

PRESS RELEASE: Montanans denounce anti-government event featuring Ammon Bundy

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Montanans Speak Out against Event Promoting Extremist, Anti-Government Agenda and “Deep State” Conspiracy Theory
Whitefish residents, tribal representatives, and public land advocates denounce ‘New Code of the West’

Helena, Mont. – Today, Whitefish residents, tribal representatives, and public land advocates are denouncing the “[New Code of the West](#),” a conference of anti-government conspiracy theorists taking place in Whitefish on October 13. Speakers at the event include Ammon Bundy, leader of the armed occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge and a participant in a standoff against law enforcement officials at his father Cliven Bundy’s ranch in Nevada.

“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,” says Bob Brown, a state legislator for 27 years, former Montana secretary of state, and a Whitefish area resident. “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.”

The principal organizer of the event is Laura Lee O’Neil, founder of group “This West is OUR West.” According to [a brief prepared by the Montana Human Rights Network \(MHRN\)](#), This West is OUR West is rooted in the militia movement of the 1990s and “espouses an ideology at the nexus of the anti-government, anti-Indian, and anti-environmental movements.”

O’Neil’s website has provided a platform for another speaker at the Whitefish event – Elaine Willman. One of the most well-known anti-Indian activists in the country through her work with the Citizens Equal Rights Alliance (CERA), Willman advocates for terminating Indian treaty rights and eliminating tribal sovereignty. According the MHRN’s brief, Willman moved to Montana’s Flathead area in 2015 to fight against the Flathead Water Compact.

“CERA uses false stereotypes to create turmoil, divide communities, and undermine tribal governments,” says Rep. Shane Morigeau, a member of the Confederated Salish and Kootenai

Tribes. “Now CERA is aligning with anti-public land radicals to try and spread their hateful message. Montanans will continue to speak up against this scourge on our communities.”

“This event is targeting American Indian people across the state and the west,” adds Carolyn Pease Lopez, former legislator and member of the Crow tribe, which has been a target of one of the conspiracy theories spread by participants of the conference. “We must stand together undivided against bigotry and any efforts to insert anti-Indian sentiment into the political mainstream.”

Another speaker at the event is Montana state Rep. Kerry White, who has advocated for the transfer of public lands to state ownership on behalf of the Utah-based American Lands Council. During the standoff at the Bundy ranch in 2014, White wrote on his Facebook page that he was preparing to leave for Nevada to “stand with Mr. Bundy.” During the Malheur occupation, White called on the sheriff of Harney County, Oregon to protect the occupiers, including Ammon Bundy, against “federal soldiers.”

“By speaking at this event with Willman and Ammon Bundy, Rep. White is aligning himself with a violent, anti-government, and anti-Indian fringe intent on seizing public lands and making it alright to threaten the lives of public land managers and federal law enforcement officers,” says Jan Metzmaker, a 46-year resident of Whitefish and longtime public lands advocate. “Frankly, it’s shameful that any of our state legislators would participate in this event because it so clearly runs counter to who Montanans are as a people.”

Whitefish city councilman Richard Hildner agrees.

“Two years ago, a group of neo-Nazis and white supremacists wanted to hold a rally in Whitefish, and the people of Whitefish stood together against that divisiveness,” Hildner says. “The New Code of the West event brings with it a similar divisiveness that we rejected two years ago and we reject now.”

Montana Wilderness Association, in partnership with Montana Wildlife Federation, Montana Human Rights Network, and Love Lives Here, will host an event on the same day as New Code of the West. Called Montana Undivided: A Rally for Human Rights and Public Lands, the event will occur on October 13 at 10 a.m. at Depot Park in Whitefish.

“Montanans reacted with disgust to the Malheur occupation, and for good reason – Ammon Bundy and his gang threatened the lives of our public land managers, tore apart the nearby community of Burns, and, for 40 days, took possession of lands that belong to all Americans,” says Amy Robinson, Montana Wilderness Association conservation director based in Whitefish. “Public lands define and unite Montanans because those lands enable our way of life. 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.

“We’ll let them know Montanans prefer unity over the division they’re trying to sow.”

For more on the New Code of the West and its participants, [read MHRN's brief](#) on the event.