

## Private UFO study takes a public turn

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By [Deseret News](#), Zack Van Eyck, Staff Writer

Two years ago, Terry and Gwen Sherman were trying to unload a 480-acre Uintah County cattle ranch they said was rife with UFO activity and other bizarre occurrences.

Millionaire philanthropist Robert T. Bigelow came to the rescue, buying the ranch and moving in a team of researchers and surveillance equipment. Bigelow, 54, a Las Vegas native who amassed a fortune in real estate development, had for years funded private research projects on the far fringe of mainstream science.

The Sherman ranch was exactly what he was looking for - a secluded location with a history of phenomenal events where his nonprofit National Institute for Discovery Science could gather extraordinary data.

As a condition of the purchase, however, the Shermans agreed to keep quiet about what they reportedly had witnessed - the mutilated and disappearing cattle, UFOs the size of football fields, circular doorways that appeared in midair and floating balls of light that allegedly incinerated the family dogs.

Bigelow and his staff also dodged media inquiries, saying public knowledge about their observations would be premature and not in keeping with established scientific methods. Even today, two years later, Bigelow will not discuss specific incidents that have occurred on the ranch and the surrounding area.

But the strange airborne activity and unusual animal deaths have continued, Bigelow confirmed in a lengthy, face-to-face chat with the Deseret News - the first interview he has granted to discuss his regional pursuit of aerial phenomena.

"We wouldn't be there just for the weather," he said.

When the impressive team of scientists Bigelow has assembled can say something definitive about what is going on in the skies around Fort Duchesne, Randlett and beyond, they will, Bigelow promised - on the NIDS Web site at ([www.accessnv.com/nids](http://www.accessnv.com/nids)).

"We know so little in terms of what the overall scope of these phenomena is all about that it's just embarrassing to try to make conclusions at this point," Bigelow said.

And it's still too early, he said, to determine whether the curious activity poses any threat to Uinta Basin residents.

"Should people be fearful of anything from NIDS? Absolutely not. But I think the jury is way, way, way out and a long way from coming back on whether or not we know enough to say that they shouldn't have something to fear from the phenomena," he said, then added somewhat humorously, "We haven't had any of our staff eaten or anybody else that we know of."

Bigelow said the National Institute for Discovery Science needs the help of Uinta Basin ranchers and residents. He asks anyone who discovers an unusual animal death or spots an unidentified object in the sky to call NIDS at 1-888-433-6500. When an animal mutilation is reported, NIDS veterinarians can respond to perform a necropsy.

"It will cost him (a rancher) nothing to try to find out what happened to his animal," Bigelow said.

The recent interview in Las Vegas was an intriguing departure for Bigelow, a confident and articulate self-made man who has kept the lowest of low profiles over the years - prompting some paranormal researchers to suggest he has a hidden agenda or government connections.

Bigelow said he retained a private persona while conducting his own research into the UFO field primarily to protect his sources. But now, with NIDS sponsoring an international essay contest to pique the mainstream science community's interest in the search for extraterrestrial intelligence, the time is right to assume a more public role - even if he doesn't allow his photograph to be taken.

As for the government, Bigelow said his staff has no evidence the government has any interest in the Sherman ranch or similar "hot spots" NIDS has investigated in New Mexico and Colorado.

People shouldn't be worried that he is part of a covert government group, Bigelow said, but instead should ask themselves why the government, politicians, religious institutions, educators, scientists and the media are not taking UFOs and the possible existence of extraterrestrials more seriously.

Bigelow, in fact, said one reason he spends more than a million dollars a year on NIDS research is to do what he feels the government and other institutions should be doing - preparing America and the rest of the world for eventual ET contact. That revelation, if confirmed suddenly and dramatically, Bigelow believes, could have a devastating psychosocial impact on global civilization.

"There are aspects of this phenomena that are going to be disturbing to the average person," he said. "It's more complex, more diverse than I think is commonly recognized."

"We've been exposed to some things that are significantly different than the traditional body of information that you read about or that you watch (on TV, movies), and that increases the dynamics, the scope of what has to be digested."

Bigelow's interest in the paranormal stems from his youth. At the time, Las Vegas was, by comparison, a sleepy little hamlet. There wasn't much for locals to do in the 1950s except drive down the street for an ice cream cone after dinner.

Off on one of those evening cruises, Bigelow's grandparents had a close encounter that not only had a profound impact on them, but - when he was told the story two years later - strongly affected their 10-year-old grandson.

"This ball of light that appeared to be on flames was coming right at them," Bigelow recalled.

"They swerved the car off the road in a pretty dramatic way and kind of ducked, waiting for this impact and there was no impact. Instead, it made a 90-degree turn. It came right at them and went vooooom - it just went the opposite direction.

"It not only shook them up because they thought they were about to die, but then it gave them something to think about for weeks, months and years after."

Ditto for their grandson.

Bigelow retained his curiosity about that event and other Vegas-area UFO sightings for three decades while building his real estate empire. In 1988, with money to burn, he began an intense, personal quest for an answer to the question: "Are we alone in the universe?"

That led to the formation of NIDS, established in '95 to investigate both aerial phenomena and another of his interests - the survival of consciousness after bodily death.

A year later, word of the Shermans' plight brought Bigelow to the Uinta Basin, where hundreds of UFO sightings have been cataloged by former Roosevelt schoolteacher Joseph "Junior" Hicks, beginning in the early '50s.

NIDS isn't likely to leave the area anytime soon, either - as long as research can be conducted without interference. Bigelow and Colm Kelleher, NIDS' deputy administrator, worry that too much publicity may attract undesirable attention.

"If you had a tailgate, football-stadium kind of atmosphere out there, and everybody's out there with hot dogs and hamburgers, and they're barbecuing and waiting for the UFOs to come down, I don't picture it (continuation of the activity) is going to happen."