

Forest Service: Fincum memorial must come down

By AMANDA PEACHER
Oregon Public Broadcasting

Supporters of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge occupiers are in conflict with the U.S. Forest Service and other agencies over an impromptu memorial site for Robert "LaVoy" Fincum, the Arizona rancher killed by law enforcement during the occupation.

Rocks, flags, balloons, photos and flowers are in place at the remote site along U.S. Route 395 north of Burns, where the spokesman for the armed occupation died in a confrontation with Oregon State Police troopers.

The Forest Service says the memorial, which sits on Malheur National Forest land, is illegal.

"While the placement of a monument or memorial on public land may help some individuals through difficult times, these memorials are generally of significance to only those most closely tied to a specific person or event," said Mike Stearly, public affairs officer with the Malheur National Forest. "Others may feel that memorials intrude on their experience of the forest."

Two men have been guarding the memorial for nearly three weeks, in response to several instances when the memorial was altered or disappeared completely in the middle of the night. William Fisher, of Salmon, Idaho, and Jamey Landin, of Burns, say these three weeks are the longest the site has been untouched.

"They know we're here," said Fisher, referring to anyone who might want to alter the site. "We're doing something here."

After reaching the 14-day stay limit allowed in the nearby designated campground, the two moved across the road and founded a dispersed campsite. There, they can



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

The U.S. Forest Service has said the roadside memorial to Robert "LaVoy" Fincum on Highway 395 north of Burns must be removed.

stay for an additional 30 days.

Both Fisher and Landin say they are unarmed, and they say they intend to remain peaceful. By law, they are not allowed to carry guns because both men are convicted felons.

The Forest Service said the memorial items are prohibited and need to go, but the agency has not specified a timeline for when it could be removed by the agency.

"The Forest Service does not want to have any conflict or confrontations," said Stearly. "Law enforcement is in contact with those folks, and communications are in

place." In late May, four men were cited for allegedly attempting to install a permanent cross in concrete at the site. The Harney County Sheriff's Office charged the men with third degree criminal mischief, a violation that could carry a \$5,000 fine.

Larry Jay, one of the four who was cited, said he and the other defendants in the case plan to plead not guilty to the offense.

Stearly suggested Fincum's supporters pursue the Forest Service's "Plant-A-Tree" option, which allows donors to plant seedlings in honor of a loved one.

Fisher scoffed at that option. Those trees wouldn't be planted where Fincum was shot, and he dislikes that the seedlings would be planted via a federal government program.

The men said they won't leave until a permanent memorial is in place at the site. They said others will take their place when their stay limits are up.

"We are prepared to do this for as long as we need to," said Fisher. "We have wall tents with wood stoves if we need them. We have snow machines. We have whatever it takes."

Fisher and Landin are both currently unemployed. Before he began camping with Fisher, Landin worked as a gas attendant in Burns. They are now supported by food and monetary donations from Fincum supporters and friends.

"You've got angels," said Fisher. "If you're supposed to be somewhere, then the universe will make sure you're provided for."

Fisher maintains an active Facebook page and occasionally solicits donations through social media.

The recent activity at the memorial has some Harney County residents worried that the tension around the site could lead to further conflict with land agencies or even another occupation.

"There's no need for this whole thing," said Burns resident Helen Patton, a retired school principal. "If they want to honor (Fincum), why don't they do it where he's buried?"

She said the memorial supporters don't seem to have a grasp of the laws they're breaking.

"They're just prolonging this whole thing," said Patton. "It's a strange situation, and it just needs to go away. We just need to get back to normal."

On Sunday, Fincum supporters from as far away as Utah and Wyoming attended a Father's Day ceremony at the site. Fincum's wife, Jeanette, attended and emphasized her hope that supporters would continue her husband's mission.

Fisher said meeting Jeanette Fincum in person strengthened his resolve to remain at the site and stand up to federal agencies.

"They want to fight us just over a small little memorial," he said. "Fine, we're here. You might have killed the messenger, but you haven't killed the message."

HERMISTON

Council to set taxi rates, rules

By JADE MCDOWELL
East Oregonian

The Hermiston city council will discuss a 25 cent increase for its senior and disabled taxi program during its Monday meeting.

The council also will consider adoption of a set of policies governing the program, which uses taxpayer money to subsidize taxi rides for senior and disabled Hermiston residents.

Assistant city manager Mark Morgan said the price was set at \$2 per ride in 2010. Since then minimum wage has risen \$1.10 per hour and will continue to rise 50 cents per year through 2022.

"We need to recoup some of those costs," he said.

The taxi ticket program used to be administered by Hermiston Transit Services, which has since gone out of business, and is now under Umatilla Cab Company. Morgan said the transition has caused some confusion with riders who had grown used to certain services, so the proposed policies are meant to "get everyone on the same page."

The policy manual states that personal care assistants and children may accompany the senior and disabled riders for the cost of a ticket, instead of full fare, but a ticket must

be used. Riders who have so many groceries that they take up a seat that could be used for another passenger must use a second ticket to pay for that seat.

The policies also outline rules for passengers, including not eating or drinking in the taxi, and outlines what drivers cannot do, including leaving their taxi unattended to help put away groceries or walk through assisted living facilities looking for a passenger.

The full list of policies can be found under the June 27 agenda online at www.hermiston.or.us.

On Monday the city council also will be asked to make recommendations to the League of Oregon Cities on what its top legislative priorities should be for the coming year.

