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Olivehurst resident Bill Goehler, right, a Freeman supporter, stands with white separatist Ra Weaver, center, and former Green Beret Col. James "Bo" Gritz during a gathering Friday in Jordan, Mont. The three were listening as a Montana group announced an anti-extremist drive.

Anti-extremist effort launched

Montana effort tries to blunt hate groups

Tom Laceky
Associated Press

JORDAN, Mont. — Victims of hate groups came here Friday to launch a ballot petition to toughen Montana's law against the tactics of the anti-government Freeman, who have been holed up in a farm compound near here for 33 days.

Backers will have no problem gathering the 20,392 voter signatures needed to qualify it for the November ballot, predicted Evan

Barrett of Butte, co-chairman of the Montana Anti-Extremism Coalition. The petition deadline is June 21.

"When one Montanan is threatened, all Montanans are threatened," Barrett told a news conference in a community hall 24 miles northwest of Jordan, near the crossroads where the FBI restricts access to the encircled Freeman farm complex eight miles away.

First signers included Tammy Schnitzer, whose family was the target of anti-Jewish vandalism in Billings, and the county prosecutors in Musselshell and Garfield counties, both of whom have been the target of threats from

Freemen and sympathizers.

Observers at the news conference included James "Bo" Gritz, who helped end the bloody siege at Ruby Ridge, Idaho, and Ra Weaver, whose wife and son were killed there by federal agents. A U.S. marshal also was killed.

The initiative petition would ask voters to approve a new law letting individuals sue for damages if they receive threat or false liens against their property. It would also simplify the legal process for removing such liens.

False liens, clouding title to property and forcing expensive legal action to clear the title, are a favorite tactic of Freeman against their enemies.