

THE WAY I SEE IT

BLM SPY

DAN LOVE'S EXTRAORDINARY PROMOTION. BY THOMAS MITCHELL

The Peter Principle persists in proving to be prescient because bumbling bureaucrats keep getting bumped to better berths.

The man who was in charge of security for the Bureau of Land Management during the bollixed Bundy Ranch cattle roundup two years ago—which resulted in the agency spending \$1 million to round up a couple hundred head of cattle, only to release them when confronted by armed supporters of the rancher—has been promoted to a newly created position.

Dan Love, who headed up BLM security forces in Nevada and Utah, will now serve as the BLM's agent in charge of security, protection and intelligence nationwide. The intelligence part of the job reportedly includes gathering information on emerging threats, such as from websites and online social media. He will oversee a three-person team.

Why a land-management agency should have what amounts to its own militarized law-enforcement division is a question to begin with. Even the Nevada Test Site uses private security firms. And aren't actual law-enforcement agencies such as the FBI and U.S. Marshals, as well as local police and sheriffs, sufficient to protect these public servants whose job it is to manage federal public land—which regularly burns in wildfires, is overpopulated with wild horses, and where species seem to always be endangered?

As for intelligence, why does a federal land agency need a spy? To spy on whom? The citizens who dislike how they do their jobs? [See "Tyranny" at rangemagazine.com]

Nevada Gov. Brian Sandoval chastised the BLM at the time of the Bundy ranch invasion for creating an "atmosphere of intimidation" by flooding the area with hundreds of heavily armed and armored agents. "Due to the roundup by the BLM, my office has received numerous complaints of BLM misconduct, road closures and other disturbances," Sandoval said in a statement at the time. "I have recently met with state legislators, county officials and concerned citizens to listen to their concerns. I have expressed those concerns directly to the BLM."

He said most disturbing to him was the BLM's establishment of a "First Amendment Area," where any protests were supposed to be

contained inside an orange plastic fence, calling that a trampling of Nevadans' fundamental rights under the U.S. Constitution.

"No cow justifies the atmosphere of intimidation which currently exists nor the limitation of constitutional rights that are sacred to all Nevadans," the governor said. "The BLM needs to reconsider its approach to this matter and act accordingly."

Though he said rancher Cliven Bundy must be held accountable for defying federal court orders and grazing cattle on federal land without proper permits, then-Clark County Sheriff Doug Gillespie was critical of the tactics and behavior of the BLM security forces for creating a situation that threatened to turn into a bloodbath.

Speaking at an editorial board of the Las Vegas morning newspaper a couple of months after the roundup, Gillespie said he had a tense meeting with some of Bundy's sons a few weeks before

the agents moved in with armed vehicles, heavy weapons, snipers and attack dogs. He feared emotions would boil over.

"I came back from that saying, 'This is not the time to do this,'" he told the editors. "They [the BLM] said: 'We do this all the time. We know what we're doing. We hear what you're saying, but we're moving forward.'" He noted that a video of one of Bundy's sons being Tasered went viral on the Internet, prompting self-styled patriots and militia to pour into the ranch, an outcome for which the BLM was unprepared.

Gillespie added, "You'll have a hard time convincing me that one person's drop of blood is worth any one of those cows," and that the BLM had no place to take the cattle it had gathered anyway.

Two years later, Cliven Bundy, four of his sons and 14 others are being held without bail on federal charges growing out of the standoff. And Love's handling of the Bundy situation is hardly the first criticism leveled at his methods and relationships with local officials.

In an article in the *Salt Lake Tribune* in October 2014, rural Utah sheriffs described

Love as Public Enemy Number One. "Elected law-enforcement officers from Nephi to Blanding call him an arrogant and dishonest bully who has little regard for local authority and dodges accountability, derailing a collaborative approach to police work on the state's federal lands," the article declared.

The online news service *Greenwire*, which covers energy and environmental issues, quoted Garfield County, Utah, Sheriff Danny Perkins: "The biggest problem with Dan is nobody trusted him. It sounds to me that they gave him a better job than he had."

Love also seems to have a propensity for excessive shows of force. In 2009, he was involved in a sting operation that resulted in the arrests of several people in Blanding, Utah, for picking up Indian artifacts off the ground. Federal agents conducted a search of the home of the town's only doctor in search of evidence. According to a *Los Angeles Times* account, Love told the doctor's daughter there were 140 agents involved in the raid, and a neighbor said snipers were perched on the roof. The doctor later committed suicide.

According to the Reno newspaper, Love also has a penchant for demanding pampering for himself and his agents. Before the 2015 Burning Man festival in the Black Rock Desert, Love told festival

organizers his staff would require a separate compound with amenities such as flush toilets, washers and dryers, and 24-hour access to specific types of ice cream and candies. Apparently, accommodations in Gerlach, just 10 miles away, were not up to BLM demands.

Specifically requested items to be stocked in this BLM VIP compound kitchen included steaks (rib, loin, T-bone, New York, sirloin, cubed, filet and pepper), roast (prime rib and sliced), short ribs (baked, broiled and barbecued), ground beef (lasagna, meat loaf, meatballs in spaghetti sauce, and ground beef patties), pork (chops, loin cut, spareribs, country-style ribs, and barbecued), sliced ham, sausage, poultry, fish and cold cuts. That's just the meat.

The cost of these special accommodations and luxury feedbag was estimated to be \$1 million. The BLM backed off after being widely ridiculed from Carson City to Washington.

But that must be how one mounts the ladder of success in the BLM bureaucracy. ■

Thomas Mitchell is a longtime Nevada newspaper editor and columnist.



BLM Special Agent Dan Love, aka "an arrogant dishonest bully."