



**EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY
Washington, DC 20503**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Wednesday, August 30, 2006

CONTACT: Jennifer de Vallance, ONDCP
202-395-6648 / 202-368-8422 cell or
Shirley Lessiak, BNE 916-717-6078 cell

**BUSH ADMINISTRATION CRACKS DOWN ON MEXICAN
DRUG GANGS POLLUTING U.S. PARKS**

**AS BORDERS TIGHTEN, MUTLI-BILLION DOLLAR INDUSTRY TURNS
NATIONAL PARKS INTO HAVENS FOR CRIME, VIOLENCE,
ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION**

(FRESNO, CA) – The Director of National Drug Control Policy, John Walters, and the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of California, McGregor Scott, participated in marijuana eradication operations today in California’s Sequoia National Forest. They met with Federal, State, and local law enforcement professionals to discuss the worrisome trend of increasing marijuana production by violent Mexican drug cartels on U.S. public lands.

Marijuana production on public lands is a multi-billion dollar industry, with Mexican drug cartels responsible for 80 percent of the grow operations. More than 50 percent of the marijuana produced on public lands across the country is in California. Hawaii, Kentucky, Oregon, Tennessee, Washington, and West Virginia are also targets for the cartels’ illegal use of public lands. Last year, more than 1.1 million marijuana plants were eradicated from State or Federal public lands in the State of California alone, with an estimated street value of \$4.5 billion.

Intelligence indicates that the cartels are expanding their operations north and east, and seizures/eradication of marijuana on public lands in California is expected to break last year's record. Already, just two months into this year’s growing season, more than 940,000 plants have been eradicated in the state. Out of 228 California marijuana grow operations seized on public lands so far this year, 166 were associated with Mexican national criminal organizations.

Director Walters, President Bush’s “Drug Czar,” said, “Mexican drug cartels are turning our national parks into centers of international drug production and trafficking. Every American should be outraged that parts of their public lands are being held hostage by illegal drug traffickers.”

Mexican drug trafficking organizations have traditionally smuggled large amounts of marijuana into the United States through our shared border. Strengthened border controls have recently made those smuggling operations more precarious, and thus, the cartels are moving their centers of production inside the United States. Combined with the huge profitability of marijuana production relative to that for other drugs like methamphetamine, there have recently been significant increases in domestic public lands production of marijuana. Each marijuana plant has the potential to produce one pound of marijuana, with a current street value of approximately \$4,000.

“There is hardly a more precious resource than our national park lands. All of us are entitled to enjoy these marvels without fear of encountering large-scale marijuana grows defended by armed guards. We are committed to doing all we can to eradicate this most serious problem from our public lands,” said United States Attorney Scott.

-MORE-

The consequences of marijuana production on public lands are significant. Law enforcement has reported increases in violence and intimidation associated with the Mexican organized criminal groups and those hired to protect the marijuana plantations. In 2005, during an early morning raid, law enforcement officers were ambushed while approaching a marijuana grow location, resulting in the serious wounding of a law enforcement officer and the death of a grower. There were four separate reports last year of armed growers threatening hunters while on public lands, and in 2001, a man and his eight-year old son were shot and critically injured at an illegal grow site hidden on their own property.

In addition to the public safety consequences, illegal Mexican grow operations jeopardize the fragile ecosystems of the forests. For every acre of forest planted with marijuana, ten acres are damaged. The human footprint on pristine forest land at a large-scale marijuana grow site can leave behind several tons of garbage, biohazard refuse, and toxic waste. Erosion is also a problem, as small streams and other water sources are diverted for irrigating the marijuana fields and the land is compacted. Repairing and restoring these sites costs the American taxpayer more than \$10,000 per acre.

Federal, State, and local law enforcement officials have been cooperating at unprecedented levels to address this problem. ONDCP funds initiatives throughout California to locate, eradicate, and remove marijuana sites on Federal and State public lands by coordinating investigations and interdiction operations, and combining resources from the various jurisdictions. For FY06, ONDCP provided \$2.2 million in supplemental funding to the Central Valley HIDTA to augment ongoing marijuana eradication efforts.

Additionally, California's Campaign Against Marijuana Planting (CAMP) is a multi-agency law enforcement task force managed by the California Department of Justice, Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement and composed of local, State and Federal agencies. CAMP agents are broken into five teams covering Northern, Central, and Southern California regions. CAMP members are assisted in their eradication efforts by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the U. S. Bureau of Land Management, the U.S. Forest Service, the California National Guard, the California Department of Fish and Game, the California State Parks, and dozens of county sheriff agencies and local police departments.

Seizures in California have increased over the last five years due to a variety of factors, including an increased number of deployment teams, more aggressive techniques, such as aerial surveillance and transportation of officers and larger garden sizes. During 2005, CAMP seized 1,134,692 plants, with a street value of more than \$4.5 billion, setting a new record. In the 23-year history of the CAMP program, agents have eradicated more than 15 million plants with an estimated wholesale value of \$60 billion.

After meeting with representatives of the various agencies participating in eradication efforts on California public lands, Director Walters said, "All the Federal, State, and local agencies are to be commended for their effective, collaborative efforts protecting our public lands. Despite the enormous challenge of patrolling hundreds of thousands of acres, the pressure exerted on the Mexican drug cartels operating on public lands is forcing them to go to extremes to protect their cash crops. We must continue to push back against this problem and to return our national parks back to their rightful owners – the American people."

###