

Troutdale, OR

"I've never seen people load up a bulldozer so fast and disappear. From dead set on destroying this place and cleaning it up and hauling it off to- invisible, they turned to smoke you might say, they disappeared so fast." Says 'Hippie', who has lived with the 'Thousand Acres' encampment for more than six years. Matted locks wrap around his head like snakes and an eclectic array of carvings and crystals hangs around his neck.

Hippie is one of a half dozen residents of the encampment I've spoken to about their ongoing struggle to remain on the land they've occupied for years. Trenches dug into the soil and makeshift barricades dot the encampment: remnants from their stand against Springfield, Oregon-based Northwest Hazmat and NW Enforcement, a Portland based private security group. Contracts were obtained via open records requests with the state of Oregon courtesy of KATU news, revealing that NW Hazmat was contracted for up to \$139,000 and NW Enforcement contracted for up to \$200,000. The Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL) hired both to conduct a 'clean up' of the forest on June 2nd, and facilitate the 'willing' removal of the residents. Residents would be forced to leave or be trespassed beginning June 9th. This timeline was derailed after DSL postponed the cleanup indefinitely on June 8th after a private contractor allegedly maced a protestor unprovoked. Video of the altercation can be viewed [here](#).

Over the years the Thousand Acres encampment has been visited several times by Kevin Dahlgren, an "independent journalist" who was hired as a consultant by the city of Gresham as a "homeless specialist" in a botched \$18,000 contract with their police force in 2023. He has since been indicted twice in the same year, first with nineteen charges and again for six more, for a total of twenty five separate charges relating to theft, identity theft, and misconduct towards people on the streets and the city of Gresham totaling thousands of dollars in

damages. Dahlgren toured the Thousand Acres encampment several times with city and state officials to encourage the sweeps going as far back as 2021 when he visited the encampment with Mayor Lauer of Troutdale, Mayor Stovall of Gresham, and former Mayor Cooper of Fairview.

None of these mayors have jurisdiction over the Sandy River Delta. According to the City of Troutdale, the presence of the Thousand Acres encampment is a “concern and frustration,” but they lament, “there is very little the city can do... and [they] have no jurisdiction over it.” Instead they say the woodlands are divided between the Oregon Department of State Lands (DSL) and the US Forest Service (USFS).

“Kevin Dahlgren is a propaganda King,” according to Hippie. Another resident named Danny added, “To me he’s a thief, he’s a crook. He claims he’s a social worker but he comes and takes your stuff and throws it away.” Danny claims to be the longest running resident of the Acres for over thirty years, which has earned him the mock title of ‘mayor’ of Thousand Acres. Since the encampment doesn’t keep written records it’s impossible to confirm the complete timeline of the Acres community except through their own oral history. Residents of the Acres claim the encampment has been going for around forty years, longer than anyone claims to have been a part of it. Over that time Danny says he’s seen the community at acres change a lot, “Thirty years I’ve met thousands of people. People that needed help, had nowhere to go. People just keep coming back to say thanks and helping us out.” Those I interviewed referred to those like Danny and Hippie- those who stay-as “the family”.

Danny explains how the group has survived all this time, “Every time they’d do a sweep we’d move over to another part of the park, wait thirty days, and move again.” But this time rather than fleeing to another area of the park, residents say they’re prepared to stand their ground. A hip hop artist who goes by the stage name Mention1 said he finds the Acres ‘sacred’, “We fight for what we believe in. Acres is our home,

and they've accepted me as well, so yeah, I will continue to fight for acres." This sentiment was echoed among everyone I spoke to, most emphatically from a woman who goes by Trish who said she spent the week of the sweep building a patio on her "property" to prove her commitment to fighting for the Acres. The "land pirate", Clinton Bell Philips, who says he's running for president in 2028 with his tongue in his cheek and a wink in his eye said, "I'm gonna stay here as long as I can... What's happening here at Acres has never happened before*, it's special because it worked. Anarchy worked. We govern ourselves."

I asked what the self governance of Thousand Acres looked like, and Hippie responded, "We don't really have a government, we call him [Danny] "mayor," but if we have a problem, we make it known and it gets solved."

After video of one of the contractors macing an unviolent protestor was shared around social media, a spokesperson for DSL wrote to KATU news regarding the incident, *"We respect and support the right of individuals to express their views through protest. What's depicted in the video does not reflect our values or the expectations we set for contractors working on our behalf. We are actively investigating this incident and will seek an immediate remedy with the contractor."* Contractors on site that day were not authorized to use force to remove people. Several days later according to the Portland Mercury DSL would write that "they will be halting and reevaluating the project for now, citing *"the safety and security of our staff, contractors, and the public, including those currently in the area."* KATU reports this move was directed from the office of Oregon Governor Tina Kotek herself. The pause has been criticized for increasing the cost of the project by Troutdale City manager, Ray Young, who says he's been pushing for the camp to be cleared for six years.

