



June 13, 2016

Honorable Raul Grijalva
United States House of Representatives
Tucson District Office
738 North Fifth Avenue, Suite 110
Tucson, Arizona 85705

Honorable Bennie Thompson
United States House of Representatives
Jackson District Office
3607 Medgar Evers Boulevard
Jackson, Mississippi 39213

Dear Representatives Grijalva and Thompson

I serve as President of the Friends of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge (FOMR) and I'm one of the founders of this Refuge Friends Group which was established in 1999. I formerly worked at Malheur for 15 years as Refuge Biologist, and, like our other Board members, many visitors and former Service employees who have a long association with Malheur, the seizure of our treasured Refuge was a shock and an emotional trauma from which we still haven't completely recovered. Personally, I am still angry about the damage the militia caused and their corrupt agenda to take public lands privileges away from the public which owns the land. I am angry about the lies they told about the history of Malheur Refuge and about "government overreach." I also found it disturbing that there were elements of the Harney County community that supported the seizure. Their support was based on misinformation and deliberate lies told by the Bundys and their cohorts. I find it disturbing that over half the current refuge staff is considering transferring from Malheur because of the continuing stress due to the seizure.

The militia's choice of Malheur Refuge as a place to make their stand is ironic because staff there has worked hard at building a collaborative effort to provide wildlife habitat on and off the refuge in Harney County, in partnership with local ranchers, other agencies and environmental groups. This calamity tragically kept refuge employees from doing their jobs, damaged refuge grounds and facilities, insulted and distressed the Sovereign Wadatika Paiute Nation of Burns, caused much emotional stress in the local and national community, and threatened Malheur's ability to meet the Fish and Wildlife Services' mission for Refuges: *"working with others to conserve, protect, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people."*

The seizure of Malheur inflicted stress on a much wider public which cherishes such natural places and goes far beyond its negative effects on refuge staff and the Harney County community. It was both a curse and a blessing to FOMR. We were a relatively small Friends Group of about 140 members and we struggled to find people to serve on our Board. During the seizure, our member/donor support grew to

almost 2000 people, and concerned supporters contributed about \$65,000 to FOMR, including some international donors. Our Facebook page grew from about 120 fans, to over 8,000, and, during the seizure, our peak weekly post reach exceeded 200,000 people! We have become the largest Refuge Friends Group in the country, which presents new challenges to our Board.

Malheur is now on the map, for the good and the bad; it's on people's radar. For the bad, the militia movement supporters see it as a rallying symbol for their secessionist cause; this means refuge staff and the community will continue to suffer their presence in the future. Staff safety and refuge security concerns will continue, which means increased funding needs to protect people there. For the good, Malheur is now famous. Thousands of people who have never been to Malheur now want to visit to experience its natural wonders. This will lead to a better economy for Harney County, as for every \$1 Congress appropriates to run the Refuge System, nearly \$5 is returned to local economies in jobs, sales, income and tax revenue. And that's on average. In many areas, wildlife refuges provide an even greater boost to the economy. Malheur is one such economic engine, returning over \$7 for every \$1 appropriated by Congress. Ironically, in spite of their economic value, our refuges are tragically underfunded and understaffed because of actions by our elected representatives.

FOMR's expanded membership and support has led our Board to scramble to update our group's management capability. We have expanded the size of our Board and are working to modernize our web page, social media connections and membership management. We don't have a site to operate our nature store, and our ability to connect with Refuge visitors on-site is hampered by the closure of Refuge headquarters for necessary repairs. Our employees and volunteers now need to be more concerned with their personal safety. We see an important need to reach out to the local Harney County community, to help educate them and garner local support for Malheur Refuge. However, due to our expanded public reach, we now have an opportunity to become a leader in rallying political support for conservation of public lands using Malheur as an icon for a national movement. We are looking for ways to help promote refuges and public lands conservation.

With Kind Regards,

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