

## PUBLIC LANDS

### Refuge managers still haunted by Ore. standoff — survey

Scott Streater, E&E News reporter

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National wildlife refuge managers say last year's armed takeover of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon has left them feeling vulnerable to outside threats, according to a government watchdog group's survey.

Nearly two-thirds of the 104 refuge managers who responded to the survey from Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, or PEER, say they feel visitors to refuges are not as safe as they were five years ago. And 43 percent of respondents disagree, plus 29 percent strongly disagree, with the statement that resource law enforcement "is stronger at my refuge(s) than it was five years ago."

What's more, 48 percent of the refuge managers said the acquittals last year of seven suspects arrested in connection with the Malheur refuge standoff "make my job more dangerous."

A federal jury last fall found the leaders of the 41-day armed occupation, including standoff leader Ammon Bundy, not guilty on conspiracy and other charges ([Greenwire](#), Oct. 28, 2016).

"The people in the best position to know say our nature preserves offer less sanctuary to nature and to its guardians," PEER Executive Director Jeff Ruch said in a statement. "The legacy of the Malheur occupation seems to be that despite greater spending on security there is heightened insecurity for both visitors and refuge staff."

In addition, PEER sent a separate [survey](#) to more than 2,200 employees with the Bureau of Land Management, indicating they also have safety concerns in the wake of the Malheur standoff.

More than a third (38 percent) of the 364 BLM employees who responded said they agree and 32 percent strongly agree with the statement that the Malheur standoff verdict last fall has made their jobs "more dangerous."

What's more, 41 percent said they agree with the statement that they and their colleagues "face threats to our safety due to resource management issues." And 31 percent agree, plus 12 percent strongly agree, that increased security costs in the wake of the standoff "are eating into BLM programs."

Federal prosecutors charged 27 people with conspiracy to impede federal officials through the use of intimidation, force or threats. Some have pleaded guilty, charges against one have been dropped, and some are set to face trial later this month ([Greenwire](#), Jan. 30).

Overall, however, more than half (54 percent) of BLM respondents said they "feel safe" when they are out "in the field" at work, the survey said.

"Although militias have not taken over BLM facilities, its employees reflect a siege mentality," Ruch said in his statement. "It is a sad state of affairs when federal botanists and archaeologists fear attack for doing their jobs."

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