

The Oregon Standoff: Understanding LaVoy Finicum's Death & the Management of BLM Land

When one talks about the Bundy Family, the first thing that springs to mind is the standoff in Nevada in 2014. However, perhaps even more important is the standoff and occupation at Oregon's Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in 2016. Indeed, the two events are often conflated because Ammon Bundy is the son of Cliven Bundy, the man who stood up to the federal government over "grazing fees" on Bureau of Land Management land.

The occupation was a highlight for both the militia and the sovereign citizen movement as well as proponents of states' rights. The main argument from those occupying the land is that the federal government is mandated by law to turn over the land that they manage to the individual states in which the land sits. This, they argued, was particularly true of the Bureau of Land Management, United States Forestry Service, and United States Fish and Wildlife Service land.

The 2016 Oregon standoff was over two ranchers convicted of arson on federal lands - despite the fact that the men, a father and son pair named Dwight and Steven Dwight Hammond, did not want their support.

Harney County in rural eastern Oregon is one of the largest counties in the United States by land mass, but one of the smallest when it comes to population. With a mere 7,700 people, cows outnumber humans in Harney by a factor of 14-to-1. Nearly three quarters of the land in the county is federally managed. The Malheur National Wildlife Refuge was established by then-President Theodore Roosevelt in 1908. It's a large area of the county and surrounding area at 187,757 acres.

How Federal Land Management Works

While each federal agency manages land differently, it is worth taking a closer look at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) as a template case for how federal land management works in general.

The BLM manages fully 1/8th of all the landmass of the United States. The Bureau was created by then-President Harry S. Truman in 1946, through the combination of two existing federal agencies - the General Land Office and the Grazing Service. Most BLM land is concentrated in 12 Western states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming.

There's truth to the idea that BLM lands are largely lands that no one wanted to settle. The actual land is remnants held for homesteading that no homesteaders actually claimed. Ranchers, however, often use the land for grazing with 18,000 permits and leases held for

155 million acres. There are also over 63,000 gas and oil wells, as well as extensive coal and mineral mining. So while the land might be land that individuals don't want to live on and farm, it is far from without value.

Part of the controversy in both the Nevada and Oregon standoffs was the question of ownership of these public lands. Cliven Bundy did not feel obligated to pay grazing fees for what is ostensibly "public" land that, the argument goes, is not owned by the federal government at all, but no one in particular. Similarly, the men who were convicted of "arson" on federal land weren't terrorists or thrill-seeking firebugs. It was part of a longer-standing dispute with the federal government over their right to graze cattle on the land that started with the pair doing controlled burns that *became* uncontrolled. They became a cause celebre for the Bundy crew, because they were another symbol of the conflict over who rightfully owned the land.

The Oregon Standoff: Understanding LaVoy Finicum's Death & the Management of BLM Land originally appeared in the Resistance Library at Ammo.com. Check out the Resistance Library Podcast for more information on The Oregon Standoff.