

OCCUPATION ENDS

Land management issues persist

By George Plaven
EO Media Group

After 41 days, 25 indictments and one man killed, the armed occupation of a federal wildlife refuge near Burns has come to an end.

The four remaining holdouts surrendered peacefully Thursday.

The underlying issues of rangeland management, however, won't be going away anytime soon.

John O'Keeffe, president of the Oregon Cattlemen's Association, said things are far from perfect between ranchers across the West, the Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service. Environmental regulations are making it harder to get rangeland improvement projects done quickly. Wildfires are getting bigger and hotter, scorching hundreds of thousands of acres. Noxious weeds continue to spread, choking out native vegetation for grazing.

Yet O'Keeffe was quick to condemn the militants who came mostly from out of state to the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, where they protested the sentences of Harney County ranchers Dwight and Steven Hammond and called for federal land to be returned to private citizens.

"What happened in Burns is outsiders coming in and occupying a refuge illegally," O'Keeffe said. "We have a lot of issues to sort out with the agencies, but we absolutely intend to do it through legal channels."

O'Keeffe runs cattle on about 75,000 acres of public land near the tiny community of Adel in isolated south-central Oregon — an average size family ranch, he says. His operation includes grazing permits with both the BLM and Fremont-Winema National Forest.

Ranchers understand the need to support multiple uses on public land, such as recreation and wildlife habitat, O'Keeffe said. But he worries further restrictions might become too much to take.

"There's no guarantees," O'Keeffe said. "Should these government regulations become too burdensome, ranchers could go away. That would create a whole new set of problems."

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*John O'Keeffe,
president of the Oregon
Cattlemen's Association*

Building relationships

The BLM manages grazing permits and leases on roughly 14 million acres in Oregon and Washington. That breaks down to a total of 951,000 permits for the region.

Of those, about 20 belong to Jacob Ferguson. Ferguson is a rangeland management specialist for BLM Vale District in southeast Oregon. His area encompasses 850,000 acres south of Jordan Valley and east of the Owyhee River. From May through October, he travels usually once per week to visit his permittees and monitor conditions on the ground.

See ISSUES, Page A18



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The Eagle/Cheryl Hoefler

The sun rises over the Silvies Valley just south of Seneca near the border of Grant and Harney counties. The standoff at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near Burns ended after 41 days.

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File photo

Pickers stand in the back of the room during a meeting in John Day Jan. 26 where refuge occupiers were expected to speak before being arrested en route. Grant County is considering a resolution condemning the occupation to deter militia from relocating.

County residents speak out against armed militia

County Court considering resolution condemning illegal occupation

By Sean Hart
Blue Mountain Eagle

Even after the remaining refuge occupiers surrendered Thursday morning, Grant County officials plan to continue working on a resolution condemning the occupation.

County Judge Scott Myers said he was pleased the 41-day occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge had finally ended. He said, however, he was concerned militants might be considering a new location to target,

and he did not want that to be Grant County. "It's the logical procession, to some, in that our courthouse is 67 miles from there," he said. "I think concern and awareness should be heightened."

Myers said minor revisions are being made to the draft resolution, but he and the other two County Court members said they would vote to adopt the finalized version, likely at the next meeting Wednesday.

Many residents attended the Feb. 10 meeting to discuss the initial draft. The vast majority of those who spoke out praised the

commissioners for considering the resolution, and many said the language should be even stronger. Janine Goodwin, Prairie City, said the word "illegal" should be added when describing the occupation. She said the county should emphasize that militia groups would not be welcome here.

"There has in fact been considerable chatter openly on the Internet — and, of course, who knows how much behind the scenes — about Grant County as a possible next target," she said.

See SPEAK, Page A18

New faces join Grant County corrections team

By Cheryl Hoefler
Blue Mountain Eagle

CANYON CITY — Two new faces have recently joined the Grant County Community Corrections staff.

Todd McKinley, former Grant County undersheriff, is the new director at the department, and Mike McManus is the adult probation officer.

McKinley began his new job on Dec. 28. The position was vacated by Dean Hoodenpyl, who retired on Dec. 1.

"He (Hoodenpyl) will be missed and his time committed

to the citizens of Grant County greatly appreciated," McKinley said.

McManus has been on the Corrections staff since September 2014, a job previously held by Jim Gravely. He worked at the Harney County Jail for seven years, and prior to that, the Grant County Jail for five years.

Other corrections staff members include Cindy Tirico, juvenile counselor; Roni Hickerson, administrative secretary and case aid; and Charissa Palmer, community service supervisor.

McKinley, a 1990 graduate

of Mt. Vernon High School, began his law enforcement career in 2000 as a reserve deputy with the Grant County Sheriff's Office, and was hired as a full-time deputy in 2001. He had been the undersheriff since 2008.

McKinley said he pursued the job at Community Corrections because he wanted to get hands-on knowledge of how this side of the criminal justice system works.

So far, he's learned that it's a busy position, one that values the support of the community.

"We are all working together to have a safer, better function-

ing society," McKinley said. "Positive input into individual lives is a must, as continual negative input is counterproductive."

McManus, who graduated from high school in Halsey, finished from the corrections academy in 2003 and the probation academy in October 2015.

Community Corrections is responsible for supervising felons, misdemeanants, registered sex offenders and juvenile offenders and supervised bench community service.

See TEAM, Page A18



The Eagle/Cheryl Hoefler

The Grant County Community Corrections staff, from left, Cindy Tirico, juvenile counselor; Roni Hickerson, administrative secretary/case aid; Charissa Palmer, community service supervisor; Todd McKinley, director; and Mike McManus, adult probation officer.



Contributed photo

Prairie City resident Brian Johns suffered serious injuries after a welding accident on Thursday. He was flown to a Portland hospital. Those wishing to help with medical expenses can contribute at the Brian Johns Medical Fund account at GoFundMe.com.

Prairie City man injured in welding-related blast

Donation account set up for Brian Johns

By Angel Carpenter
Blue Mountain Eagle

PRAIRIE CITY — Brian Johns of Prairie City was injured after a 55-gallon drum he was welding exploded at about 5 p.m. Thursday outside his Bridge Street home.

Prairie City resident Chase McClung, who was staying next door, said several neighbors came to assist.

One neighbor, who didn't want to be named, pulled Johns out of the fire, and Dean Hicks used a fire extinguisher to put out the flames.

John Day Police; Prairie City Volunteer Fire Department, including Fire Chief Marvin Rynearson; and John Day Ambulance responded.

Damon Rand of JDPD said, among other injuries, the blast caused significant damage to Johns' lower jawbone area.

McClung said Johns was flown to a Portland hospital.

Donations may be contributed to the Johns Family Medical Fund at GoFundMe.com which was set up by McClung.

"Anyone that knows Brian, knows he is an outstanding member of the community," McClung wrote on the donation website. "He is the kind of guy that would give the shirt off his back to anyone in need."



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