



The Honorable Raúl Grijalva
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
1329 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

June 7, 2016

Dear Representative Grijalva,

The Center for Western Priorities thanks members of the House Committee on Natural Resources for holding a forum to discuss the growing threat of extremism on America's public lands and appreciates the opportunity to submit comments.

From the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge to the Sugar Pine Mine to the Bundy Ranch, we have seen the movement to seize federal public lands erupt into violence, endangering the lives of law enforcement officials. These conflicts are the product of radical anti-government ideologies that have been nurtured by a small set of elected officials and extremist groups, which are profiled in the Center for Western Priorities' August 2015 report "[Going to Extremes](#)."

While elected officials supporting state efforts to seize public lands frame their arguments with innocuous rhetoric urging "better land management," their actions embolden extremists such as Cliven Bundy who do not "recognize the United States as even existing." In recent years, groups such as the Oath Keepers, comprised of military veterans vowing to disobey "unconstitutional" orders from a "tyrannical" government, have sent armed members to confront Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service officials in defense of miners breaking the law on public lands in Oregon and Montana. The leader of the Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association, a county supremacist group that claims county sheriffs are the highest law enforcement authority in the nation, lent his support to Cliven Bundy during his armed confrontation with the Bureau of Land Management, stating "I don't believe that the BLM has any authority whatsoever."

Not only have these extreme groups threatened the safety of law enforcement officials through armed confrontations, they have led to a disturbing trend of violent threats against federal employees. In recent years a growing number of land management agency employees have received [death threats](#), had their homes vandalized, and even been shot at.

Many Western state legislators who have introduced land seizure bills are directly linked to extremist groups. For example, the most prominent leader of the land seizure movement, Utah State Rep. Ken Ivory, has signed a resolution by the Constitutional Sheriffs and Peace Officers Association asserting that the "arrest of citizens or seizure of persons or property without first notifying and obtaining the express consent of the local sheriff" would not be tolerated. As the de facto leader of the public land seizure efforts, Rep. Ivory has built bridges between mainstream politics and the extreme fringes.

The Center for Western Priorities report, "Going to Extremes," is provided as an attachment.

CENTER FOR WESTERN PRIORITIES

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Center for Western Priorities

Thank you again for taking the growing threat of extremism on America's public lands seriously. From national parks and national forests to wildlife refuges and wilderness areas, our public lands provide immense intrinsic and economic value to all Americans. In the years to come it is critical that elected officials make land management decisions that are informed not by extremists, but by the broad majority of Americans that value our public lands.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Rokala
Executive Director
Center for Western Priorities