

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

JOINING THE FIGHT FOR JUSTICE

When is a “terrorist” not a “terrorist?”

RANGE magazine has joined with thousands of Americans who are fighting against the excessive punishment meted out to elderly an Oregon rancher and his son. RANGE is an advocate for the people who live and work on the land, and is the recipient of three consecutive Freedom of the Press awards.

“Oregon’s Hammond family is paying a high price for burning a bit of federal land while trying to protect their ranch and range,” says C.J. Hadley, RANGE publisher. “Dwight, 73, and son, Steve, have already served time in federal prison, but the BLM wasn’t satisfied and appealed the sentence to force them to serve the minimum demanded for ‘domestic terrorism’ — five years each.”

RANGE writer Hank Vogler, who wrote two reports on the Hammonds and their situation, asks: “Isn’t it ironic that people in Ferguson, Mo., and Baltimore, Md., can burn their towns down and that’s not domestic terrorism, while the Hammonds burn 127 acres of brush to put out a fire that threatened their livelihood—with verbal permission from BLM—and they are convicted as terrorists? Or could it be they own land that the environmental activists and the government covet on Steens Mountain and the Hammonds have been outspoken critics of land use and management by the government?”

Digital versions of Vogler’s reports, “Enemies of the State” and “Government Tyranny,” can be found on left side of RANGE’s Home Page by visiting www.rangemagazine.com.

Also, it is suspiciously coincidental that former Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid used the word “terrorists” to describe those involved in the Cliven Bundy standoff. Now, the Hammonds are being prosecuted as terrorists. It’s time to connect the dots: the director of the BLM, Neil Kornze, worked for Senator Reid as a policy advisor from 2003 to 2011. (Check “Patterns of Harassment” at www.rangemagazine.com. Click on Special Reports, Fall 2014.)

In the future, will the threat of terrorism charges be the new way to control the land and people who help feed 300 million Americans?

To help the Hammonds with legal costs and to save the ranch (because BLM has first option on it), Hadley suggests sending a check to: The Hammond Family, c/o Sandra Carlon, U.S. Bank, 493 N. Broadway, Burns, OR 97720.

WHY THE HAMMONDS ARE BEHIND BARS

Dwight and Steven Hammond reported to prison on Jan. 4, 2016, and have been given credit for time served. Their fight began when the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Department of Justice prosecuted them as “terrorists” under the 1996 Anti-Terrorism & Effective Death Penalty Act. Their crime? They were convicted in 2010 of setting two fires on their private land and in the process burned less than 140 acres of BLM land, valued at approximately \$150 by presiding Judge Michael Hogan. Of the 19 charges filed against the pair, all charges were dropped except for the setting of the two fires, for which they went to prison—Dwight for three months, and Steven for a year-and-a-day.

Here’s where it gets sticky: Judge Hogan, who presided over the trial, had refused to sentence the Hammonds to the mandatory minimum of five years, saying the sentence is “grossly disproportionate to the severity of the offenses” and would “shock the conscience.”

A determined federal government re-filed, based on the issue the Hammonds should be resentenced to the rest of the mandatory minimum. The 9th Circuit Appeals Court agreed.

The Oregon Farm Bureau (OFB) says, “They [the Hammonds] made mistakes, broke the law, had a fair trial, and paid their debt to society.” However, the OFB continues, despite the judge’s protest, the feds appealed the Hammonds’ sentences and won. The court was compelled to resentence both Hammonds on October 7 to the minimums, unless BLM and DOJ agreed to grant the Hammonds some leniency, which they did not. The Supreme Court declined to take the case after that loss.

“There is no debate about whether the Hammonds broke the law,” according to the OFB. “A jury found that they did. However, OFB believes BLM is guilty of abhorrent overreach in insisting the Hammonds be tried using charges subject to terrorism laws and sent back to federal prison. This prosecution will have a chilling effect across the West among ranchers and others who rely on federal allotments and permits. It will harm the positive relationship many ranchers and organizations have worked to forge with the bureau [BLM], and the hard work that has been done on the range. It also is hypocritical given BLM’s own harm to the range, which goes without consequence. It is unjust. OFB worked quietly behind the scenes with BLM through the spring and summer. That diligent diplomatic effort was fruitless.”

Only a presidential pardon will get these good ranchers out of federal prison. If Dwight serves the full five years, he will be 79 years old when he finally returns home. As Judge Hogan noted, it certainly does “shock the conscience.”

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