

During COVID, California's Toxic Trespass Grows Have Returned to Pre-legalization Levels

As enforcement efforts ebb, organizations like CROP are raising awareness and funds to reclaim the public wilderness

VANCOUVER, BC, CANADA, February 12, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Activists working in California's public wilderness to remove illicit cannabis grows — hundreds of which use carbofuran, a pesticide banned in the United States for its high toxicity — have seen the number of sites increase for the first time in 15 years.

As the pandemic constrained already struggling enforcement efforts, illicit operators have seized on the opportunity to ramp up cultivation and sales to the profitable, multistate black market.

And they're not the mix of hippies and rednecks that popularized growing weed in Californian forests. Experts estimate that more than 95 per cent of the sites are run by Mexican cartels that care little about the environmental fallout of their methods.

The toxic carbofuran they use kills wildlife, taints waterways, spreads into the air as pressurized cylinders explode during wildfires, and travels in or on weed plants to consumers on the other side of the country.

- Reclamation efforts have been underfunded and unorganized. Cartels are taking advantage -

Twenty million acres of dense national forest conceal an unregulated industry on California's public lands. Organizations like the Cannabis Removal on Public Lands Project (CROP) and the International Cannabis Farmers Association (ICFA) say California law enforcement need help.

"The law enforcement presence on those federal lands in California is extremely undermanned and outgunned," explains Rich McIntyre, director of CROP.

There's only one officer for every quarter-million acres of land, he says, and while growers have semi-automatic weapons, federal rangers are walking around with .38-caliber rifles.

During Covid, California's toxic trespass grows have returned to pre-legalization levels - emerald triangle

"Covid has emboldened them to increase the number of grows this year for the first time in 15 years," he says. "Law enforcement is seeing trespass grow activity on federal lands at pre-legalization levels."

And reclamation efforts have gotten harder as funds from the U.S. Forest Service budget have shifted towards fire abatement and suppression to deal with the increase in wildfires. But an uptick in wildfires is one of the symptoms of the trespass grows.

"It looks like the Dolan fire was set, at least in part, to try to draw attention away from the growing sites," McIntyre says. "Someone sets a fire someplace else just trying to attract attention from you as you're growing."

That fire had devastating consequences including killing...

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Nick Laba
Mugglehead Media Corp
+1 888-684-4534

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