

# Whitefish Pilot

## Ammon Bundy set to speak here; groups plan counter rally

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*Ammon Bundy, one of the sons of Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy, speaks during an interview at Malheur National Wildlife Refuge, Tuesday, Jan. 5, 2016, near Burns, Oregon. (AP Photo/Rick Bowmer)*

A group that says it's opposed to government regulation will host Ammon Bundy, leader of an armed occupation of an Oregon wildlife refuge, as part a gathering in Whitefish later this month. While a number of organizations opposed to the conference are planning to hold their own event in response.

On its website, This West is OUR West says the conference scheduled for all day on Oct. 13 at Grouse Mountain Lodge is about "exploring land, water, property and civil rights in the western states." Bundy, who was part of the occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and participated in a standoff against law enforcement officials at his father Cliven Bundy's ranch in Nevada in 2014, is set to speak at the event titled, "A New Code of the West."

The organizer of the event is Laura Lee O'Neil, founder of the group This West is OUR West.

O'Neil described the gathering in an email to the Pilot, saying it is "in order to facilitate a dialogue on issues important to Montanans and others in the Western states." She said the speakers were selected based on their knowledge and expertise regarding these issues.

In response to the conference, the Montana Wilderness Association, in partnership with Montana Wildlife Federation, Montana Human Rights Network, and Love Lives Here, are set to host an event on the same day.

The event is called “Montana Undivided: A Rally for Human Rights and Public Lands,” and is set for 10 a.m. on Oct. 13 at Depot Park in downtown Whitefish.

A group that includes Whitefish residents, tribal representatives and public land advocates denounced the New Code of the West event in a release Thursday from the Montana Human Rights Network, which claims This West is OUR West is rooted in the militia movement of the 1990s and spreads an ideology that is “anti-government, anti-Indian, and anti-environmental movements.”

Bob Brown, former Montana secretary of state and state legislator, lives in Whitefish and is among those speaking out against the event.

“By inviting Ammon Bundy, organizers and participants of this event are attempting to normalize the seizure of public lands and to legitimize threats against federal and local law enforcement,” Brown said in a statement. “This extremist event flies in the face of the values Montanans of all political persuasions share. It has no place in Whitefish or anywhere else in Montana.”

Amy Robinson, Montana Wilderness Association conservation director based in Whitefish, said of the group “Montanans prefer unity over the division they’re trying to sow.”

“Public lands define and unite Montanans because those lands enable our way of life,” Robinson said in a statement. “So any threat to our public lands is a threat to our way of life, and few threats are greater than that posed by the Bundys and their allies.”

This would be the third time in the past eight months that a member of the Bundy family has spoken in northwestern Montana.

In her email, O’Neil took exception to the criticism of the Montana Human Rights Network. She said that while she respects their First Amendment right to speak she does not agree with the “disparaging name-calling” issued in their release.

“Our event is in no way advocating nor supporting an extremist, violent, anti-government, anti-Indian agenda,” she wrote.

She also noted that This West is Our West promotes uniting Western states and protecting rights, and since those rights are clearly state in the Bill of Rights and the U.S. Constitution the group is in no way anti-government.

“It’s shameful that some must resort to name calling and untruthful slander simply because others may have differing opinions,” she said in the email. “It appears they are the ones who are sowing division. And yes, we Montanans do prefer unity over the division, and celebrate our right to peacefully assemble and speak freely and respectfully.”

During the A New Code of the West event, a full list of speakers are scheduled to attend, according to the group’s website. It says the day will include an array of speakers and subjects to provide an updated overview of “The Deep State” and its impact in the West of “bureaucratic agency over-reach, federal Indian policy, public versus private property rights, environmental and jurisdictional issues affecting our country and each of our communities.” The website lists a registration fee of \$75 to \$150 per person for the day.

For more information about the “This is OUR West” event, visit <http://www.thiswestisourwest.com/>

The Montana Human Rights Network issued its take on the conference in brief on its website, at <https://mhrn.org/2018/09/25/codeofwest/>

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