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UNION CONDEMNS WRONGFUL ARREST OF U.S. FOREST SERVICE EMPLOYEE FOR "SIMPLY DOING HIS JOB"



November 2, 2022

Today, the National Federation of Federal Employees (NFFE) strongly condemns the wrongful arrest of Rick Snodgrass, a U.S. Forest Service (USFS) wildland firefighter who was working as an active "burn boss" when taken into sheriff's custody on October 19, 2022. At the time of his arrest, Firefighter Snodgrass, an Assistant Fire Management Officer, was working as the

incident commander overseeing fire operations and containment efforts during a prescribed burn on the Malheur National Forest in Grant County, Oregon. Grant County Sheriff Todd McKinley arrested Firefighter Snodgrass during the burn operation after the fire unexpectedly jumped a road where firefighters were working, causing the fire to burn several acres of grasslands on private property.



NFFE National President Randy Erwin released the following statement after the arrest of USFS Firefighter Snodgrass:

"It is unconscionable that a local sheriff would arrest a working wildland firefighter during an active fire operation. Not only did the sheriff exceed his authority in detaining Firefighter Snodgrass, in doing so, the sheriff put everyone and everything in danger by removing a working fire commander during a dangerous incident. Firefighter Snodgrass was arrested for simply doing his job.

"We applaud all of the wildland firefighters on the line that day who held their focus despite the Sheriff's interference. Undeterred, they worked together to contain the blaze and finish the job. Our firefighters who conduct and lead prescribed burns, like Firefighter Snodgrass, are highly trained professionals. They know how to manage the most dangerous situations. Prescribed burns are essential to keeping communities across this country safe from wildfires. When dealing with unpredictable environmental conditions, it is always possible that a prescribed burn could spill over into an untargeted area. Normally when this happens, the government will address any damages to affected parties as appropriate. It is not normal for a local sheriff to arrest a working fire commander during an incident. In doing so, the sheriff may have violated federal law that makes it a felony to interfere with a federal employee during their official duties, and the sheriff may have opened the county to massive liability for a civil rights violation for unlawfully detaining and removing Firefighter Snodgrass.

"Firefighter Snodgrass has the full, unconditional support of your union, as does every federal wildland firefighter across this country. NFFE is calling on state and federal authorities to investigate the reckless actions of Sheriff McKinley to pursue any violation of civil and criminal law. This incident will not be swept under the rug. There must be consequences for this unprecedented abuse of power and incredibly dangerous disruption to the critical work of the Forest Service.

"We applaud the USDA and the USFS for expressing their full support of Firefighter Snodgrass in the performance of his official duties. NFFE will continue to follow this investigation and provide support to Firefighter Snodgrass to ensure that rogue sheriffs or any other person who threatens or impedes public servants answer for their actions."

PRINT VERSION (<https://nffe.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/2022-11-2-PR-Snodgrass-Arrest-final.pdf>)

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