

Prosecutor says Ryan Bundy hatched jail escape attempt

PORTLAND (AP) — A federal prosecutor says Oregon standoff figure Ryan Bundy was working on a plan to escape from a Portland jail.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Geoff Barrow dropped the bombshell at a hearing Monday in which Bundy and his brother Ammon sought to be released as they await trial on charges stemming from the January takeover of a national wildlife refuge in Oregon.

In trying to show Ryan Bundy is a flight risk, Barrow said deputies searching Bundy's cell in April found torn sheets braided together in a 12- to 15-foot rope, as well as extra towels, pillow cases and food.

Bundy denied he was attempting an escape, telling U.S. District Court Judge Robert Jones it is "self-serving speculation" and "simply not true."

Barrow said Bundy's excuse to jailers was that he's a rancher and was practicing braiding. In court,



AP Photo/Rick Bowmer, File

In this Jan. 8 file photo, Ryan Bundy walks through the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near Burns. A U.S. District Court Judge ruled that the trial of Ryan Bundy and others charged in the occupation will remain in Portland.

Bundy told the judge he used the rope and towels for additional comfort.

Court records show Bundy hasn't been charged with any crime related to the episode.

The leading figures in January's takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge have been behind bars for nearly six months. They contend the 41-day

occupation was a peaceful protest, and getting out of jail will help them prepare for their September trial on conspiracy and weapons charges.

To win release, the brothers must convince Jones they are not a danger to the community and will return to Oregon in September. Jones said he'll decide Tuesday whether to

release them.

The brothers also face the possibility of being sent to a Nevada jail, where they are accused of taking part in a standoff with federal agents at the ranch of their father, Cliven Bundy.

Judge Jones noted that Ammon Bundy seems unlikely to flee the country. The Emmett, Idaho, resident has a wife, six children, owns a fleet-maintenance business and resides on a property that includes an orchard with 240 apple trees. But the judge worried about him returning for trial.

"He might want to hole up like his father did for two years," he said. "I'm still concerned about that."

Ammon Bundy took the stand late in the hearing, explaining that he and the other occupiers took action to protest the imprisonment of two Harney County ranchers and publicize their belief that the federal government has taken unconstitutional control of too much Western land.

Idaho Power looking for buy-in on solar from customers

By KEITH RIDLER Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho — The Idaho Power electrical utility is proposing the construction of a solar power project that would be funded by customers who take out subscriptions to guarantee it gets built, the company said Monday.

The company recently filed an application with the Idaho Public Utilities Commission to launch the project on land southeast of Boise, which would be the state's first utility-owned solar power production facility.

The 500-kilowatt solar project would involve the installation of solar panels on an area the size of two football fields and power about 730 homes, said company spokesman Brad Bowlin.

It would be a so-called "community solar project" aimed at attracting customers who can't install solar panels on their homes because they rent, live in communities with rules prohibiting solar panels or have houses shaded by trees.

Most of the project's \$1.2 million construction cost would be paid by customers who take out subscriptions, said Bowlin.

If approved by the commission, Idaho Power would offer about 1,500 subscriptions costing \$740 per 320-watt solar panel. Buyers would receive credit for their portion of the solar array's output on their monthly bill over the 25-year life of the project.

"There are a lot of folks who are interested in solar power, and especially locally generated solar power," Bowlin said.

Bowlin said the subscription-based business model is aimed at assessing whether there's enough interest in building the solar project.

The utility has 516,000

customers in Idaho and eastern Oregon. Those who don't want to participate will not face any charges for the project, Bowlin said.

The amount of energy that would be generated by the solar project is a tiny fraction of the 3,200 megawatts the company is occasionally called on to supply on a hot summer day. Much of that is supplied by the company's 17 hydroelectric projects on the Snake River and its tributaries, as well as coal and gas plants, which can produce less expensive power than solar energy.

Bowlin warned that participants won't save money on their monthly energy bills except for a tiny monthly deduction over 25 years that pays back the initial \$740 solar project construction subscription cost.

"This is intended for folks who want to support the development of solar energy," he said.

Meanwhile, the company will learn more about solar energy as costs to produce it decline and regulations come into force requiring reductions in carbon emissions.

The commission will decide whether the project's business model is good for the state and consumers, commission spokesman Gene Fadness said via email.

It wants to make sure customers "will feel their investment makes sense from both an economic and an environmental perspective," he said.

A decision is likely in the fall. If the project is approved, Idaho Power will advertise the program.

It would be built by June unless customers take out less than about 1,200 subscriptions, meaning the project would probably not go forward, Bowlin said.

BRIEFLY

Superintendent steps down amid lead scandal

PORTLAND (AP) — The superintendent of public schools in Portland, Oregon, is stepping down from her role, effective immediately, after the release of a scathing report on the district's handling of high levels of lead found in schools' drinking water.

Carole Smith has been superintendent since 2007. Several weeks after the lead scandal at two Portland schools broke this spring, she announced plans to retire within a year.

But Smith sped up her departure to Monday after the release of the findings of an independent probe. It concluded the district's efforts to test water, fix problems and notify the public have been

inadequate for 15 years.

Tom Koehler, school board chairman, said in a statement that officials will select Smith's interim replacement this summer while searching for a permanent leader.

Man dies going over 100-foot Lava Canyon Falls

STEVENSON, Wash. (AP) — The body of a 25-year-old Beaverton, Oregon, man has been recovered from Muddy River after he slipped and went over the 100-foot high Lava Canyon Falls.

The Skamania County Sheriff's Office received a 911 call on Sunday reporting that James Fowler was trying to across the river just above the falls when he stepped on a partially submerged rock

and the swift water swept him over the falls.

The site was about 20 miles northeast of Cougar, Washington in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

Officials say that Fowler's body was seen floating face down below the falls. A witness tried to reach Fowler but the rugged terrain turned him back.

Search crews aided by a fixed-wing aircraft searched Sunday night and Monday morning. At about 12:30 p.m. Monday, Fowler's body was recovered. His body was taken to the Clark County Medical Examiner's Office.

State penitentiary inmate dies at local hospital

SALEM (AP) — An inmate at the Oregon State

Penitentiary has died at a local hospital, but officials are not yet releasing any details.

The Oregon Department of Corrections issued a release Monday

that said 27-year-old James Howland died unexpectedly and that the Oregon State Police Criminal Investigations Unit is conducting an investigation.

Howland was taken off site for medical care on Friday and was pronounced dead Monday afternoon, officials said. Officials said no other details were available.

Howland has been in the custody of the Department of Corrections since August 2014 and was serving time for four counts of unlawful use of a vehicle in the first degree out of Marion County.

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