

[Marijuana plantations threaten national forest resources](#)

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A marijuana plant growing on national forest land at Winter Park Ski Area.

Forest Service law enforcement director outlines impacts in Senate testimony

By Summit Voice

SUMMIT COUNTY — Outlaw marijuana growers on national forest lands are polluting streams, killing native vegetation and leaving behind trash and dangerous debris that's difficult and expensive to clean up, the agency's top law enforcement official said in early December at a U.S. Senate hearing.

"The illegal cultivation of marijuana on our National Forest System is a clear and present danger to the public and the environment," said U.S. Forest Service law enforcement director David Ferrell, testifying before the Senate Caucus on International Narcotics Control.

Ferrell detailed the impacts from sites in 20 states on 67 national forests across the country, including California, where the Forest Service completed cleanup and restoration on 335 sites, removing more than 130 tons of trash, 300 pounds of pesticides, five tons of fertilizer and nearly 260 miles of irrigation piping.

"Many marijuana sites found on national forests are under cultivation by drug trafficking organizations that are sophisticated and include armed guards, counter-surveillance methods, logistics support and state-of-the-art growing practices," he said. "It is incumbent on the agency to do what is necessary to ensure that the resources we manage are protected and visitors as well as employees are safe."

The effects of marijuana sites on natural resources are harsh. Native vegetation is cleared before planting. Thousands of feet of black tubing transport large volumes of water diverted from streams, lakes, and public drinking water supplies. An average size marijuana plot of approximately 1,000 plants requires up to 5,000 gallons of water daily.

Natural vegetation and wildlife are killed as growers use liberal doses of herbicides, rodenticides and pesticides, some of them banned in the United States. These chemicals can cause extensive and long-term damage to ecosystems. Human waste and trash in the grow sites are widespread. Winter rains create severe soil erosion and wash the poisons, this waste and trash into streams and rivers – including Wild and Scenic Rivers and National Recreation Areas.

At an estimated cost of \$5,000 per acre, cleanups also divert scarce Forest Service resources away from other priorities. The restoration of the site to re-establish streams costs another \$5,000 an acre. And yet another \$5,000 an acre is needed to restore the area to its natural state. The typical marijuana site is between 10-20 acres.

The agency will continue to enhance partnerships with other federal, state, local and Tribal agencies in a cooperative effort to investigate and eradicate marijuana cultivation and other narcotic activities occurring on National Forest System lands, Ferrell said.

<http://summitcountyvoice.com/2011/12/29/marijuana-plantations-threaten-national-forest-resources/> (cited 16/1/12)