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PARKS

Oregon Standoff Ends in Time to Prepare Malheur Refuge for Avian Occupiers

By **Andrew C. Revkin** February 11, 2016 4:21 pm

The #OregonStandoff is over. It was heartening to learn today that the patient, but determined strategy of federal and local law enforcement officials worked, with three of the anti-government trespassers at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge walking out to be arrested and the last holdout coaxed to surrender after hours of YouTube-streamed discussion with the FBI and supporters. Get the details from The Times and Oregon Live.

After the buildings and grounds are swept for hazards and evidence, it'll be time for the refuge staff to return, assess any damage to facilities and gear, then reboot operations — in particular preparing for what should be a spring invasion of a very different kind — vast arrays of avian families and then human ones, returning to marvel at nature's cycles.

I hope to get there, as well, to write about the values that make such places a vital part of the American and global landscape.

I'll leave the rest of this post to the Malheur staff, who've been writing regularly on the refuge's Facebook page, stressing the strong ties to surrounding communities that helped insure that the anti-government trespassers built no

significant local following.

They posted a thankful note today:

We are relieved that the illegal occupation of Malheur NWR is over. While we are now able to look forward to a new beginning, there is still much that needs to be done so that the community and the larger public can be welcomed back to their refuge. We will be available, at the request of the FBI, to help in the long and painstaking job of processing the crime scene, and will be working to assess and repair damages caused by the occupation. Above all, we will begin to revitalize our deep connections in the local community and resume the dialog that has made Malheur a model of collaborative conservation.

Here's their Jan. 22 post about the Harney County Migratory Bird Festival coming this April:

Malheur National Wildlife Refuge is a place for families. Spring is one of the best times of year to view birds returning to the Refuge to rest, eat, and raise their families.

The annual Harney County Migratory Bird Festival is an example of how the local community, the Refuge, and many other partners work together to highlight the result of their collaborative conservation efforts and bring tourism dollars into the county. From birdwatching and photography to hiking and camping to hunting and fishing, the Refuge provides a lot of opportunity for visitors. For every \$1 dollar the Refuge spends, the community sees \$7.02 in economic benefits.

And here's the open letter that was posted Jan. 20:

An open letter to our friends, our supporters, and many curious about

what's going on here.

From: The Staff of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge
To: Our Friends, Partners, and the American Public
Dear Friends,

Many have asked us to comment on the ongoing situation at Malheur NWR. We have refrained because we care deeply for the community, and want to ensure our words do not inflame an already heated situation. However, we believe it is important that our views and position are known.

We believe many in the media (as well as those sympathetic to the illegal occupiers) were surprised to hear that the community—while frustrated with the Hammond situation—did not leap to the support of the militants. We are not surprised.

For over 100 years, our Refuge employees have been members of this community. We study, watch our kids play basketball, worship, commune, and interact with our fellow Harney County citizens—not as a 'we vs. they'—but as an 'us.'

In a community with nearly 40% of working adults engaged in some form of government, we are all touched or involved in the public process. In Harney County, that means we talk. We have cups of coffee. We have arguments. Together we knit our brows, and together we knit scarves. We understand what those currently occupying the Refuge don't understand—that Harney County isn't afraid of tough talk.

We can have effective disagreements and either find resolution, find compromise, or simply agree to disagree. But we do it with respect for the rule of law, and know that our areas of agreement and cooperation are infinitely more powerful than the differences we may face. Mostly, we face those differences together with open dialogue and open gates—not intimidation and threats. We have access to each other, because we are not afraid to confront difficult situations or have difficult conversations.

It pains each of us that we are missing our obligations to you—as church leaders, as 4-H advisers, as friends, and as school volunteers. We hope to be back soon and pick up where we left off.

From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you for your support. We know (as you do too) that it is not our Refuge that has been occupied; this is Harney County's and America's Refuge.

We are excited to be part of the eventual healing process for our community. We believe that this difficult situation will lead to even stronger bonds between the Refuge and the community that has supported us. We feel for you, because we are you.

We will get through this—because:
We. Are. Harney. County.