

Militias ‘mobilizing’ to support embattled Clark County rancher in clash with federal rangers



Krissy Thornton, right, looks at blood from a taser wound on Ammon Bundy near Bunkerville, Nev. Wednesday, April 9, 2014. Bundy was tased by Bureau of Land Management law enforcement officers. Bundy is the son of Cliven Bundy. (John Locher/Las Vegas Review...

By BEN BOTKIN and HENRY BREAN LAS VEGAS REVIEW-JOURNAL

April 9, 2014 - 10:44 pm



Gift this article



Listen to this article now

-07:02



Presented by NAQVI INJURY LAW

BUNKERVILLE — From near and wide, armed men are trickling toward Cliven Bundy’s ranch, where [the rancher’s fight with the federal government](#) has become a rallying cry for militia groups across the United States.

On Wednesday, that dispute teetered at the edge of deadly conflict, when Cliven Bundy’s family members and supporters scuffled with rangers from the Bureau of Land Management sent to protect the federal roundup of Bundy’s cattle on public land.

One of Bundy’s seven sons was shot with a stun gun, and Bundy’s sister was knocked to the ground; but no one was seriously hurt, and no arrests were made.

By late Wednesday, three militia members — two from Montana and one from Utah — had arrived at the ranch 80 miles northeast of Las Vegas. Other militia groups have inundated the Bundy household with calls and pledges to muster at the site. Their stated goal: to protect the Bundys from tyranny.

They say they are prepared for armed confrontation, but they insist they will not be the instigators if bloodshed happens.

Ryan Payne and Jim Lardy, members of the West Mountain Rangers, made the 12-hour drive from western Montana on Tuesday night. Payne is also a coordinator with Operation Mutual Aid, a national association that describes itself as a coalition of state militias.

“They all tell me they are in the process of mobilizing as we speak,” Payne said.

He didn’t put a specific estimate on how many militia members may come, but he said the groups expected are from places like New Hampshire, Texas and Florida and could number in the hundreds.

“We need to be the barrier between the oppressed and the tyrants,” he said. “Expect to see a band of soldiers.”

Payne, 30, and Lardy, 49, both wore holstered handguns as they spoke, but they downplayed the display of firepower. They wear their weapons daily.

They say the goals are for no one to be harmed, the Bundy family to be protected, and the Bundy property restored.

For now, the militia members will camp on the Bundy ranch. They say the issue isn’t about cattle or grazing rights; it’s about constitutional rights.

“We’re not anti-government,” said Lardy, who cuts firewood for a living. “We’re anti-corrupt government.”

Stephen Dean, 45, an artist from Utah, said he made the trip in hopes of heading off another Ruby Ridge or Waco, referring to deadly confrontations involving federal agents in Idaho in 1992 and in Texas in 1993.

A member of the People’s United Mobile Armed Services, Dean said he also carries weapons more powerful than his firearms: a camera and the Internet. Those tools will document the plight of the Bundy ranch and bring the issue to light, he said. “I’m here to see it does happen differently.”

Serious bloodshed was narrowly avoided earlier in the day, when a BLM ranger shot Ammon Bundy, a son of Cliven Bundy, with a stun gun during a heated confrontation a few miles from the ranch house.

A YouTube video shows protesters and law enforcement officers yelling and threatening each other as trucks involved in the roundup attempt to drive through. The officers have stun guns drawn, and one is trying to push the crowd back with a barking dog on a leash.

Cheryl Teerlink, said Ammon Bundy was hit by a stun gun in his arm, chest and neck, but he shook off the first attempt to incapacitate him. “I pulled the tasers out of him,” Teerlink said.

Shortly before that, Cliven Bundy’s sister, Margaret Houston, was thrown to the ground by a BLM officer, Teerlink said.

The incident unfolded near the intersection of Gold Butte Road and state Route 170, where protesters gathered after they saw BLM vehicles coming down from the range.

The Bureau of Land Management and National Park Service released a statement confirming that one protester had been stunned. The agencies said the incident started when “a BLM truck driven by a non-law enforcement civilian employee assisting with gather operations was struck by a protester on an ATV, and the truck’s exit from the area was blocked by a group of individuals who gathered around the vehicle.”

According to the statement, peaceful protests have “crossed into illegal activity” in recent days, with people “blocking vehicles associated with the gather, impeding cattle movement, and making direct and overt threats to government employees.”

“These isolated actions that have jeopardized the safety of individuals have been responded to with appropriate law enforcement actions,” it said.

Federal law enforcement officers, also heavily armed, are providing tight security to contract cowboys from Utah who were hired by the government for almost \$1 million to round up as many as 900 cattle that Bundy has left to roam on federal land despite not paying grazing fees for the past 20 years.

Two federal court orders issued within the past year called for the rancher’s livestock to be impounded from a vast swath of mountains and desert. That roundup began Saturday on almost 600,000 acres closed to the public during the operation.

As of Wednesday, 352 animals had been rounded up.

[Gov. Brian Sandoval](#) on Tuesday slammed the BLM for creating an “atmosphere of intimidation” and called on the agency to dismantle two “First Amendment areas” it set up for demonstrators well away from any roundup activity.

The former federal judge said he told the agency “that such conduct is offensive to me and countless others.”

“No cow justifies the atmosphere of intimidation which currently exists nor the limitation of constitutional rights that are sacred to all Nevadans,” the Republican governor said.

On Wednesday morning, before news broke of the scuffle between protesters and the BLM, Sen. Dean Heller, R-Nev., sent a statement expressing “great disappointment with the way that this situation is being handled.”

Heller said he spoke to newly confirmed BLM director Neil Kornze and “told him very clearly that law-abiding Nevadans must not be penalized by an over-reaching BLM.”

“After hearing from local officials and residents, and receiving feedback from the Nevada Cattlemen’s Association in a meeting this morning, I remain extremely concerned about the size of this closure and disruptions with access to roads, water and electrical infrastructure,” Heller said. “I will continue to closely monitor this situation, and urge the BLM to make the necessary changes in order to preserve Nevadans’ constitutional rights.”

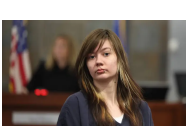
Kornze is a Nevada native who spent eight years as a senior policy adviser for Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid before joining the BLM.

Reached for comment before Wednesday’s altercation between rangers and demonstrators, spokeswoman Kristen Orthman said: “Senator Reid hopes the trespassing cattle are rounded up safely so the issue can be resolved.”

MORE STORIES



Visitors turned away as Hoover Dam remains closed with no reopening date



Las Vegas woman pleads guilty to killing model friend during photo shoot



This Las Vegas Valley ZIP code is one of the fastest growing in country, report says



These 2 Las Vegas casinos among ‘luckiest’ in US, report says



Nevada is one of the worst states to move to, study says



‘Trash’: Victim’s dad blasts probation sentence for driver in Las Vegas teen’s death