

## Experts: Oregon Standoff May Be Small, But It's Just The Tip Of A Growing Militia Iceberg

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[January 8, 2016](#)



Author Judy L. Thomas appears to worship at the altar of the SPLC, but it is interesting to see how such people spin the truth, and to see how worried they are. – Shorty Dawkins Associate Editor

[This article comes from the Kansas City Star](#)

by Judy L. Thomas

The seizure of a federal wildlife refuge in Oregon by armed anti-government extremists has attracted national attention and raised questions about whether the takeover is a powder keg about to blow.

But experts who monitor the anti-government movement say an even greater concern is lurking behind the confrontation that erupted Saturday at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in the high desert of eastern Oregon.

The militia movement, they say, is in the midst of a massive growth spurt at levels even greater than in the early 1990s after the Waco, Texas, standoff and the siege at Ruby Ridge, Idaho. It peaked after the Oklahoma City bombing.

“It’s bigger than anything we’ve seen before,” said Leonard Zeskind, president of the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights. “And it’s not simply a resurgence of the ’90s militia movement; it’s different in many ways. Now it’s much broader.”

The growth of an “insurgent militia movement,” Zeskind said, is the result of a combination of events, including a renewed effort to strengthen gun control laws and the revival of the white nationalist movement over the Confederate flag issue.

[An annual report of militias](#) released this week by the Southern Poverty Law Center identified 276 militia groups in the U.S. — a 37 percent increase over the 202 groups identified in 2014. The Star reported on [the rise of militias](#) as part of [a series on domestic terrorism](#) last year.

The current expansion, according to the Law Center, came in the aftermath of a 2014 standoff between federal authorities and hundreds of armed anti-government activists on the property of Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy. The government said Bundy owed \$1 million for years of grazing his cattle on federal land. It ended peacefully, but authorities were criticized for not prosecuting those involved in the standoff and not collecting the fees.

Although the Oregon takeover is small in comparison, it was “entirely predictable” based on the outcome in Nevada, the Law Center said.

“We believe these armed extremists have been emboldened by what they saw as a clear victory at the Cliven Bundy ranch and the fact that no one was held accountable for taking up arms against agents of the federal government,” Heidi Beirich, director of the Law Center’s Intelligence Project, said in a statement.

Beirich noted that Bundy’s sons, Ammon and Ryan, are among those occupying buildings at the wildlife refuge in Oregon.

“When the federal government was stopped from enforcing the law at gunpoint, it energized the entire movement,” Beirich said. “The fact is, Bundy is still a free man and has not paid the money he owes to the federal government — and the militiamen who aimed rifles at federal agents have gotten away with it.”

#### Oregon conflict

The Oregon confrontation stems from a case involving two ranchers in Harney County who were convicted in 2012 of setting fire to public land.

Dwight Hammond Jr. and his son, Steven, said that they’d set the fires on their land to stop an invasive plant species and prevent the spread of wildfire, and that the blazes had spread unintentionally to federal Bureau of Land Management property. But prosecutors said the ranchers set the fires to cover up their illegal poaching activity. Both were found guilty. Dwight Hammond served three months in prison; Steven served one year. They were then released.

Recently, however, a judge ruled that they hadn’t served enough time under federal law, and they were ordered to report to prison this past Monday. The action prompted an outcry from anti-government groups and ranchers in the area, and the Bundys also took up the cause.

On Saturday, demonstrators participated in a rally and march in the county seat, Burns, Ore., to support the Hammonds and protest what they said was an out-of-control federal government. The rally was peaceful, authorities said, and drew about 300.

But afterward, a group of armed militants split off, went to the wildlife refuge 30 miles away and took it over. Ammon Bundy has been acting as the group’s leader, and they say they won’t back down until the government relinquishes the federal refuge to the people.

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