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# Moonbattery

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## [The Real Story Behind the Oregon Ranchers](#)

In case media leftists have managed to create confusion as to who are the bad guys regarding the events that led to the occupation at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, readers are referred to a [local account](#) of the conflict from last fall, before outrage boiled over:

The latest scene involved two ranchers being sentenced to five years in federal prison for inadvertently burning about 140 acres of Bureau of Land Management (BLM) rangeland in two separate fires. That is an area big enough to feed about three cow-calf pairs for a year in that neck of the woods. ...

Dwight Hammond, 73 and son Steven Hamond, 46, admitted in a 2012 court case to lighting two different fires. Both fires started on Hammonds' private property.

The first fire was a planned burn to get invasive juniper trees under control. No BLM assistance was required to put it out. They had permission to start the fire.

The second was a defensive backfire, intended to protect their property from lightning fires, which are much more devastating now that there are few prescribed burns thanks to pressure from environmental extremists, due to brush building up. The BLM claims the backfire burned 1 acre of federal land, although it could have been the lightning that burned that acre.

The ranchers are paying the BLM \$400,000 to cover the costs of fighting the fires. In addition,

The two men were sentenced to prison in 2012. Steven served eleven months and Dwight

three. ...

In order to draw the original court case to a close, the two men, in a plea deal, agreed that they would not appeal the 2012 sentence.

The Department of Justice news release said arson on federal land carries a five-year mandatory minimum sentence. Judge Michael Hogan, however, did not give the two men the minimum sentence called for under the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996, saying it would have been “grossly disproportionate” to the crime. He added that a longer sentence would not meet any idea he has of justice and that he didn’t believe congress intended that act to be applied in cases like the Hammond one. A longer sentence than the few months he gave them would “shock his conscience” he said.

The Department of Justice appealed for a full sentence.

Shocked consciences are not a problem at Obama’s Injustice Department.

The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals agreed to a review of the case and District Chief Judge Ann Aiken went ahead with a full sentence – five years in federal prison for both men, minus time already spent.

Obviously this decision was not reached in the interest of justice. Planned fires spilling over onto federal land are hardly unusual, but rarely result in arson prosecutions, much less terrorism charges. To find the government’s motive, we need to go back a little further:

In an effort to stave off what they feared was a pending Clinton/Babbitt monument designation in 2000, a group of ranchers on the scenic Steens Mountain worked with Oregon Representative Greg Walden, a Republican, to draft and enact the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management and Protection Act that would prevent such a deed. The ranchers agreed to work with special interest “environmental” groups like the aggressive Oregon Natural Desert Association and others to protect the higher-than 10,000-foot peak.

A number of ranchers at the top of the mountain traded their BLM permits and private property for land on the valley floor, allowing Congress to create a 170,000 acre wilderness in 2000, with almost 100,000 acres being “cow-free.”

“The last holdouts on that cow-free wilderness are the Hammonds,” said Maupin. Though some still have BLM grazing permits, the Hammonds are the last private landowners in the area.

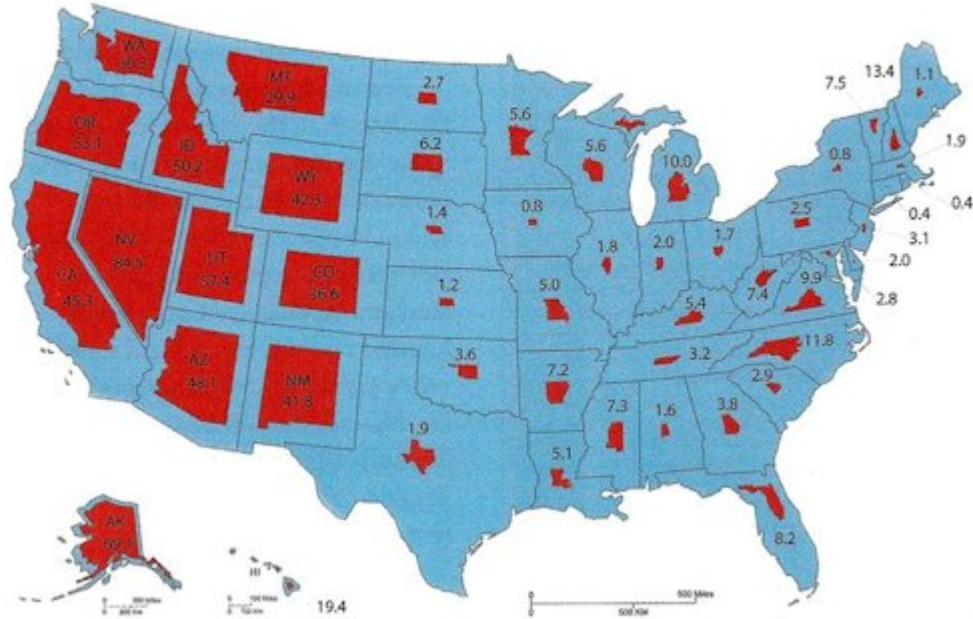
Private landowners are anathema to the Marxists in Washington. Only when all land is owned by faceless bureaurats in the Debt Star can all ranchland be incrementally reduced to “cow-free wilderness.” Then the cows will stop causing imaginary global warming with their flatulence, people will munch [arugula](#) like Obama instead of eating meat, and everyone can live happily ever after.

If only this story were a 1950s Western. It would end with the Hammonds gunning it out with the land-grabbing scoundrels at high noon. Then everyone really would live happily ever after.

The tale boils down to local resistance to federal tyranny. It is no surprise that the media backs up the tyrants by referring to their victims as “terrorists” and “arsonists.” Hitler had his SS; the soft tyrant

Obama has the media. Unfortunately, the protesters at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge have played right into the enemy’s hands. But it isn’t hard to see why they have had enough.

## WHO OWNS THE WEST? Federal Land as a Percentage of Total State Land Area



Data source: U.S. General Services Administration, *Federal Real Property Profile 2004*, excludes trust properties.

There isn’t much land in the West the Feds don’t already own.

On a tip from Guest.



By [Dave Blount](#) |