



Written by [William F. Jasper](#) on January 8, 2016

## Oregon Standoff — Rancher Supporters Disagree With Occupation

Dwight and Steven Hammond have many supporters in their hometown area of Burns, Oregon, as well as many sympathizers nationwide, especially among rural populations of ranchers and farmers who identify with their plight. However, few of those supporters appear to support or endorse the armed occupation of the federal wildlife facility by a self-appointed “militia,” considering it misguided, at best, and dangerously counter-productive, at worst.



The Hammonds, father and son ranchers, were prosecuted as terrorists under the federal Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996 for controlled burns on their own property in 2001 and 2006 that spread to bordering federal BLM (Bureau of Land Management) land, causing no real damage to around 150 acres and no threat to lives, homes, or property of other citizens. In fact, the BLM acknowledged that the 2001 fire for which the Hammonds were prosecuted had actually “improved range conditions” on the public lands. By contrast, federal agencies such as the BLM, Forest Service, National Park Service, and Fish & Wildlife Service regularly set “prescribed burns” that get out of control and burn up thousands of acres of forest, grasslands, and habitat, as well as destroying wildlife (including “endangered species”), homes, ranches, cattle and other livestock, and even taking human lives. (See [here](#), [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).)

Controlled or prescribed burning is a common practice for controlling noxious weeds, as well as reducing fuel-load buildup to prevent dangerous wildfires. Federal, state, and local agencies, Indian tribal authorities, and private landowners nationwide regularly use prescriptive burning for these purposes.

We reported in 2013 that, according to the National Interagency Fire Center (NIFC) in Boise, Idaho, during the previous decade, [wildfires annually consumed an average of 5.6 million acres](#), most of it grassland, woodland, and wetland under the control of federal agencies. The enormity and unnatural intensity of these fires is due to [agency mismanagement of these “public lands”](#) — which, incidentally, are increasingly off-limits to the public that pays for them. Many of these destructive fires are the result of actions by federal agencies that lost control of their “controlled burns.” This can happen even under the best of conditions and when proper precautions have been taken. However, many of the devastating wildfires of recent years have been started by federal agents in defiance of common sense and agency protocols, under conditions that even the complete greenhorn would understand to be inherently dangerous and ripe for catastrophic results.

This devastation has been occurring with such frequency and in tandem with other hostile measures and punitive regulations as to signify a systematic burn-em-out, drive-em-out strategy by federal agencies aimed at hardworking, salt-of-the-earth, family ranchers and farmers who are struggling to survive.



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Federal District Court Judge Michael Hogan ruled that imposing a five-year mandatory minimum prison sentence on the Hammonds, as sought by federal prosecutors under the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act, would “shock the conscience” of the court. It “would result in a sentence which is grossly disproportionate to the severity of the offenses here,” he said. The Hammonds’ actions, Judge Hogan reasoned, “could not have been conduct intended” under the antiterrorism law. Judge Hogan used his discretionary authority to sentence Dwight Hammond (now 74 and a model citizen) to three months in prison, followed by three years’ “supervised release.” Dwight’s son Steven (now 45 and a father of three) was sentenced to one year and one day in prison — also to be followed by three years’ “supervised release.” The Hammonds served their sentences starting in 2013. They were also forced to accept a settlement in which they agreed to pay \$400,000 for firefighting costs, and to give the BLM the first option to buy their land if they are forced to sell (which many observers believe is the real motive behind the persecution of the Hammonds). But the Obama Justice Department was not satisfied; it appealed the Hogan ruling and found a judge who would impose the full “terrorist” sentence on the Hammonds.

All of the above information is important to keep in mind when considering the boiling resentment felt by many in rural communities toward federal authorities who have publicly smeared the Hammonds as “arsonists” and “terrorists,” and have now sent them to prison for a second time. Nevertheless, relatively few Hammond supporters appear to be supportive of the armed “militia” effort led by Ammon and Ryan Bundy to occupy the facilities at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge near Burns.

Sheriff Richard Mack, president of the Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association (CSPOA), attended the public rally for the Hammonds in Burns on January 2, along with three other leaders of his national organization. He also led a CSPOA delegation to the 2014 standoff in Nevada, in support of rancher Cliven Bundy, father of Ammon and Ryan. In a January 3 [posting](#) on his CSPOA blog, Sheriff Mack wrote movingly of the peaceful march by the Hammond supporters:

We met at the Safeway parking lot and after a few instructions about where we would be heading, we all started the march. The crowd was estimated at approximately 600 people. As we marched up the street towards the Sheriff’s Office the crowd looked massive as it completely filled the street from side to side for over 2 ½ blocks. It was inspiring!

There was never any sign or chants supporting any kind of violence. The large majority of the protesters were not armed. We stopped briefly by the sheriffs office and threw hundreds of pennies on the walk at the office front door. Many said the pennies represented a “sellout” by the Harney County Sheriff for not stopping the impending arrest of Dwight and Steve Hammond. There is no question that the Hammonds’ rights have been violated by the Federal Government. However, the Hammonds did not want an armed confrontation or violence of any kind, which coincides exactly with the CSPOA platform. So we went there in complete support of the Hammonds and their peaceful approach.

After we passed the Sheriff’s Office we went to the home of Susan and Dwight Hammond. They came outside and waved as numerous protesters laid flowers on their doorstep. A few of us spoke briefly with the Hammonds and offered our support and apologies for what they were going through. They were very gracious.

Then suddenly, with no announcement to do so, the crowd broke out singing, “Amazing Grace.” Yes this group of “radicals and extremists” as the media has often called them, did a “radical” performance of “Amazing Grace.”



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As we headed down the road Dwight Hammond, who has been sentenced to an additional five years for a crime he has served time for and paid all subsequent fines for, yelled to the crowd, “This is not about me, this is about our country.”

The Hammonds, said Sheriff Mack, “have conducted themselves with class and humility. They have exemplified strength, courage, and dignity. We should emulate their patriotic and peaceful spirit and stand with them as they go through this unspeakable federal victimization. We should allow nothing to detract from the Hammonds’ plight and the wonderful rally that was held in their honor. The Hammonds had tears in their eyes as they viewed the huge crowd of well-wishers and thanked each of us for our support.”

“Thus, for the record,” wrote Mack, “CSPOA does not support or condone the occupation by those individuals who have taken over the Federal Wildlife building just outside Burns, Oregon. With all our hearts we appeal to all those occupying the federal facility to immediately vacate the building and to go home to their families!”

It appears that even the Bundy family may be divided on the rightness and wisdom of the occupation, if the leftist National Public Radio and its Oregon Public Broadcasting affiliate are reporting accurately and have not doctored their interview with Cliven Bundy. According to NPR/OPB:

Even Cliven Bundy, Ammon’s father, expressed his hesitation over the protests. “I don’t quite understand how much they’re going to accomplish,” Bundy told OPB. “I think of it this way: What business does the Bundy family have in Harney County, Oregon?”

Hopefully, the occupation will end peacefully and soon, and without gunfire or bloodshed. However, as we pointed out in 2014 ([War on the West: Why More Bundy Standoffs Are Coming](#)), the [enormous federal footprint](#) in the western states, combined with the tyrannical regulatory agenda of the federal agencies and their allies in the militant environmental movement, are guaranteeing that more desperate farmers, ranchers, and rural property owners will be unjustly pushed off of their land — and many, inevitably, will resort to desperate measures.

*Photo at top: AP Images*

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