

# Revealed: FBI and police monitoring Oregon anti-pipeline activists

Emails show the latest example of environmental groups facing increased surveillance by law enforcement

**Jason Wilson and Will Parrish, The Guardian** Thu 8 Aug 2019 <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2019/aug/08/fbi-oregon-anti-pipeline-jordan-cove-activists>

Law enforcement groups, including the FBI, have been monitoring opponents of a natural gas infrastructure project in Oregon and circulated intelligence to an email list that included a [Republican-aligned anti-environmental PR operative](#), emails obtained by the Guardian show.

The South Western [Oregon](#) Joint Task Force (SWOJTF) and its members were monitoring opponents of the Jordan Cove energy project, a proposal by the Canadian energy company Pembina to build the first-ever liquefied natural gas terminal on the US west coast, as well as a new 232-mile pipeline that would carry fracked natural gas to the port of Coos Bay.

The Trump administration [has named](#) Jordan Cove as one of its highest-priority infrastructure projects. Jordan Cove opponents [have raised concerns](#) about the project's significant environmental impacts, impacts on public lands, indigenous rights and climate change.

The emails, obtained via open records requests, reflect the increased [scrutiny and surveillance](#) to which law enforcement agencies are often subjecting indigenous and environmental groups, activists say.

It also comes amid an uptick in civil disobedience and direct actions challenging fossil fuel infrastructure projects – particularly in the wake of the Native American-led struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016 and 2017. They also reflect a [nationwide](#) tendency for [rightwing partisans, law enforcement agencies and the fossil fuel industry to ally with one another](#) in the suppression of such activities.

An email distribution list associated with the taskforce included addressees in the FBI, the Bureau of Land Management, the Department of Justice (DoJ), the National Forest Service (NFS), Oregon state police (OSP), and various Oregon municipal police and sheriffs departments. But some of its recipients are outside any government agency, most notably Mark Pfeifle, the CEO of the political consultancy [Off The Record Strategies](#).

Pfeifle was previously [a Bush administration PR adviser on national security](#). More recently, Pfeifle worked with law enforcement on a counter-information operation against the Dakota Access Pipeline protesters.

When contacted by telephone about the Jordan Cove project, Mr Pfeifle said “I just don’t have anything for you, I’m not up on it,” before ending the conversation.

Emails circulated on the SWOJTF email list include activists’ social media posts, emails and rally announcements.

Pfeifle appeared on the distribution list of a November 2018 email from the list’s apparent keeper, the Coos county deputy sheriff, Bryan Valencia, which described a recent protest action by Southern Oregon Rising Tide, a direct action climate justice group.

“These are the tactics that are currently being used to forcibly insert their narrative into the conversation,” Valencia wrote. He noted: “There has long been a call for a ‘Standing Rock’ action [by the Klamath Tribe](#) in Klamath county.”

Don Gentry, the chairman of the Klamath Tribes, said Valencia’s characterization is false – his tribe has never put out such a call. “We’re working through the readily available channels to get this project stopped,” Gentry said.

In January 2019, Valencia circulated information on Facebook event attendance to a smaller group of SWOJTF officers, related to an upcoming Oregon department of state lands hearing, to some members of the taskforce, despite stating there was a “lack of a criminal nexus”.

The Coos county sheriffs office (CCSO) public information officer, Gabriel Fabrizio, wrote in response to emailed questions that SWOJTF had been set up to “ensure a multi-agency approach to any and all contingencies”.

Fabrizio added: “As potential dangers to the safety of the citizens and businesses of the county are identified, we monitor groups as long as necessary to determine if they will become a danger to others. Once it’s determined a group has not or likely will not conduct criminal activity, we discontinue monitoring.”

He also wrote that “Mr Pfeifle has no relationship with the Coos county sheriff’s office or with the SWOJTF. He was involved with training that was presented by the National Sheriffs Association to emergency responders in Coos county.”

He also denied that SWOJTF had been engaged in surveillance. “Surveillance implies an active gathering of data and images, and any monitoring we have conducted has been passive, simply watching for information,” he said.

