

Sovereign citizen extremist arrested for 'Holy Fire' arson

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by Daryl Johnson

On August 6, 2018, a sovereign citizen reportedly ignited a massive [forest fire](#) in the Holy Jim Canyon in the Cleveland National Forest on the west side of the Santa Ana Mountains in Orange County, California.

To date, the fire, known as the "[Holy Fire](#)," has scorched nearly [23,000 acres](#), spread into Riverside County and continues to burn. Multiple firefighters have been treated for heat-related injuries as a result of the intense flames. Tens of thousands of residents have also been forced to flee their homes, making it one of the most destructive wildfires of 2018. It is one of 15 wild fires raging in California this summer. A day after the fire began, authorities announced they believed it was deliberately set.

On August 7, authorities arrested Forrest Gordon Clark, 51, on suspicion of intentionally starting the Holy Fire. Clark, who owns a cabin in Holy Jim Canyon, was a known [troublemaker](#) to local government authorities for decades. The local volunteer fire chief, Mike Milligan, had long warned that Clark posed a danger to the community. "Milligan said that he was so wary of the suspect that he avoided going to the area of the remote Orange County canyon where Clark lives," [CNN reported](#).

In the weeks preceding the Holy Fire, Chief Mulligan had an encounter with Clark at his residence when Clark returned some items he had "borrowed" from the fire department. When Mulligan told Clark to leave and that he wanted "nothing to do with him," Clark responded with profanity and called him a "jerk."

The next day, Milligan received the first of several disturbing [text messages](#) from Clark that read, "911 call sheriff." After Milligan contacted Clark about the text, he received another text from Clark. This time, it was profanity-laced. It ended with the ominous [warning](#): "The place is going to burn just like you planned."

According to authorities, soon after sending the text messages, Clark was observed running through the

area screaming at his neighbors. Chief Milligan also said that Clark had been involved in a decade-long [feud](#) with neighbors and other cabin owners in the area that may have provoked him to set the fire.

Of further interest to law enforcement, Clark appears to be affiliated with the sovereign citizen extremist movement that regards the U.S. government as illegitimate. [Sovereign citizen](#) ideology has been known to inspire individuals to avenge perceived grievances through violence and intimidation.

Photo by Mindy Schauer/Orange County Register via Getty Images

In a Facebook [post](#) dated March 16, 2012, Clark states that he has been nominated as a “representative for the ‘Republic of Kansas’” (a bogus government entity affiliated with the now defunct sovereign citizen group “Republic for the united [sic] States,” or [RuSA](#)). In a December 19, 2010, post on his [Facebook](#) page, Clark posted a picture of him posing with then RuSA President [James “Timothy” Turner](#).

In addition, according to [J.J. Macnab](#), a domestic terrorism expert for the [Program on Extremism](#) at George Washington University, Clark was once an active member of the “Restore America Project (RAP),” a sovereign citizen program promoted by [Eustace Mullins](#). According to Macnab, RAP later morphed into [RuSA](#), an Alabama-based sovereign citizen group. Indeed, in another social media post dated June 23, 2018, Clark states, “share it far and wide” in response to another user’s post referencing the beliefs of Eustace Mullins.

Clark’s Facebook page, which indicates that he attended Overwood Academy in Orange County, is also

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Clark is currently charged with aggravated arson, arson of inhabited property, arson of forest, making

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convicted. If Clark’s involvement in setting the fire is proven, it would be the first known case of a sovereign citizen deliberately setting a wildfire to violently retaliate against their enemies (which may include Clark’s neighbors and government authorities).

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