

THE WILD, WILD WEST: DRONES HUNTING DOWN CATTLE RUSTLERS

This story, billed as an account of the first Predator-drone assisted arrest in the US, has all the elements we've been expecting from this development.

The drone in question belongs to the Border Patrol; presumably, it operates under the legal black hole built up around borders.

The drones belong to U.S. Customs and Border Protection, which operates eight Predators on the country's northern and southwestern borders to search for illegal immigrants and smugglers.

[snip]

Congress first authorized Customs and Border Protection to buy unarmed Predators in 2005. Officials in charge of the fleet cite broad authority to work with police from budget requests to Congress that cite "interior law enforcement support" as part of their mission.

The local sheriff used the drone to conduct sophisticated surveillance of his target, the Brossart family.

For four hours, the Predator circled 10,000 feet above the farm. Parked on a nearby road, Janke and the other officers watched live drone video and thermal images of Alex, Thomas and Jacob Brossart – and their mother, Susan – on a hand-held device with a 4-inch screen. The glowing green images showed people carrying what appeared to be long rifles moving behind farm equipment and other

barriers.

What surprised me, though, was the justification for using the drone: \$6,000 worth of cows that had wandered into the family's property.

A search of the property turned up four rifles, two shotguns, assorted bows and arrows and a samurai sword, according to court records. Police also found the six missing cows, valued at \$6,000.

Now, to be fair, the cow thieves in question weren't just your garden variety cow thieves. In a move that ought to remind Conservatives why they used to embrace libertarianism, these cow thieves allegedly belong to the Sovereign Citizen Movement.

The six adult Brossarts allegedly belonged to the Sovereign Citizen Movement, an antigovernment group that the FBI considers extremist and violent. The family had repeated run-ins with local police, including the arrest of two family members earlier that day arising from their clash with a deputy over the cattle.

It'd be nice if the story considered this angle in more detail. Was the sheriff quicker to use this drone because he was targeting the closest thing his district has to terrorists? Is this part of the (also entirely predictable) focus on domestic terrorism for local law enforcement that doesn't have any Muslim extremists to hunt?