

**STATEMENT BY RICHARD MARTIN, SUPERINTENDENT OF SEQUOIA AND  
KINGS CANYON NATIONAL PARKS, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, DEPARTMENT  
OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE HOUSE GOVERNMENT REFORM  
SUBCOMMITTEES ON ENERGY POLICY, NATURAL RESOURCES AND  
REGULATORY AFFAIRS, AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE, DRUG POLICY AND HUMAN  
RESOURCES REGARDING THE IMPACTS OF MARIJUANA CULTIVATION AND  
METHAMPHETAMINE PRODUCTION ON SEQUOIA AND KINGS CANYON PARK  
LANDS AND OPERATIONS**

**October 10, 2003**

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Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to present the efforts being made by the National Park Service to protect visitors and resources in national parks from the increasing numbers of illegal, cultivated marijuana crops on public lands in California.

We are always greatly concerned at the discovery of drug activity in the national parks. National Park Service (NPS) practices and policies are dedicated to preserving cultural and natural resources while providing a safe, clean and secure environment for its visitors and workforce. Illegal activity, especially one that fosters a component of violence, threatens the mission of the NPS and the haven of peace and serenity that our public seeks when they visit our parks. Here in California three of our park units, Sequoia National Park (NP), Point Reyes National Seashore (NS) and Whiskeytown National Recreation Area (NRA), experience illegal activities that threaten our employees, visitors, and our natural resources today.

In the 1980s, marijuana gardens proliferated at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park (NP). The rugged terrain discouraged visitors, but the phenomenal weather was conducive for the growth of high yield marijuana. To most of the visiting public, the Hawaiian Islands represent peace and tranquility in a lush tropical setting. Marijuana growers in Hawaii Volcanoes NP protected their

illegal crops with attack dogs and threats of violence to those who stumbled upon their sites.

Drug cultivators during this time period, 20 years ago, did not use guns or booby traps.

In Hawaii Volcanoes, the NPS eradicated the illegal crops, or “gardens”, by a coordinated and assertive approach of consistent surveillance, teamwork, and arrests, coupled by collaboration with the U.S. Attorney who always prosecuted the cases to the fullest extent of the law. It also helped that the park is on an island. It is somewhat easier to change behavior when land is confined.

The key to this effective and successful campaign was personnel and consistency. It meant staking out every marijuana patch and arresting growers. Our goal was to eliminate the cultivation of an illegal drug in the national park. It is the same goal we must establish for Sequoia NP. We can learn from the Hawaii Volcanoes experience by recognizing that the drug cultivation in our California parks is orchestrated by cartels and requires coordinated Federal, state, and local response.

Two years ago, investigations revealed that Mexican cartels were finding gaps in our law enforcement programs, which the growers could exploit by moving their operations into the more remote areas of Sequoia NP. The problems we are discovering frequently at Sequoia NP are emblematic of how the skills and abilities of professional law enforcement park rangers are being tested every day on remote NPS lands, located at an elevation with access to water that provide conditions conducive to illegal cultivation. It also exemplifies our struggle to protect the

cultural and natural resources while providing the visiting public a safe, clean and secure opportunity to experience their parks.

The drug cartels are very secretive, well equipped, highly organized and well supplied. Drug cartels arm their growers with guns and knives. They provide booby traps such as bear traps, which can seriously injure or kill a human, and teach the gardeners how to set them up. We have found a number of weapons, including air rifles, .22 caliber long guns, 12 gauge shotguns, 9 mm and 40 caliber hand guns, assault rifles, knives and machetes. They hire people who cannot, or pretend not to, speak English, and locate them in very hard-to-get-to-places where few others go. They expect them to live in squalid conditions for months at a time, tending a multi million-dollar crop. The gardeners appear to be willing to live a squatter's life with interesting and seemingly conflicting needs. Oddly, these remote and incredibly difficult-to-find locations often contain religious icons or shrines matched with AK-47s, bowie knives and pornographic magazines.

Though the threat to visitors and employees remains the highest concern, the devastating effect to the resources, including the wildlife, of the parks cannot be forgotten. Tons of trash – in open as well as buried pits– are hauled out by park rangers after a location is found. Human waste, food garbage, carcasses of poached animals, shovels, buckets and miles and miles of irrigation hoses are found along with the ubiquitous blue tarps and other debris.

This is a snapshot of a very disturbing trend in national parks, particularly in the California chaparral country. We are deeply concerned for the safety of NPS employees who must fight this war on drugs and for those visitors who seek to enjoy the beauty and serenity of the backcountry.

In 2002, a particularly unlucky park visitor stumbled upon one of the drug camps. This visitor was threatened by the grower with keeping the location secret. It is fortunate that the visitor was released unharmed by the grower even though he had seen the heavily fortified grounds. The next visitor may not be so lucky. It was this incident that led to concerted efforts to begin eradication last summer.

Park Rangers have increasingly become concerned that some of the illegal encampments have been only a few feet from visitor hiking trails. In many of these locations the brush is so dense that no one spotted the garden or blue tarps in the camps. The casual visitor usually stays on the trails as dense vines of poison oak carpet the hillsides and banks leading into these illegal sites.

