

Showdown further polarizes federal land debate

Experts say incident likely to reinforce opinions on both sides

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI and ERIC MORTENSON
EO Media Group

The showdown between federal agents and armed militants in Southeast Oregon will likely further polarize the public over the management of federal lands, experts say.

For some, the recent killing of an armed protester and arrests of several others will buttress the view they were extremist militants with unrealistic goals.

For others, the government's actions and its siege of remaining protesters occupying the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge will confirm fears of persecution by federal agencies.

Whether the standoff will ultimately lead to changes in the federal government's oversight of the West's vast public lands is also subject to varying interpretations.

Char Miller, an environmental analysis professor at Pomona College, said that Ammon Bundy and the other armed protesters miscalculated the public's reaction to the occupation.

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.

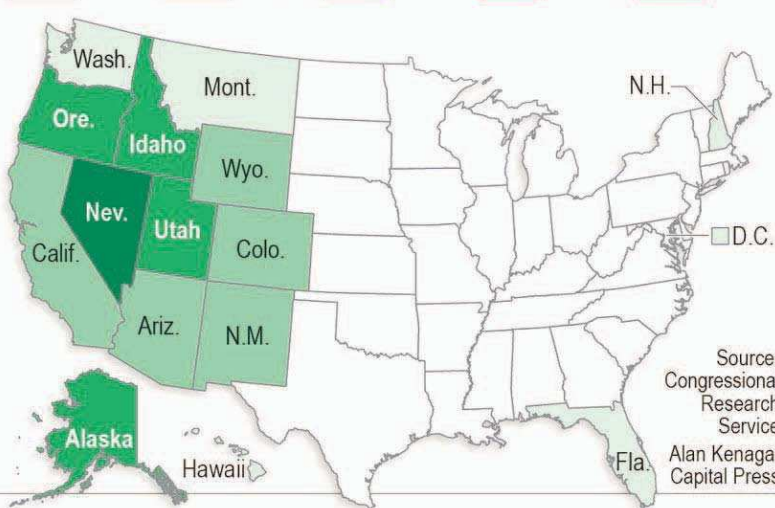
"What they've done is really hurt those with legitimate beefs with the federal government about how the land should be managed," he said.

In the public's mind, the protesters' hostile tactics have been conflated with the goal of increasing

Federal land by state

Land area by percent of state

0-10% 11-30% 31-50% 51-80% > 80%



Source: Congressional Research Service
Alan Kenaga/Capitol Press

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 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, LaVoy 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 Oregon'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 standoff 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 is 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."

PENDLETON Committee takes a look at school sidewalks and public transit

By ANTONIO SIERRA
East Oregonian

Tasked with updating the Pendleton Transportation System Plan, a team of city staff and consultants have moved past identifying Pendleton's transportation issues at-large and onto creating a list of specific options the city could use.

The team's next step will be to whittle down dozens of pedestrian, bike and public transit options into something the city could feasibly address.

The plan's advisory committee met Tuesday to discuss those options.

One of the goals of the update is to provide more safe routes for children to walk to school, especially given that sidewalks are lacking around many Pendleton schools.

For instance, the section of Southwest 31st Street between Hailey Avenue and Marshall Avenue is a common travel route for Sherwood Heights Elementary School, despite not having a sidewalk.

The consultants suggested either building sidewalks on both sides of 31st or installing a raised barrier on the south side of the street to give kids a safe place to walk without breaking the bank.

The consultants also suggested improving travel routes around Pendleton High School, West Hills Intermediate School and Sunridge Middle School by either adding sidewalks, improving existing infrastructure or formalizing the informal "goat paths" students have already been using to get to and from school.

Public transit was also a topic of discussion at the meeting.

A public transit survey conducted by the city revealed that residents are supportive of increasing mass transit opportunities, especially intercity transportation and a Pendleton circulator line.

While the consultants didn't recommend the city expand intercity options beyond what the tribally-run Kayak Public Transit is already doing, they did see the possibility of offering fixed or flex route services.

Stephanie Wright, a senior associate with transit consultant Nelson/Nygaard, said Pendleton's current on-demand Let'Er Bus transit was already well run — the service operated on a \$226,549 budget, with the city covering about 10 percent while state grants and fare paid for the rest.

On the other hand, demand

was outstripping supply as the city frequently runs out of the vouchers used to ride on Let'Er Bus.

One suggestion was to create a fixed route that ran north and south while Kayak continued to run buses that go east and west, ground it already covers well.

Such a move would require a larger operating budget, something that City Finance Director Linda Carter said the city wouldn't be able to afford.

"It's not on the city council's radar right now," she said.

Wright said the fixed route service didn't need to be as comprehensive as the consultants' suggestion and the city could instead opt for a hybrid approach of on-demand and fixed route.

J.D. Tovey, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation planning director, said Kayak's Mission

Metro line already spends a lot of time in Pendleton and draws funding from the same pot of money as Pendleton does. He said the city and the tribes could leverage their funding together to potentially expand services.

As it stands now, the list of proposals is several pages long and covers millions of dollars worth of projects.

Matt Hughart, an associate planner with Kittelson & Associates, said the consulting team would be back in two weeks to gather more public input from residents and students and hold another advisory committee meeting to discuss funding options.

After that, the consultants will work with city staff over a three to four week period to finalize the plan.

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Sherman County wind farm wins safety award

East Oregonian

WASCO — A Sherman County wind farm was recognized on Wednesday for completing its first year in the Oregon OSHA Safety and Health Achievement Recognition Program, or SHARP.

Portland General Electric's Biglow Canyon Wind Farm includes nine employees and 217 wind farms spread across 25,000 acres of wheat fields. The wind farm is one of about 32 locations that currently participate in SHARP, an incentive program for employers to work with their employees

to find and correct safety hazards.

"The SHARP program is important to use because it is driven and owned by the employees," said Ken Brock, safety coordinator for PGE's generating plants in Eastern Oregon. "It continues to push people to look for something better or think outside the box instead of settling for the 'we are good enough' mindset."

Oregon employers that have been in business for more than one year are eligible to apply for SHARP, regardless of size or type of business. A business "graduates" from SHARP after five years in the program.

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