

NEWS RELEASE

Sequoia National Forest and the Giant Sequoia National Monument
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Monumental Outlook Over The Horizon (What's Happening on the Sequoia National Forest Giant Sequoia National Monument)

By Tina Terrell, Forest Supervisor

Thought I'd take a few moments and share with you some startling statistics about marijuana sites on the Sequoia National Forest. Most readers have likely heard about Operation LOCCUST (Locating Organized Cannabis Cultivators Using Saturation Tactics), where 14 agencies teamed up to remove marijuana plants, investigate and apprehend drug trafficking individuals, and remove marijuana-growing infrastructure on public lands in Tulare County. In just two weeks they put a phenomenal dent in the marijuana cultivation activity in Tulare County. Public safety is the Forest Service's impetus for addressing the marijuana growing aggressively on the Sequoia National Forest and we are partnering with others to vigilantly police these public lands.

Of the startling 482,158 plants eradicated, 312,994 were taken from public land managed by the Sequoia National Forest. Additionally, law enforcement confiscated 380.2 lbs of processed marijuana, 17 ounces of cocaine, 42.5 ounces of "ice" methamphetamine; made 28 drug related arrests; seized 26 firearms, a vehicle, and \$6900 in cash. They have seven ongoing warrants; most from marijuana grow operations conducted by armed drug trafficking organizations. These organizations are primarily undocumented foreigners that pose a significant threat to the public, Forest Service employees, and to the environment.

In past efforts, when marijuana was eradicated in Tulare County, personnel and funding were not adequate to clean up the mess created by growers. Thanks to volunteers from the High Sierra Volunteer Trail Crew, supported by the Forest Service, over thirty percent of the 51 grow sites located on the Forest were reclaimed.

In less than two weeks, these volunteers removed 245 bags (35,540 pounds) of trash which held 20 propane tanks, 4,195 lbs of fertilizer, 22 lbs of pesticide, 33.5 gallons of chemical, and 165,556 feet (31 miles) of irrigation line. These volunteers destroyed multiple

make-shift structures that were built by the growers, including benches, tables, 2 dams and 11 reservoirs. Removal of this material will help restore the land to its natural state and will remove the infrastructure which is imperative to deter drug trafficking organizations from re-establishing their operations.

These drug trafficking organizations occupy public land for months at a time, threaten public safety, cause fires, cut trees, build illegal structures, illegally kill wildlife, pollute the watershed, create massive trash problems and illegally use herbicides and pesticides. These large sites strip the soil of its nutrients and stress local indigenous species. Forest Service law enforcement and partner agencies will continue to focus their efforts to disrupt and dismantle drug trafficking organizations that are primarily responsible for the marijuana cultivation occurring on the Sequoia National Forest and Giant Sequoia National Monument.

We continue to address resource degradation issues and the effects of marijuana growing that impact the watershed when chemicals and materials and equipment are left on the landscape. We will be diligent in our law enforcement operations and management restoration efforts to reduce damage where marijuana growing occurs. Even though Operation LOCCUST is over, we will continue to partner with law enforcement agencies to manage and curtail marijuana cultivation and work with volunteers and others to restore areas that have been degraded.