Governor Tina Kotek is emphasizing a 'humane' sweep, her office's statement to KATU news says in part that she has

“assigned her State Resiliency Officer to work closely with the agency to bring together the necessary NGO, local, and state partners that can help accomplish a successful outcome. Onsite work will begin again with those resources in place.” Partners which were previously involved in this process include Portland Police Bureau’s HOPE team (Homeless Outreach and Programs Engagement), as well as the Salvation Army in order to provide the occupants of the encampment with resources within the “proper channels”.

Many of the occupants I spoke to described being distrustful of the HOPE team. The outreach the Salvation Army has done is also seen as inadequate by the people in the camp. An article from the Western Regional Advocacy Project (WRAP) wrote in regards to these efforts, “Outreach has consisted of referrals to shelters, such as Bybee Lakes, but all the beds are full. Many residents have dogs which make it even more difficult to access shelter.” Included in the article from WRAP is a cooperative stewardship proposal developed alongside residents of the Thousand Acres encampment, which claims to offer a different path forward. One which claims to address “cleanup needs and combines cost-effective, modular housing with robust community governance,” claiming to create a, “system of environmental and community stewardship.”

In June of 2024 the Federal Supreme Court sided with Grants Pass, Oregon in the case of Grants Pass v Johnson, deciding that the constitution does not protect against sweeping, ticketing, and arresting unhoused people without offering adequate shelter beds. An interactive map of the ongoing criminalization of homelessness in the wake of the Grants Pass Decisions can be viewed [here](#), courtesy of the ACLU.

On July 24th of 2025 President Trump signed an executive order to reverse federal and state judicial precedent, giving cities and states the power to force people living on the streets into treatment centers without their consent. The order, first reported on by USA Today, is titled “Ending Crime and Disorder

on America's Streets". This Executive order could have major ramifications for unhoused people across the country, a crisis which has worsened every year. According to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development report from 2024, there are an estimated 771,480 people living on the streets. This number is likely an under-representation, as explained by School House Connection. What this executive order could mean for these hundreds of thousands of people, including every person I spoke to at Thousand Acres is currently unclear.

At Thousand Acres, uncertainty juxtaposes diverging paths; the peaceful cooperative stewardship model proposed by activists and residents; or continuing the pattern of sweeps and the destruction of people's personal belongings that characterizes the state's kneejerk approach to dealing with people without homes— albeit with dubious promises of a "humane" solution which never seems to meaningfully materialize, or actively makes things worse.

If readers would like to get involved, the Acres is fundraising through @thousandacresdefense on venmo and can follow the Instagram account with the same name to stay up to date as the encampment's struggle continues to unfold.

*Note that Philip's statement that Acres has never happened before is hyperbole. There are many cases of self governing encampments, squats, and other "occupations" throughout even just modern history.

Interviews with: Clinton Bell Philips, Hippie, Danny, Mention1, and several others who's amazing quotes sadly could not be included.

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Sources and Resources:

Portland Mercury reporting on the sweep and it's postponement:
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Coverage (including video) of protestor being maced at thousand acres:
<https://katu.com/news/city-in-crisis/departments-state-lands-begins-clearing-sandy-river-delta-camps-as-part-of-restoration-efforts-oregon-troutdale-thousand-acres-homeless>

Troutdale City Limits and Jurisdiction:
<https://www.troutdaleoregon.gov/commdev/page/concerns-about-homeless-camps>

About NW Hazmat: <https://nwhazmat.com/>

About NW Enforcement: <https://nwenforcement.com/>

About DSL: <https://www.oregon.gov/dsl/Pages/about-dsl.aspx>

About USFS: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/>

Kevin Dahlgren's 'shoddy' contract work:
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Kevin Dahlgren's first set of charges:
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Kevin Dahlgren's second set of charges:
<https://weheartseattle.exposed/kevin-dahlgren-indicted-on-another-6-counts-of-theft-and-misconduct/>

Dahlgren's reporting on Thousand Acres:
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Mention1 on youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/@TyrellGraham-y2n>

Costs of the projects, Young's and Kotek's statements:
<https://katu.com/news/local/documents-jurisdictional-kerfuffle-cleanup-pause-troutdale-sandy-river-delta>

About the HOPE team:
<https://multco.us/info/multnomah-county-sheriffs-office-homeless-outreach-and-programs-engagement-hope-team>

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Grants Pass V Johnson:
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Cooperative Stewardship Proposal:
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School House Connection, why HUD reports are under-representations:
<https://schoolhouseconnection.org/article/the-pitfalls-of-huds-point-in-time-count-for-children-youth-and-families>