

## **All Employee Email from Director Ashe on Malheur NWR Verdict**

From: Director, FWS <fws\_director@fws.gov>

Date: Fri, Oct 28, 2016 at 11:00 AM

Subject: Verdict in the Malheur Occupation

To: All Employees

Last night, a jury acquitted seven defendants of all charges related to the 41-day armed occupation of Malheur National Wildlife Refuge that began January 2. I'm not going to speculate on the reasons why the jury returned the verdicts it did, and I urge each of you to also restrain from speculation, but suffice it to say that words cannot express my deep disappointment.

We are a nation of laws, and we accept and respect the jury's decision. I know the prosecutors from the U.S. Attorney's Office worked extremely hard to seek justice, and I'm grateful they stood up for our agency and the American people.

We cannot say much more publicly, because multiple other defendants still face trial in connection with the occupation. In addition, some defendants acquitted today still face serious charges related to the 2014 standoff at the Bundy Ranch, in Nevada. As such, they remain in jail pending trial for those offenses.

My hope remains that in those upcoming trials, defendants will yet be held accountable for their actions, which have had such an enduring impact on Federal employees across the West – particularly the staff at Malheur Refuge.

Last week, I wrote to the judge in a victim statement filed in anticipation of convictions. In that letter, I said that nature is resilient; birds have returned to Malheur, and the refuge is preparing for the coming winter after a productive spring and summer season. Relationships are durable; our collaborations with Burns and Harney County continue. Buildings and equipment are repairable; they are being fixed or replaced.

But the lives and careers of many employees and family members will never be quite the same.

For their safety, during the occupation of the refuge we relocated all employees and most family members to alternate locations. Their refuge work went undone – reversing or impeding years of dedicated effort. Their families were disrupted, missing family events, school and other milestones that can't be restored. Many of their friendships, and their sense of belonging in the community, have been damaged or destroyed. Even now, though many employees have returned, they continue to bear the scars of this traumatic experience. Some have chosen to not return, while others are making plans to leave.

Out of respect for what they endured – and keeping in mind the vital importance of ensuring the safety of Service employees across the nation – I will continue to press the courts for some measure of justice. We cannot erase the past or change the verdicts just handed down. We must send a strong message of deterrence to those who would seek to replicate the occupation or perpetuate the toxic myths that

sustained it. I hope and trust future juries will respond and give the defendants the justice they have earned.

I have no doubt that employees across the entire Fish and Wildlife Service share my deep disappointment at these verdicts – but I also know you will continue to serve the American people with dedication and dignity, as you have throughout this ordeal. Thank you for representing our agency in such an impressive manner.

Dan