

# Exorcising the Demons in Our Midst

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There are demons in our forests, exploiting our public lands. Quietly they move through the forest, finding secluded areas to stake their claims. Using the cover of darkness, they use trucks outfitted with special equipment to travel in and out of the forest, or at times ATV's or UTV's in their quest to achieve their goals. Anyone else who travels on their trails or near their camps, soon feels the fear of their presence.

And when they depart, the destruction they leave behind is devastating. Watersheds are poisoned from the chemicals that have leached into streams and creeks, trees are clear cut with impunity, all actions undertaken with no regard to environmental consequences. Animals in the area run the risk of being shot, or perishing from poisons left behind. Garbage accumulates, winter, summer, spring and fall, and we run the risk of encountering these demons every time we travel in the forest. But don't underestimate the danger, they are very powerful, and will stop at nothing to continue their destructive activities.

Reading the above, it may sound as if I am describing activities associated with off-road recreation, or motorized access in our forests. But the demons I am describing, and the danger that accompanies them hand in hand, is associated with illegal marijuana growing.

Illegal use of our land to grow marijuana is **the most destructive** activity in our national forests, yet little is heard about this serious problem from the usual environmental organizations. There are no calls for eradication of the illegal growers, or demands for increased enforcement by Forest Service Law Enforcement Officers. A recent quote from Sgt. Mike Horne of the Ventura County Sheriff's Department Narcotics Bureau, illustrates the enormity of the issue; "...growers kill animals that get in the way of their gardens, and set up shop in natural habitats, poisoning water and land."<sup>1</sup>

Randy Moore, Regional Forester of our California forests, stated on October 21, 2009; "...there's a huge danger associated with the herbicides and pesticides that are used to grow this illegal marijuana. We also have an issue with natural resource damages out there, such as stream diversions, damage to vegetation, sometimes a permanent loss of vegetation on some of these sites. We also have animals that are being killed."<sup>2</sup>In the same article, Game Warden Patrick Foy with the California Department of Fish and Game clearly illustrates the magnitude of the problem; "This is a very much an ecological disaster from all these

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1 . Cindy Von Quednow, for Scripps Howard News Service

2 <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/podcasts/marijuana/transcript5.php>

different aspects: from the poaching aspect, from the pollution, from the habitat destruction, I mean hundreds of trees are cut down. It's a complete disruption of the natural environment....it's permanent damage that they're causing."

There is an overwhelming amount of evidence to prove that illegal marijuana growing is causing great destruction in our forests, yet the Sierra Club states: "...it has **"other priorities."**"<sup>3</sup> Even the firefighters who work in the Sierra Nevada, who see this environmental damage first hand and are often on the front lines of this battle, are wondering why the Sierra Club isn't helping combat this plague on our public land. A article on [www.firefighterblog.com](http://www.firefighterblog.com) asks; "One outfit I would think should care is the Sierra Club Where are they?"<sup>4</sup>

The goals of the Wilderness Society, so eloquently stated on their website; "[to]...keep California's forests healthy by limiting the onslaught of roads that bring new industrial development, logging and mining to some of the state's most pristine regions" do not include the environmental destruction brought upon those very same forests by illegal marijuana gardens. The website has extensive information about global warming, and invasive species, but not a word is written about the scourge of illegal marijuana growing.

Some of these extreme environmental organizations even oppose efforts to eradicate the gardens. Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER), issued a press release objecting when the Forest Service bought unmanned remote-controlled aircraft to search for marijuana gardens in remote areas of the Sierra Nevada. Jeff Ruch, Executive Director of PEER, stated; "A cash-starved Forest Service is buying glitzy hardware with zero justification....the use of spy technology in the domestic U.S. should not be undertaken lightly." Clearly, PEER does not care about the threat to our forests, or to the law enforcement personnel tasked with eradication of these gardens.

But all the above organizations, the Sierra Club, PEER, and the Wilderness Society, have brought numerous lawsuits against the Forest Service and BLM over motorized recreation. Motorized roads and trails, which occupy roughly 7% of the land mass in our national forests when designated Wilderness and Wilderness Study Areas are included, and poses no threat at all to public safety, is criticized and falsely maligned over and over again. The real issue threatening our public land involving poisoning our land, water and animals, has been completely ignored.

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<sup>3</sup> [War of the Weed](#), By Joe Robinson, *LA Times*, August 9, 2005

<sup>4</sup> <http://firefighterblog.com/2008/10/pot-plantations-polluting-the-sierras-endangering-firefighters/>

It is a known fact among law enforcement personnel when trails are closed, or roads abandoned in the forest, the cartels that control illegal marijuana gardens move right in because they know they will be undisturbed. The very lawsuits brought by The Sierra Club, Wilderness Society, and PEER to close roads and trails are contributing to the problem. They legally force the agencies to limit travel to the backcountry, and enable the cartels. It's a simple correlation; more motorized travel in the forests equals fewer undisturbed or remote areas for the cartels to set up shop. The more wilderness or wild lands that are designated, the more roads and trails closed to travel, the freer the growers are to cultivate their illegal gardens, cutting down hundreds of trees, poisoning our water, and killing our animals.

Help our federal agencies protect our forests, rural residents, recreationists, campers, hunters and fisherman by demanding increased legal access to the backcountry. Let's call on our federal agencies to enhance legal motorized travel by designating **more** roads and trails, and encouraging off-road recreation. Shame on those organizations who ignore this problem, it's time for these extremists to exorcise these demons, and turn their attention to the real threat to our national forests, the damage caused by illegal marijuana cultivation.