Sequoia NP had significant success in 2002 arresting 12 growers. To date, in 2003, we have made three arrests. Unfortunately, none of the arrests have led to the higher levels of the cartel. Because of the nature of this substantial law enforcement challenge, our rangers must be equipped and trained to best protect the resources, park visitors and themselves.

In the past 10 years, rangers at Point Reyes NS have discovered 44 illegal marijuana operations. Last year a marijuana site with a multi million-dollar street value was removed and two growers arrested. No illegal sites have been discovered this year.

At Whiskeytown NRA last year, park rangers discovered marijuana gardens when they became suspicious of a massive tadpole die-off. Park rangers tracked up through a canyon and water source to the remains of a small dam that growers had created to hold water with a jerry-rigged open can of fertilizer suspended in it. A flash flood wiped out the dam and washed intense concentrations of fertilizer downstream, poisoning the fry. From this discovery, the park rangers followed nearly vertical trails, often on their bellies and in dense rattlesnake country, to locate gardens perched on the edges of cliffs. Growers had seriously damaged the resource by scraping the terrain nearly flat and disguising many of the locales from the ground and air surveillance.

No gardens have been discovered at Whiskeytown NRA this year; but we believe the growers are continuing to conduct their illegal activities up and down the state, crossing park boundaries and posing a dangerous threat to our public lands.

Efforts in this area are interagency. Sequoia NP works closely with the County Sheriff in Tulare County. Whiskeytown NRA has an equally close relationship with the Tehama County Sheriff. The California Department of Justice/Bureau of Narcotics Enforcement and our allied Federal agencies – the United States Department of Agriculture, Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management are equal partners. We work closely with them on all levels pertaining to law enforcement issues. In addition, we can count on the Drug Enforcement Agency and the U.S. Attorney to pursue arrests and prosecutions.

Sequoia NP has a program of monitoring lands by air, foot and patrol vehicle. We take advantage of search and rescue flights to observe unusual activity, as well as helicopter use provided by the state and the military.

Park ranger foot patrols are utilized in high probability areas. In Sequoia NP we have a cadre of backcountry rangers who patrol their districts on foot or with stock animals. The Mineral King district, one of the most remote and pristine areas of the Sierra Nevada range, has the most recent marijuana garden discoveries. Air reconnaissance followed by foot patrol has led to this discovery.

Pilots from LeMoore Naval Air Station have been extremely cooperative in providing air support for park ranger surveillance activities. This relationship is crucial.

Our Global Positioning System (GPS) staffer at Sequoia NPS has mapped elevations, water sources, vegetation, drainages, roads and garden locations. Over the years this history of land use provides us with a model for the high probability growing areas.

Sequoia NP has 25 rangers for 1.5 million acres of parkland. All of our park staff is involved – park naturalists have an educational and safety message for visitors. Maintenance employees perform site cleanup after an illegal grow operation has been eradicated. Resource management, fire management, and administrative employees have roles in restoring the areas within their occupations. The issue of employee and visitor safety, however, has become so serious, that we may have to allocate more of our law enforcement staff solely to the drug eradication efforts.

The money we were able to direct toward this issue last year was money well-spent. Our park rangers eradicated 34,000 plants in Sequoia NP last summer. The task in 2002 represented a 600 percent increase over previous years. To date, in 2003, we have located 24,000 plants. We removed 15 tons of plants last year with a street value in excess of \$140 million. There were 45-50 growers in at least 22 illegal encampments, plus more coming in and out of the park using an annual 'National Park Pass' for admission.

Additionally, Sequoia NP has excellent relations with the state agencies devoted to drug enforcement. It is the strength of these professional friendships that have helped us with the scheduling of CAMP, Campaign Against Marijuana Production, which has three 11-member teams with helicopters. The drawback is that this successful task force is in high demand. Sequoia NP also supports a program to deputize county sheriffs to work in our exclusive Federal jurisdiction. Finally, because of the difficult air quality standards facing the State, we are especially indebted to the Sheriffs Departments for burning the 'product' on county lands in areas where the environment is more conducive to dispersion of smoke by-products.

The NPS has a long history of success in restoring lands. Unfortunately, we cannot keep up with the adverse impacts of the illegal marijuana operations. These criminals are cutting trees, diverting streams, creating crude dams, and contaminating the soil. Major irrigation systems can carry water from up to a mile away. Some are gravity fed. Some have timers. Some are on drip systems. Huge quantities of chemicals such as ammonia nitrate, sevin, malathion, diazinon, dcon, strychnine and detergents are found in the camps.

We start by removing the tons of trash and abandoned equipment in an attempt to control the habituation of wild life, such as deer, coyotes, and black bears. We know our next steps are to remove the irrigation hose and take care of the illegal logging, replant where necessary, and send hydrologists in to advise on the damage. Restoration will take a long time and also requires consistent work.

On September 16, 2003, two growers were killed during a law enforcement confrontation with criminals who were working illegal drug grows on BLM lands in Shasta County. The NPS has both the responsibility to ensure that its 388 units are well-managed for this and future generations. We must continue to work with other law enforcement officials to stop this illegal activity now for the safety of our visitors and our staff, and for the continued protection of our priceless resources.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the other members may have.