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‘Oath Keepers’ Declare Mission Accomplished At Lincoln Mine Operation

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[PACIFIC PATRIOTS NETWORK](#)

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by Steve Jess

Fifteen miles outside the town of Lincoln, members of several “constitutionalist” groups including the “Oath Keepers” say they’ve helped prevent a confrontation between several miners and the U.S. Forest Service. The Lincoln County Sheriff contends there was no risk of a confrontation to start with.

Chris McIntire is spokesman for the Idaho three percenters, one of the groups that took part in the armed “security operation” near the White Hope Mine. He says the Forest Service tried to intimidate miners Philip Nappo and George Kornec into giving up their mining claim.

“Stalling techniques, using ignorance of the law, and also sponsoring a media disinformation campaign, is what we would consider strong arm techniques. Those sort of techniques are not to be tolerated, especially from officials who have taken an oath to uphold and defend the constitution of the United States of America.”

The constitutionalists, operating under the banner of the “Pacific Patriots Network”, say they achieved their main objective by forcing the Federal Government to take the two gold miners to court over a disputed mining claim, instead of simply seizing the property and destroying an unauthorized building.

The Oath Keepers and other groups put the word out late last week that they needed help to guard the mine site against “unlawful action” by the Forest Service. McIntire won’t say how many people made the trip to Lincoln to help out, but he says their mere presence spurred the Forest Service to file suit against the miners in Helena Federal court on Tuesday, rather than using force to resolve the matter.

“With our presence here we basically forced the United States Forest Service into a legal discussion, forcing the matter into court. Now, once they’re into court, the miners not only get their due process, but

they're also able to substantiate their claims, both sides are able to provide evidence on why they think it is a lawfully documented private property claim, or if in fact the U.S. Forest Service does in fact have jurisdiction."

The Forest Service and the U.S. Attorney's office, which filed the suit, both decline to comment on the matter, because it is pending in the court.

McIntire says the key to resolving the issue was when Lewis and Clark County Sheriff Leo Dutton made a pledge that federal agencies would take no action against the miners until they had had their day in court.

Dutton says he did make such a pledge.

"And how I can make that assertion is there never was any threat of violence," Dutton says. "I know that Phil Nappo felt there was, but I've talked to the Forest Service, I've talked to others involved, and there is no threat from any federal agency, so it's a relatively sure claim that if they were to do something, it belongs in court, and that's where this will be settled."

The outcome of the White Hope Mine dispute parallels a similar case in Oregon, just three months ago.

"The Oath Keepers of Josephine County are gathering at a piece of property near Merlin. They're in the process of setting up a staging area in order to step in if they're needed by the Sugar Pine miners."

That from a report aired on KDRV television in Medford Oregon in May. In that case, the Oath Keepers' "security operation" ended when a court issued a Cease and Desist order against the Bureau of Land Management to stop action against the miners.

"It was a peaceful operation, although we were running security. No shots fired, no one hurt, and that's what we want," says Mary Emerick, with the Oath Keepers of Josephine County, Oregon.

Emerick traveled to Lincoln to help support the operation there. Although the "presence" of a self-appointed "security patrol" at the site of a dispute is intended to deter the federal government from taking actions that might be "unconstitutional", Emerick admits that "presence" also caused some concern among the people of Lincoln.

"When some of the team arrived in town, they had chosen to wear camouflage and that apparently had bothered some people, and of course they were strangers and they had some weapons with them."

Sheriff Dutton says his deputies talked to some of the "security" people, and he says they responded appropriately.

"The Oath Keepers have kept their word about being peaceable and not the overzealous display in town. They voluntarily cut that back. They've pretty much limited their area to the mine claim so that has worked out well."

Mary Emerick insists their goal is not to intimidate.

"We do as small a footprint as we can when we do these operations, and we like to do it quietly, and that's what we try to do."

While both sides say the situation has de-escalated with the Forest Service filing suit against the miners, the "Pacific Patriots Network" with its undisclosed number of volunteers wearing camouflage and carrying weapons, is not budging. Chris McIntire says they will stay on the mine site until the federal court in Helena assigns a court date to hear the suit. When the miners have an official court date, that's when he says they'll leave.

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