“A smooth sea never made a skilled sailor”

Last week, we learned that the seven tried for the 41-day armed occupation of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge were found not guilty of conspiracy and conspiracy-related weapons charges. The verdicts provoked a range of emotions, from disappointment and perplexity, to focus and resolve.

We received and are grateful for many powerful messages of support from Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell and Bureau of Land Management Director Neil Kornze, other agencies and organizations, and the general public through one-on-one conversations, phone calls and social media posts. Oregon/Washington Bureau of Land Management State Director Ron Dunton quoted President Franklin D. Roosevelt “…a smooth sea never made a skilled sailor” – sometimes the best things come from the worst situations. We are resilient, and resilient people can sit with discomfort; know that it’s okay to not have it all figured out; and focus on what’s right. We know the verdicts do not reflect on the hard work we do, day in and day out, every day.

In the face of a difficult situation, we trust that perseverance and partnership is the best path forward to celebrate and honor your public lands and all of their uses. We know the authority for the Federal government to manage public lands is confirmed through a healthy stack of irrefutable U.S. Supreme Court cases, and was also affirmed with the 1976 passage of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act. The United States Constitution is Federal law and interpretation of Federal law is done authoritatively by the United States Supreme Court.

Retention of lands does not exclude private interests from actually developing and using the resources on public lands. The important role of private companies of all sorts, from timber companies to park concessionaires — who provide services and derive profit from public resources — continues today. We value and will continue to uphold the laws of the United States and carry out our mission of responsible public land stewardship for the benefit of all users. That will never change.