The records reveal the existence of other law enforcement intelligence activities related to monitoring the work of environmental groups.

In a November 2018 email to Valencia, a BLM law enforcement analyst noted her role in the “Forest Intelligence Group (FIG)” that is also tracking activists. “I appreciate anything you find, and I am glad to share likewise,” the analyst wrote.

Fabrizio said in an email response to questions that FIG “began its life as a timber investigators meeting in the mid eighties ... It has been [sharing](#) information about activity including criminal activity in our regions forests since that time. The intent of the group is to identify activities that may require sharing of resources or have an impact across traditional jurisdictional lines.”

In a telephone interview, a spokesman for the US attorney in Oregon also confirmed the existence of another body mentioned in the emails: a “domestic terrorism working group” led by the assistant US attorney, Craig Gabriel, that meets “roughly quarterly” in Portland. He said that the group was mostly made up of federal agencies but included some local law enforcement.

“It’s really just to discuss any current issues in the domestic terrorism arena. This could be local issues, all the way up to international issues,” the spokesman said. He said protest movements would be “within the scope” of its discussions even if no criminal activity had occurred.

In another email exchange, an FBI agent, Michael Frost, offered “open source and social media training” to the Coos county sheriffs, writing to Valencia that “with the significant social media presence of the anti-pipeline individuals, I figured your office would be a good place to start”.

The flyer for the training promises law enforcement officers information on tracking individuals online while minimizing their “digital footprint”, and indicates that it would be hosted by yet another law enforcement “task force”: the FBI’s Joint Terrorism Task Force (JTTF) in Portland.

A spokesperson for the FBI’s Portland field office said in an email: “The FBI does not comment on what may or may not be an ongoing investigation. However, it is important to note that the FBI can never initiate an investigation based solely on first amendment-protected activity.”

On the training session, the spokesperson said: “The FBI’s Portland field office regularly provides training to local law enforcement agencies. This training covers a wide range of law enforcement topics, including appropriate and legal use of open source material in investigations.”

Fabrizio said that the offer of training had not been taken up.

Although Coos Bay is located more than 200 miles away from Portland, the Portland police bureau (PPB) officer Andrew Hearst is also part of the SWOJTF email list. Hearst told Valencia in January 2019: “As always if we hear anything about our people heading down to your area we will alert asap.”

Jordan Cove opponents expressed alarm upon learning about the level of scrutiny they are receiving from so many different law enforcement entities.

“It is outrageous that our Oregon public agencies are actually working to plan how to stifle the very southern Oregonians whose drinking water, property and communities are threatened by this project,” said Sylvia Mangan, a retired public health nurse who lives on one of the proposed pipeline routes.

Asked why Pfeifle was included in the distribution of intelligence on protest groups, Fabrizio wrote: “Open source information is posted on public forums and not considered sensitive.”

He added: “Anyone who may be affected by potential actions are involved as an effort in community outreach and according to the tenets of community policing.”

Pfeifle previously described his work with law enforcement at Standing Rock during a 2017 presentation to [oil, gas and banking executives](#) during a pipeline conference in Houston. “A lot of things that we were doing were being done to put a marker down for the protesters. And, ‘OK, if you’re going to go protest somewhere? There’s going to be consequences from it.”

In an email comment, the ACLU of Oregon questioned the legality of the activities revealed in the emails.

“Monitoring and compiling information about Oregonians’ political or social views, activities, or associations violates [Oregon law](#),” said the spokeswoman Sarah Armstrong.

Lauren Regan, the executive director of the Oregon-based Civil Liberties Defense Center, says the SWOJTF’s activities reflect a nationwide trend. “Police and corporations are working together to suppress movements against fossil fuels,” she said.

Holly Mills of Southern Oregon Rising Tide, a group regularly subjected to scrutiny in the records obtained by the Guardian, said: “We know that the state, police and corporations have often tried to stop movements like this one by using fear as a tactic and repressing dissent. We have prepared ourselves with this in mind, and we communicate on social media and over email with the assumption that cops might be reading.”