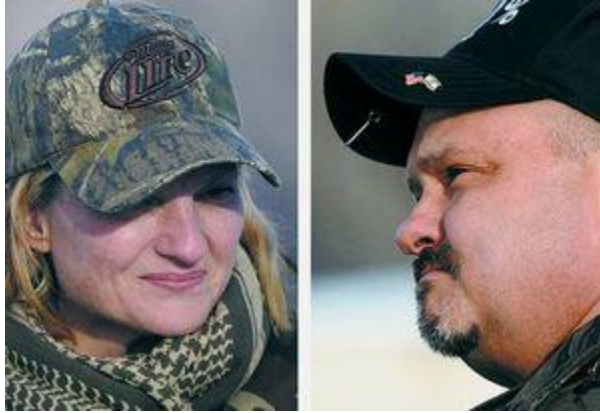


Riggins couple among Malheur holdouts

Sandy and Sean Anderson had a friend record last will and testament before they joined armed group at Oregon refuge



Mark Graves/The Oregonian

Sandy (left) and Sean Anderson from Riggins are two of four remaining occupiers of the Malheur Wildlife Refuge near Burns, Ore.

Kathy Hedberg/Lewiston Tribune

RIGGINS - A Riggins couple embroiled in the ranching standoff at the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in southeast Oregon recorded their last will and testament on a friend's cellphone before they joined the protest.

A close friend and co-worker of Sandy and Sean Anderson, two of the last four people to occupy the refuge in Burns, Ore., said the Andersons recorded the will before traveling to Oregon. Lindsey Dipo, who worked with Sandy Anderson at the Chevron service station in Riggins, said Monday the Andersons' two dogs were willed to him in the recording. The dogs have since gone missing.

"She willed them to me in case something happened to them over there and they didn't return here," Dipo said. "I have on my phone their last will and testament from Sean and Sandy. They made me record them before they went over there. They were thinking something was going to happen."

Dipo declined to disclose the contents of the recording, saying it would "not be fair to Sandy and Sean" while they are still involved in the protest. He and Felicia Olson, who also worked with Sandy Anderson at the Chevron station, said they are caring, compassionate people who "would give you the shirt off their back. Everybody loved them."

The Andersons, along with David Fry and Jeff Banta, are the only ones remaining at the southeastern Oregon refuge after a monthlong standoff led by Ammon and Ryan Bundy of Nevada resulted in the arrests last week of several people and the shooting death of one rancher.

The occupiers have been protesting federal ownership and management of public rangelands in the West.

Idaho County Sheriff Doug Giddings made phone contact with the Andersons Saturday after a friend of theirs sought his intervention.

"I called the FBI and offered my assistance in any way that I might be helpful," Giddings said. He also offered to go to Oregon and enter the building where the occupiers are staying at the refuge.

"The FBI was not comfortable with me going to the building," the sheriff said. "I could go to the checkpoint but I couldn't go (farther). There was no reason to if people weren't coming out."

Giddings, who also portrayed the Andersons as good citizens in Riggins, said the couple did not know the other protesters in advance, but made a few trips to the site before the incident blew up and they became trapped inside.

"When they got in there they didn't know there had been an offer made (to allow some of the protesters to leave) so they didn't get that information and everybody else left," Giddings said. "They're stuck. They can't leave. They (law enforcement) will not let them leave without going through a checkpoint and when they get there they will get zapped."

Despite social media postings from the group and a video depicting Sean Anderson shouting into a camera urging violence, Giddings said the Andersons are not radicals.

In a recent online video, a man identified as Sean Anderson yells: "American people better wake up and get here and fight for your country right now, it is on. If they stop you from getting here, kill them."

"I don't call it radical," Giddings said. "He's just in support of the folks that are fighting with the (Bureau of Land Management) and the land grab that they're taking all the ranches over there. He went over there to support them. He didn't go over to get into trouble. He's not a radical militia - he's just a guy."

Giddings said Sandy Anderson expressed her desire to him on the phone to get out of the refuge and that she was frightened.

"They're not even sleeping," Giddings said. "They're afraid to go to sleep. ... There are lots of threats."

Several attempts Monday to reach Sandy Anderson's cellphone were unsuccessful. A recording says the person owning the phone is no longer taking messages.

Sandy Anderson lived in Riggins while growing up but her family, the Putnams, left several years ago. Sean and Sandy Anderson moved back to Riggins about two years ago. She works at the Chevron station and he is a self-employed electrician.

Co-workers Olson and Dipo said the Andersons are Christians who care about making the world a better place, which is what prompted their interest in the Malheur protest. They did not know the people involved in the protest before visiting the refuge, Olson and Dipo said, but the Andersons made about three trips there before becoming involved in the occupation.

Idaho County Commission Chairman Jim Chmelik, who is working with a separate organization that aims to transfer authority of public lands in the West from the federal government to local control, said he has sympathy for the Malheur protesters but disagrees with their armed tactics.

"Yes, they have my sympathy but I've made it very well known I wish they wanted to have a peaceful protest. You don't need guns to do a peaceful protest. ... Showing up with guns is not going to change the hearts and minds of people."

Chmelik said he believes the protesters should have their grievances heard and he was "appalled" at the shooting last week of rancher Robert "LaVoy" Finnicum.

"They let that guy lie there and nobody walked up to him," Chmelik said. "They treated him no better than a dog dying on the side of the road. We've lost our soul."

Chmelik said many of the things the federal government is accusing the protesters and other local ranchers of doing, such as setting backfires and damaging personal property, the government has also done in greater degree.

"It's a double standard," Chmelik said.

Dipo said that when the other protesters left the site last week, leaving the Andersons, Fry and Banta behind, Sandy Anderson entrusted her two dogs - Bear, a year-old black Labrador retriever, and Scout, a 5- to 6-year-old beagle - to Anthony Gunter, one of the protesters.

Dipo believes Gunter was expected to deliver the dogs to him but he has not seen them.

Gunter called Dipo early Monday and said when he stopped at a truck stop near the Oregon-Nevada border the dogs jumped out of the car and ran away. Dipo said he has been calling dog pounds and other officials trying to locate the animals.

He said he tried to contact law enforcement officials, "but I haven't been able to get hold of law enforcement."

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