The council will discuss the LOC's preliminary list during a 6 p.m. work session first.

In a memo to the council, City Manager Byron Smith said his recommendation, based on the "current political situation" in Salem, was for the council to ask the LOC to focus on property tax reform, PERS reform, a transportation package and recreational immunity.

Morgan said rising PERS costs continue to raise costs for the city. Property tax reform is also needed, he said,

particularly adjusting the way assessed value is calculated. The state calculates "assessed value" as the market value the last time the house was sold minus 10 percent, with a cap of 3 percent growth per year. The result, he said, is that two identical houses in the same city can have wildly different assessed values, neither of which match market value. The city would also like to see measures taken to ease compression.

Morgan said additional money for transportation projects is needed, since at this point there is a very small pot of money for bicycle/pedestrian projects and "streets need not apply."

The city also is interested in seeing "recreational immunity" restored for cities. Oregon law used to shield cities from being sued if someone was injured in a public park, but a recent court case ruled that the city's individual employees can still be sued, and the city must defend its employees. The League of Oregon Cities is pursuing legislation that would expand the immunity to include city workers.

The city council meeting will be Monday with a 6 p.m. work session and 7 p.m. regular business meeting at city hall, 180 NE Second Street.

Rodriguez body found at Harris Park, not behind burned garage

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

Editor's note: This story updates and corrects information from a Friday story.

Umatilla County undersheriff Jim Littlefield set the record straight Friday on where police found the body of homicide victim Gabriel Ledezma Rodriguez of Milton-Freewater.

The body was found May 27 near Harris Park southeast of Milton-Freewater, he said.

Police had searched the site of a May 18 fire that destroyed a garage at 83949 Highway 339, Milton-Freewater. Littlefield confirmed, though, that no body was found at that site. The *East Oregonian* in a previous story misreported there was.

Robert Gage Sregzinski, 19, of St. John, Washington, remains a suspect in Rodriguez's murder, though he does not face any charges in the death and police could be looking for others connected to the case.

Rodriguez had been missing since last April. A May 19 search warrant affidavit that Umatilla County sheriff's detective Kacey Ward wrote to investigate arson at the Milton-Freewater home states the Walla Walla Police Department identified Sregzinski as Rodriguez's killer.

Sregzinski on April 28 tried to flee Milton-Freewater police after officers saw guns in his car during a traffic stop.

Police and Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus said Sregzinski fired a shotgun at officers who returned fire, striking Sregzinski.

He remains in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, on 12 charges stemming from the incident, including aggravated murder and unlawful possession of a short-barreled shotgun.

A search of Sregzinski's car turned up guns, black ski masks, rubber gloves, a roll of duct tape and more.

Ward in the affidavit stated Walla Walla police detective Steve Harris on May 4 reported a witness saw Sregzinski shoot Rodriguez in a Walla Walla home in April, roll the body into a carpet and had the witness help move the body to Sregzinski's vehicle. Sregzinski then left to bury the body.

Walla Walla detectives questioned Sregzinski about Rodriguez's death, according to the affidavit, and he mentioned Winesap Road, so detectives looked for the body along the road that runs near Milton-Freewater.

A fire broke out the morning of May 18 at a two-story uninhabited home at 83949 Highway 339, Milton-Freewater, which was a block east of Winesap. An investigation revealed the garage had no power and arson could be involved.

Walla Walla police the day of the fire asked Milton-Freewater officer Dan Lackey to go to the scene and look for a body. He found carpet matching that from the homicide scene, the affidavit states, and a pile of rocks and cement blocks and even said he caught he scent of a dead body.

But Littlefield said police dug up the site and found no body. Instead, police on May 27 later found Rodriguez's body east of Milton-Freewater on Walla Walla River Road near Lincoln Mountain Road.

Sregzinski was in custody at the time of the fire and does not face arson charges. Umatilla County District Attorney Dan Primus said only that the case remains an active investigation.

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.



Sregzinski

Umatilla man in jail after violent confrontations

East Oregonian

A Umatilla man Wednesday pleaded not guilty to 14 counts stemming from accusations he threatened to kill a man.

Orlando Garcilazo Madrigal, 30, around 12:20 a.m. June 8 pointed a pistol at the head of Jesus Tena in his residence at Southgate Village Apartments, 1105 S. First St. Hermiston, according to a report from Hermiston police. Madrigal then tried to pull his ex-girlfriend, Esmerelda Chavez, from a vehicle belonging to Elisha Cribbs.

Cribbs took off with Chavez in the car, according to the report, and Madrigal followed them through town

"attempting to force them off the road multiple times with his vehicle" while in the area of Northeast Fourth Street and East Elm Avenue before fleeing.

The Umatilla County District Attorney's Office charged Madrigal with pointing a firearm at another, fourth-degree assault, three counts each of harassment and unlawful use of a weapon against another, and two counts each of menacing, reckless driving, and recklessly endangering another person. Court records show he pleaded not guilty.

The court set a three-day

trial in the case starting Aug. 9. Madrigal remains in the Umatilla County Jail, Pendleton, in lieu of \$500,000 bail.

Madrigal in 2014 pleaded guilty to second-degree disorderly conduct, a misdemeanor, in exchange for the state dismissing multiple charges of menacing and unlawful use of a weapon against another. He also is the brother of Alonso Madrigal, 23, who was shot and killed March 4 in Hermiston. That case remains an active investigation.



Madrigal

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