

PUBLIC LANDS

Bundy vows standoff if BLM tries to seize cattle

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Cattle roamed the Gold Butte Area of Critical Environmental Concern in southern Nevada in 2015. Annette Magnus/Special to E&E News

Nevada rancher Cliven Bundy warned yesterday that if the Bureau of Land Management attempts another seizure of his cattle, he foresees the "same scenario" that resulted in the 2014 armed standoff with federal agents.

In a news conference outside the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department headquarters, Bundy discussed his plans following the dismissal this week of criminal charges against him and two of his sons, Ammon and Ryan Bundy, and Montana resident Ryan Payne.

Cliven Bundy and his co-defendants had faced charges stemming from the 2014 showdown with BLM law enforcement officers, sparked when the agency attempted to round up the rancher's cattle in response to the \$1 million in unpaid grazing fines and trespass fees Bundy had accumulated over two decades.

But a federal judge declared a mistrial in December after finding that federal prosecutors had failed to turn over key evidence to defendants.

During a 45-minute news conference, Bundy said he has yet to decide whether he will file civil lawsuits over the two years he spent incarcerated while awaiting the outcome of his criminal trial.

"I have to make a big decision here. Either I'm going to have to forgive and forget all those aiders and abettors, or I have to hold them accountable," Bundy said, referring to BLM, the Justice Department, the Clark County sheriff, and the state brand inspector, who reviews cattle before sales.

In the meantime, Bundy said, he plans to continue to farm and ranch, and acknowledged that his cattle graze as far south as the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, despite the fact that he is not permitted to graze cattle on those lands.

He also reiterated his belief that the U.S. government cannot own broad swaths of public lands, despite federal court rulings to the contrary and Nevada's own constitution.

Bundy declined to say whether he plans to pay any of the fines or fees he owes the federal government. He also said he would seek the assistance of local law enforcement — who he believes can disarm federal agents — if BLM attempted a new roundup of his cattle.

"If the county sheriff didn't come to protect me, we'd go through this same scenario that we've been through," Bundy said. He acknowledged that Las Vegas Sheriff Joseph Lombardo had declined to meet with him yesterday, either in private or in public.

BLM has not indicated whether it plans to pursue a new seizure of the Bundy cattle, many of which graze in what is now the Gold Butte National Monument, but environmental groups called on Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke yesterday to do so.

"Bundy is still an outlaw when it comes to his grazing actions, and the prosecutorial failings in the Bunkerville case do not excuse him from the decades of unauthorized livestock trespass on our public lands," Western Watersheds Project Deputy Director Greta Anderson said. "BLM needs to enforce the law and remove his cattle, which are destroying habitat for threatened species."

Center for Biological Diversity Nevada State Director Patrick Donnelly likewise accused the Trump administration of "coddling violent zealots."

"Zinke needs to stop this illegal grazing, which amounts to theft from the American people and future generations. Our government can't allow Bundy to claim our protected public lands as his personal empire and defend his theft with force and intimidation," Donnelly said.

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility and WildEarth Guardians also urged Zinke to seize the Bundy cattle.

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