

**The following is submitted to the Committee on Government Reform:**Background Information on the California Department of Parks and Recreation

The California Department of Parks and Recreation manages approximately 270 park units, which contain the finest and most diverse collection of natural, cultural, and recreational resources to be found within California. These lands include some of the last stands of primeval redwood forests, vast expanses of fragile desert, portions of the Sierra Nevada mountain range and coastal scrub. State park units include preserves and reserves among its holdings. These parks protect and preserve an unparalleled collection of culturally and environmentally sensitive structures and habitats, threatened plant and animal species, and ancient Native American sites. State parks land not only protects habitats but habitat linkages and migration routes, allowing the movement of animals and plants between state parklands and neighboring protected lands. California State Parks consists of nearly 1.5 million acres, with over 280 miles of coastline; 625 miles of lake and river frontage; nearly 18,000 campsites; and 3,000 miles of hiking, biking, and equestrian trails.

Resource Damage Resulting from Marijuana Cultivation and Methamphetamine Production

Resource damage occurs on many fronts when a marijuana plantation or a clandestine lab is located on any land. However, the impact on public land can be devastating to the local native species. Parklands are specifically set aside to preserve a significant cultural or environmental feature. These areas often include threatened and endangered species or culturally sensitive areas.

Currently, the major threat to California State Parks is from marijuana cultivation. Clandestine labs do occur and the hazardous waste they leave behind is threatening to, not only the land, but to the public and native species that may frequent the area.

Marijuana cultivation presents a more significant problem to the park system at this time. From the ground disturbance, cutting down of native vegetation, introduction of non-native seeds and diseases and changes in the ecosystem there could be an increase in exotic species. Exotic species are a threat to maintaining the natural diversity of an area. Non-native plants, animals and pathogens harm the native ecosystem by competing with and displacing native species and causing disease and mortality to plants and wildlife. Many of California's rare and endangered plants and animals are found on state parklands. Changes in vegetation may be detrimental to these endangered species as their habitat is usually already at risk.

1. Soil disturbance can result in erosion as well as a chemistry change in the soil acidity due to the addition of fertilizer. This may also enhance the habitat for exotic species, as native species are adapted to the local conditions. There is also the possibility of damage to archaeological sites primarily along creeks, streams and rivers. These locations, which are used by growers, are also the same locations used by Native Americans and European settlers.
2. Increased water to an area can also result in erosion as well as an increase in non-native species. Plants in an area are adapted to the moisture of the native habitat. Water diversion or the increase in water could also result in degradation of local water quality. Additionally, the diversion of water can result in changes to the habitat by removing water needed for the plants and animals. Spring boxes

used by some growers divert water from local springs. Spring boxes are 1 or 2-foot square wooden boxes sunk into the ground. Water from the spring is diverted to the box. A battery or solar powered timer and pump is installed to pump water to a marijuana garden. This water diversion is significant at higher and drier elevations particularly if the spring is the only water source for the area. The problem is many of these sites are remote and not frequented by park staff. While this is a positive situation from a public safety point of view these areas are often not studied by ecologists. It is difficult to quantify the damage as in many areas baseline data has not even been recorded. Therefore, the extent of the damage is unknown.

3. Marijuana growers kill native wildlife by using poison for small mammals and rodents. They additionally shoot and trap deer.
4. There is also the problem of garbage, chemicals and human waste being left behind which can attract wildlife.

### Public Safety Aspects

Public safety issues also can arise from marijuana plantations when areas frequented by hikers and other visitors are used for gardens. While many sites used for growing are remote and accessible only by difficult hikes, not all sites are remote. Approximately 85 million visitors visited California State Parks in 2001. There are approximately 835 State Park Peace Officers assigned to 18 districts. Of the total number of officers, 422 are field level staff and first line supervisors. The department currently has 71 vacancies. There are two designated investigators within California State Parks. These investigators' full-time workload consists mainly of resolving internal complaints. Workload and budget deficits have reduced the available departmental staff. By necessity, State Park Peace Officers patrol the developed areas of parks where the highest concentration of visitors congregate.

