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## **CROP (Cannabis Removal on Public Lands) Project to Reclaim Public Lands from Drug Trafficking Organizations**

*Organization fights for elimination and cleanup of illegal cannabis grows on public lands; most pressing issue threatening California's wildlife, communities, water supply and legal cannabis industry*

**Sacramento** — A broad-based coalition of conservation organizations, tribes, elected officials, law enforcement agencies, federal land managers, and the legal cannabis industry today announced the formation of the Cannabis Removal of Public Lands (CROP) Project, an organization dedicated to taking back California's public lands from drug trafficking organizations (DTOs). The CROP Project will address the environmental devastation and community safety risk posed by criminal cannabis-growing operations on public lands by cleaning up grow sites and restoring them for public use.

"We must take immediate action to protect and restore our public lands," said Rich McIntyre, director of the CROP Project. "Ninety percent of illegal cannabis grows on public lands are controlled by drug trafficking organizations and these criminal organizations are poisoning our water, our wildlife and cannabis consumers. It's unconscionable that families enjoying California's beautiful forests and tribal members accessing their ancestral lands are risking violence by encountering armed drug traffickers."

California's federal public lands — which include national forests, Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands, designated wilderness areas and tribal lands — make up nearly 45% of the state. Illicit cannabis grows on public lands are difficult to identify and remove due to their remote locations and a lack of resources for local, state and federal agencies and organizations that are responsible for detection and cleanup. According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy and the U.S. Forest Service, the cannabis grown illegally on public lands accounts for up to 70% of the illicit cannabis sold in California.

"As a consortium of partners, we are fortified by our common goal of stopping the ongoing abuse of our public lands and beginning to address the historical legacy of illicit cultivation," said Dr. Mourad Gabriel of the Integral Ecology Research Center (IERC), a not-for-profit scientific organization dedicated to researching and protecting California's wildlife and habitat

and a founding member of the CROP Project. “Our public lands are a treasure, and we aim to revert them to the state they were meant to be, providing vibrant habitats for wildlife and fish, as well as clean water for California’s communities and safe outdoor experiences for all.”

CROP is initially seeking funding to clean and reclaim up to 2,000 grow sites and increase the number of U.S. Forest Service rangers in California’s national forests. According to Dr. Gabriel, it costs an average of \$40,000 to reclaim each site, requiring law enforcement support, hiking into remote areas with trained crews, and often air support from the National Guard in order to remove tons of materials.

“We need more resources to identify and clean up the devastation from these illegal grows on public lands,” said Chris Morrill, Executive Director of the California Wilderness Coalition (CalWild). “These ticking time bombs continue to poison wildlife and contaminate California’s water long after growers leave. The CROP Project is asking federal and state officials to prioritize funding for reclamation of public lands used for illegal cannabis grows to protect our wildlife, our water and our land.”

The effects of growing illegal cannabis on public lands impacts residents across the state, since more than 60% of California’s water comes its national forests. Based on law enforcement estimates of the illegal cannabis grown on public lands, more than 9 billion gallons of water per year are illegally diverted by DTOs. This is equivalent to a yearly water supply for 35,000 homes — as much as the entire city of Redding.

“This is an important campaign aimed at tackling the longstanding problem of trespass cannabis grows on California’s federal public lands,” said Congressman Jared Huffman, (CD2). “In my congressional district, we’ve seen firsthand how illegal grow operations threaten visitors to our public lands, steal water and contaminate streams, and kill wildlife on a landscape scale. CROP is the first broad-based effort to take back our public lands from trespass grow operations, an urgent problem that I will continue to address in my work in Congress. That includes passing HR2250 (the Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act), which identifies this problem.”

According to the IERC, illegal neurotoxic pesticides used in illegal growing operations are killing and threatening endangered species in California’s national forests. An especially dangerous example is carbofuran — less than a teaspoon is enough to kill a 600-pound lion, and half-empty jugs containing the substance are regularly discovered at illicit grow sites. Additionally, IERC studies have shown that 70% of northern spotted owls found deceased in California’s national forests had been poisoned by rodenticide, 80% of pacific fishers tested positive for rodenticides, and 92% of California’s mountain lions tested positive for the substances used in illegal cannabis growing operations.

“Illegal cannabis growing on public lands jeopardizes the legal cannabis industry and prevents our communities from realizing the tax benefits that legal cannabis can bring,” said Natalynne DeLapp, Operations Director, Humboldt County Growers Alliance. “California voters strongly support a safe, well-regulated legal cannabis market. We’re supporting the CROP Project so we can ensure cannabis consumers are purchasing safe products free of dangerous chemicals.”

The CROP Project was founded by the Community Governance Partnership and the California Wilderness Coalition (CalWild). CROP’s advisory board includes representatives from the U.S. Forest Service, Karuk Tribe, Integral Ecology Research Center (IERC), Mendocino National Forest, Humboldt County Growers Association, Northcoast Environmental Center and Weedmaps, along with chairs or individual representatives from the Trinity County Board of Supervisors, Humboldt County Board of Supervisors, and Mendocino County Board of Supervisors.

### **About CROP Project**

Founded by Community Governance Partnership and California Wilderness Coalition, the CROP Project represents the first broad-based effort to cut illicit cannabis production on California’s national forests and reclaim public lands from drug trafficking organizations.

Learn more about CROP Project at [cropproject.org](https://cropproject.org)