employee at the Reid Country Store, said he knows local law enforcement officials who fear their kids will be targeted by angry demonstrators.

"I'm hoping most of it's just muscle, trying to push," he said. "But it's a scary thing."

If the situation turns violent, Bundy contends that it will be because of the federal government's actions.

"I mean, we're here to restore order, we're here to restore rights, and that can go peacefully and easily," he said.

### Ranchers plan to turn themselves in

The ranchers whose cause has been the rallying cry also reject the protesters' support. Dwight and son Steven Hammond were convicted of arson three years ago for fires on federal land in 2001 and 2006. They served their original sentences — Dwight, three months and Steven, one year — but a judge ruled that the terms were too short under federal minimum sentencing laws.

Both men were ordered back to prison for four years each. They have said they plan to turn themselves in Monday.

The Bundy brothers say the group plans to stay at the refuge as long as it takes. They declined to say how many people were at the property where several pickup trucks blocked the entrance and armed men wore camouflage and winter gear.

"We're planning on staying here for years, absolutely," Ammon Bundy told reporters over the weekend. "This is not a decision we've made at the last minute."

The FBI is working with local and state authorities to "bring a peaceful resolution to the situation," the bureau said in a statement late Sunday. It said it is the lead investigative agency and would not release details about the law enforcement response to ensure the safety of officers and those at the refuge.



Les Zaitz/The Oregonian

Protesters march on Court Avenue in support of an Oregon ranching family facing jail time for arson in Burns on Saturday. Family members were convicted of the arsons three years ago and served time. But a judge ruled their terms were too short under federal law and ordered them back to prison for about four years each.



Rebecca Boone/AP Photo

Ryan Bundy talks on the phone at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near Burns on Sunday. Bundy is one of the protesters occupying the refuge to object to a prison sentence for local ranchers for burning on federal land.

Some are criticizing the lack of action, saying it is because those occupying the property are white.

Landon, the longtime Burns resident, said he sympathizes with the Bundys' frustrations.

Landon was a logger until the federal government declared the spotted owl a protected species in the 1980s, damaging the local logging industry.

"It's hard to discredit what they're trying to do out there.



Les Zaitz/The Oregonian

Ammon Bundy chats with a protester on Saturday during a march on behalf of a Harney County ranching family in Burns.

But I don't want anybody hurt," he said.

Landon said that on the surface, it doesn't look like much has changed in Burns, a high desert town of about 2,700 people.

"It's weird — I woke up this morning expecting the town to be crawling with this and that agency. But you don't see any of it. They're keeping a low presence," Landon said Sunday.

# Better weather boosts views of gray whales at Oregon Coast

## Yearly sojourn from icy waters of Alaska

By **JUNNELLE HOGEN**  
The Register-Guard

DEPOE BAY — Captain Ahab may not be the one looking through the binoculars, but from the excitement evinced, the coastal travelers in Depoe Bay are searching for a Moby-Dick sighting of their own.

In this case, the Moby-Dick in question is a gray, crustacean-consuming hulk of a whale, and he's followed by upwards of 18,000 lookalikes.

Early Wednesday afternoon, experienced locals, coastal tourists and Ishmaels of the Pacific Northwest peered through several pairs of binoculars provided by the Depoe Bay Whale Watching Center. They were out to catch a glimpse of the not-so-elusive gray whales making their way down the Oregon Coast on a yearly sojourn from the icy waters of Alaska to the milder climate of Baja, Mexico.

The sightings coincided with the Pacific Northwest Whale Watching Week, which runs through Thursday.

Throughout the week, several hundred volunteers have been helping at 26 sites on the Oregon Coast, providing visitors with informational tidbits and guidance to spotting the whales.

Oregon State Parks has more than 300 volunteers trained for the task. Each day of the week, an estimated 100 volunteers have been staffed along the coast. The sites include Ecola State Park near Cannon Beach, Cape Kiwanda, Yaquina Head Lighthouse, the Sea Lions Caves, Umpqua

Lighthouse State Park and Battle Rock Park in Port Orford.

### Frequent sightings

The center in Depoe Bay opened at 10 a.m. Wednesday, and by 11:30 a.m. there were already 11 sightings of the whales. That development was encouraging to Scott Nelson, a longtime state parks coastal volunteer.

Nelson, who volunteered at the Depoe Bay for this year's return migration in the spring, was helping to staff the site again during the whales' southward journey.

"Yesterday, one of our sites had 33 whale sightings," Nelson said.

According to Nelson, most of the barnacled baleen whales spotted have been males, as most of the females already have made their way to the warm waters of Baja.

The weather on the coast Wednesday was sunny, mild and noticeably absent of fog in the morning and early afternoon, which made it prime whale-viewing conditions.

That, combined with the ideal location of Depoe Bay, made the area a hotbed for tourists throughout the day. Hundreds of visitors parked at coastal view areas and took out pairs of binoculars to search high and low for the elusive beasts of the sea.

### Rich history of Depoe Bay

Information in the Whale Watching Center traced back the rich history of Depoe Bay, named after Joshua tribal leader Charlie DePoe.

Depoe Bay, nicknamed by the Whale Watching Center as "The Little Harbor That Could," is known for having the "smallest natural navigable harbor in the world."

The refuge was enlarged

with the help of dredges, eventually growing to its current size. The town and U.S. Highway 101 skirt border a sea wall, with a view of the ocean.

Within the Whale Watching Center, staff members set up a live video feed showing views of the sea just outside of the harbor. Visitors had some of the best viewing successes there.

In the space of half an hour, some of the views picked up outside the harbor showed one whale "spyhopping," or lifting its head above the surface of the water, as well as a whale fluking — which happens when one of the gray whales flips its tail high out of the water.

But the sighting that drew the most attention was one that has been commonly misrepresented — a gray whale blowing.

After gray whales dive underwater for up to five minutes, they breathe three to five times at the surface to replenish oxygen. But while the blow is well-known, its cause is less so — it's a high-pressure gust of air, not water, which creates a spout when met with cold air.

### Novice explorer

One of the sightseers most eager to view the gray whales was visitor Janet Purcell, a proud "novice explorer of Oregon."

Although Purcell, a native of Idaho, said she's made trips to the coast several times, including Newport and Cannon Beach, this was her first experience looking at a gray whale.

"I've only seen pictures up to today," Purcell said. "This has been beyond exciting."

Purcell was ready for the sightings, parking her car with a full view of the coast as she

looked out at the harbor.

Inside at the Whale Watching Center, the sightings elicited mini cheers and moments of attentive silence.

Coastal whale watching companies also were able to capitalize on the excitement.

Depoe Bay, home to Eco-Excursions and Tradewinds Charters, had several boats taking trips out to view the whales within the course of the early afternoon, some with at least a dozen tourists on board.

"It's worth getting up close," Nelson said. "It's like being next to a semi truck."

### Stormy weather

The beginning of the whale watching season wasn't as successful.

Ongoing rain, stormy weather and a restless ocean might have provided a good backdrop for Herman Melville, but it didn't help State Parks Ranger Luke Parsons, who staffs the Whale Watching Center and has helped oversee volunteers.

"It was hard to sight the whales because of the stormy weather," Parsons said, adding that they told volunteers that "if it's just miserable, go home early."

The weather had a more

noticeable impact at the center, which has reported sightings of as many as 50 whales per day during previous winter coastal migrations, and was struggling to get a dozen viewings per day Sunday through Monday.

However, with the improving weather, Parsons was confident that the deluge of visitors to the coast in the latter half of the week would be satisfied with their sojourn.

"There will be thousands of people out," Parsons said.

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