Data collection for marijuana plantations is mainly anecdotal, but a sampling of parks units showed that in 6 districts queried 13 incidents came to light. These marijuana grows over the past 3 years, totaled approximately 20 acres under cultivation with approximately 18,000 plants. The estimated street value for the plants at maturation was 28 million dollars.

In 2002, Attorney General Bill Lockyer said of marijuana plantations, "This presents a dangerous situation for hikers, campers and law enforcement, especially park rangers. Those hired to tend the large gardens are usually immigrant recruits living for weeks in modest campsites, often armed and under orders to defend their illegal crops, even when approached by peace officers." According to the California Department of Justice's Campaign Against Marijuana Planting, 56% of statewide marijuana plantations were taken from public lands. In 2001, 39% of the plantations were from public lands.

Problems from plantations can include arson from remote campfires and smoking. In July of 2003, a 1-acre fire resulted from a cigarette in the Auburn State Recreation Area and the discovery of a plantation in the rough terrain near the Foresthill Bridge. The plants covered, in 3 separate areas covered a total of approximately 5 acres worth about 3 million dollars. In the past years, the Mendocino and North Coast Redwood Districts in northern California were frequent areas of activity.

Hendy Woods State Park has been the frequent site of plantations. In 1994, Ranger Kathy Kinzie was first on scene of the shooting of a grower. The garden had approximately 1,200 plants. A park interpreter at Hendy Woods was working when he encountered an individual guarding a marijuana plantation with a rifle. The interpreter was chased through the brush for approximately 10 minutes. Other

problems arise between growers and "marijuana pirates". Local individuals can often track someone else's grow by walking along the river where plants are grown to avoid the need for water. This has resulted in disputes between growers and "pirates". It also puts at risk those users who hike river trails. This was recently the case in Caswell Park when grows were found along the river. A male subject came out of the bushes dressed in camouflage led officers to the area where plants were found.

One of the problems in locating the sites is they are so remote that field personnel have to be flown in or hike rugged terrain. All grow related equipment and plants are burned on site or destroyed. Tracking the sites is also difficult as old logging skid roads are utilized. The road base is generally in a usable condition but the road itself is overgrown and not readily visible from the air or other vantage points. Park staff has often located water lines diverting water from State Park's property to private property. These remote areas lack good radio coverage reducing the officers' ability to contact backup personnel or talk to the communication center. Since they are often in areas where the public often does not go the officers do not locate the grow but they do destroy the lines.

### Solutions

The past few years has seen an increase in the location and destruction of marijuana plantations statewide. These numbers of plantations destroyed will continue to increase particularly if agencies increase the existing network across jurisdictional boundaries. The California Department of Justice's Campaign Against Marijuana Planting (CAMP) has been able to perform this function for many years. Their ability to bring together a variety of agencies and their respective resources to work together is public funds well spent.

The California Department of Parks and Recreation understands that the problem of marijuana cultivation affects the public and crosses jurisdictional boundaries of public lands. This cooperation already exists in joint ventures established in the cooperative efforts by National and State Parks in the northern California and Santa Monica Mountains area. We intend to increase our participation and cooperation with the CAMP program by establishing a single point of contact for our department. Often the boundaries of remote public lands are not clear. The Department of Parks and Recreation has been seeking funding for a new computer aided dispatch system which would include a records management function to capture information and a mapping function which will allow to integrate boundary lines with longitude and latitude coordinates. The crime mapping function will allow the appropriate agencies of jurisdiction to be notified when a location of land under cultivation is discovered. Additionally, the department will be able to determine the extent of the problem occurring upon its property. The department also intends to involve archaeologists and resource ecologists in determining the actual quantifiable damage done to a site.

Respectfully submitted by Lisa Mulz, Superintendent of Law Enforcement

