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By Karen Pickett

## Karen Pickett | The Green Scare

t r u t h o u t | Perspective

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On January 20th, eleven people were indicted in Oregon by a grand jury investigating acts of sabotage linked to the underground Earth Liberation Front (ELF). The actions, going back nearly a decade, include a number of arsons - with such targets as a ski resort expansion into endangered lynx habitat and a facility for rounding up wild horses for dog food. There were no injuries in any of the actions, but the FBI claims over \$25 million in damage to property.

Some of those indicted had been arrested in December, including one person who died in custody in Arizona. Shock waves have been reverberating through the environmental activist community, and the situation is still unfolding. Two more people were arrested in Olympia, Washington, on February 23, and the day before, outspoken Native American and animal rights activist Rod Coronado was arrested in Tucson, Arizona, on charges sent down by a grand jury in San Diego. In addition, there is a grand jury investigating Animal Liberation Front (ALF) activities in San Francisco.

But those being rounded up are not only being charged with crimes associated with the acts the FBI and grand juries allege - they are also being labeled as terrorists. Moreover, Coronado's charges stem solely from a public address he gave in San Diego in 2003. During this speech, in response to a question from the audience, he explained how he went about setting a fire at an animal testing lab in Michigan in the early 1990s - an arson crime for which he had previously served a four-year term in federal prison. For

answering that question, Coronado has been accused under a little-used federal statute making it a felony to "teach or demonstrate the making or use of an explosive or destructive device."

The FBI announced last year that ELF was their #1 priority for domestic terrorism. Now they have help from groups like the American Legislative Exchange Council, a conservative public policy lobbying group funded by over 300 corporations. ALEC, in collaboration with the US Sportman's Alliance, has written model legislation stepping up the ante for acts of property destruction committed against corporations in the business of development, logging, mining and vivisection.

Legislation has been introduced in nine states seeking to categorize property destruction, trespass or arson as acts of domestic terrorism IF committed by animal rights activists. Of course, arson, trespass and vandalism are already illegal, but ALEC wants to see additional layers added so that those who support those activities - financially or otherwise - could also be prosecuted. The terrorist label, and the addition of conspiracy changes, as in the current cases, are meant to marginalize and vilify people already facing criminal charges and to enhance sentencing options. In the current culture of fear that exists in the US, the vilification in effect denies the accused their right to a presumption of innocence until a trial.

The branding of acts of property destruction as terrorism rather than sabotage increases the sensationalism surrounding this politically charged situation, and is designed to send potential support running in the opposite direction. The authorities even call those arrested "the family," in an undisguised attempt to evoke images of the notorious Manson family. But the Manson family were cold-blooded murderers. The indicted environmental activists are people never known to carry weapons. There have been no injuries or deaths in connection with the actions alleged. Yet they are being called terrorists, even as violent attacks by the right-wing have gone unprosecuted - 7400 hate crimes motivated by race, ethnic, religious or sexual orientation, according to the FBI's own 2003 statistics.

The agenda is criminalization of dissent, long within the purview of the FBI, but the less recognized agenda is also protection of wealth and private property. It seems ALEC would put damage to property on par with threat or actual harm to life. Nowhere in the FBI's pronouncements of how heinous

...and harm to non-humans, in the IRS prosecutions of non-humans these acts they call terrorism are, is a body count or even a litany of injuries. The "injury" is defined in millions of dollars to corporations who are in the business of building multi-million dollar developments on endangered species habitat.

If property destruction is put on par with threat to life, the question must be asked whether the next step will be increased prosecution for the revered tradition of non-violent civil disobedience or vilification of the successful market campaigns carried out by the likes of Rainforest Action Network, because after all, those activities, as well as boycotts and strikes, put a dent in the bottom line of profit margin. In fact, attacks disguised as IRS investigations and other back door strategies are already on the rise against organizations that carry out civil disobedience and market campaigns.

"Eco-terrorism," a term trumpeted in the media, was invented in the early 1990s by public relations firm Hill and Knowlton, in the employ of corporations in the extractive industries. It was then put into popular use by right-wing ideologues like Ron Arnold, long known as a vehement anti-environmentalist whose self-professed goal is to destroy the environmental movement.

Property destruction is sabotage, not terrorism. Call it what it is, and then debate appropriate prosecution and penalties.

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