Issue: Marijuana cultivation on National Forest System and other public lands, environmental effects, and cooperative activities.

Description:
The cultivation of marijuana by Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO) on National Forest System (NFS) and other public lands continues to be a significant problem. This activity increases the risk to the health and safety of the visiting public and employees and the continued viability of the Nation's natural resources. Cultivation activities produce large amounts of trash, hazardous materials and chemicals, such as herbicides or pesticides. These poisons are a significant risk to wildlife and water sources and have been linked to increased mortality in listed threatened and endangered wildlife that have habitat near grow areas. Forest Service Law Enforcement and Investigations (LEI) cooperates with many Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies to combat cultivation of marijuana on Public and adjacent private lands.

Key Points:
Marijuana Cultivation on NFS Lands
- DTOs are operating on 72 national forests in 21 States.
- In fiscal year (FY) 2014, 655,864 marijuana plants were eradicated from NFS lands.
- The estimated street value of eradicated plants is $1.62 billion ($2,500 per plant).
- In FY 2014, a total of 229 sites were eradicated on NFS lands, (167 in California).
- 80 percent of marijuana grown on Federal public lands is grown on NFS lands.
- In FY 2014, LEI assisted with eradication of 73,628 plants on 153 sites on other lands.
- From FY 2000 to FY 2014, approximately 22,108,886 marijuana plants have been eradicated nationally, and 19,184,417 plants (87 percent) have been eradicated in California alone.

Environmental Concerns
- Cultivation activities produce large amounts of trash, hazardous materials, and chemicals, such as herbicides, pesticides, and rodenticides, which are typically left at the site.
- Cultivation activities also damage soils, cut timber, clear vegetation, damage resources, and create significant soil erosion problems.
- Water sources, such as streams and natural springs, are altered, contaminated, and made unavailable for use by local wildlife.
- LEI practices a coordinated “law enforcement and reclamation” strategy on all grow sites to facilitate rapid cleanup activities with minimal resources.
- The estimated average cost to reclaim a cannabis cultivation site is $15,000.

Cooperative Activities
- LEI is a lead member of the White House Office of National Drug Control (ONDCP) Public Lands Drug Control Committee (PLDCC). PLDCC was established to facilitate the coordination of public lands drug control policies and programs. The committee assists with coordination and supports eradication operations, investigations, intelligence
development, and information-sharing at the headquarters level. The committee also helps identify and integrate best practices from the past year’s efforts.

- LEI cooperates with many Federal, State, Tribal and local law enforcement agencies to combat cultivation of marijuana on NFS lands, including the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation, the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

- In 2012, the funding and resources for the Campaign Against Marijuana Production (CAMP) in California were eliminated. LEI has assumed a leadership role and provides considerable funding to lead this campaign with the DEA, the Bureau of Land Management, the California Army and Air National Guard (CNG), the California Department of Justice, the California Department of Fish and Game, and other State and local law enforcement agencies to combat DTO on public lands.

State/Tribal Legalization Issues

- Colorado, Washington, Alaska, and Oregon have legalized recreational use/possession of marijuana. Twenty-three States have legalized medicinal use of marijuana.
- Marijuana remains illegal under Federal law, however, the enforcement strategy is guided by the 2013 Department of Justice Cole Memorandum detailing eight enforcement priorities.
- NFS lands in States with “legal” use have seen an increase in use on public lands.
- At this time, we have not seen a significant increase in growth on public lands in CO and WA.
- Cultivation enforcement and investigation activities by LEI continue to be a priority, however, some State/local assistance and cooperation has decreased in States with “legal” marijuana.

Summary:

The Forest Service (FS), in partnership with many local, State, Tribal and other Federal agencies, has long employed methods to identify, investigate, disrupt, prosecute, and ultimately dismantle drug trafficking organizations involved in marijuana cultivation on NFS and other public lands. The FS also routinely recovers grow sites to mitigate the dangerous and far-reaching adverse environmental effects and deny continued use by illegal cultivators. As a result of these strategies, in recent years there has been a decrease in marijuana cultivation and the resulting resource and environmental damage on public lands. However, there has also been a shift by illegal cultivators to private and other adjacent lands. The FS will continue to partner with our cooperators to address illegal cultivation on NFS, public, and other adjacent lands.

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Law Enforcement Involvement in the Planning Process

Law Enforcement and Investigations (LE&I) is an integral participant in all Forest Service activities, including the forest planning process. Although the forest planning process does not happen on an annual cycle, the 2012 Planning Rule and its implementing directives are built on the tenets of strong collaboration and participation, both internally and externally. For example, many management issues, including fire, water and wildlife, require an understanding of what is happening both on and off National Forest System lands. This understanding would also be informed by working closely with LE&I on the issues of illegal marijuana cultivation on public lands. In addition, during the assessment phase of a Forest Plan, the responsible official must identify and evaluate existing information about stressors and threats to ecological integrity, the patterns of land ownership, planning/zoning status, and use in and around the plan area, which would include information gleaned from LE&I staff on illegal marijuana cultivation. The agency is committed to working across boundaries with our neighbors to enhance land management activities, to save time and money, and to improve engagement.