TRESPASS GROW FACT SHEET

“Trespass grows” are illicit cannabis grows on public lands. Trespass grows constitute one of California’s leading environmental threats by poisoning wildlife on a landscape scale, contaminating water and soil with EPA-banned toxicants, and severely de-watering watersheds.

The Basics

- Trespass grows account for 40-70% of CA’s illicit cannabis market\(^1\)
- 80% of trespass grows are on national forest (NF) lands\(^2\)
- Over 90% of trespass grows are controlled by drug trafficking organizations (DTOs)\(^3\)
- Since 2000, over 23 million plants have been eradicated on CA NFs\(^4\)
- Since 2016, over 3 million plants have been eradicated on CA NFs\(^4\)
- Only 1 in 5 public lands cannabis plants are eradicated annually\(^2\)
- In 2018, 90% of sites contained lethal, controlled or banned pesticides\(^3\), including Sarin-based malathion, Brodifacoum/Bromadiolone, Carbofuran, Methamidophos, and Cholecalciferol\(^5\)
- 30-40% of trespass grows go undetected\(^13\)

Impacts to Wildlife

- 70% of Northern Spotted Owls (ESA Listed) poisoned by rodenticide\(^6\)
- 80% of Pacific fishers (ESA Candidate) tested positive for up to 5 rodenticides\(^7\)
- 92% of mountain lions statewide test positive for one or more pesticide, particularly rodenticides\(^8\)

Impacts to Water

- More than 9 billion gallons of water per year are illegally diverted for trespass grows, or 27,600 acre feet (a yearly water supply for nearly 30,000 homes, or the City of Redding)\(^12\)
- Watershed diversion from trespass grows can account for 23-50% of total surface flow\(^9\)
- Approximately 6 gallons of water per plant per day\(^10\)
- Water theft exceeds minimum instream flows for certain watersheds\(^11\)

Impacts to Communities

- Contaminated watersheds; communities/tribes at great risk of toxicant exposure
- Reduced flows for fisheries, agriculture, tribal gathering, timber production, etc.
- Negative impact to local and state economy (e.g. costly clean-ups, increased enforcement)
- Reduced access to public lands as “no-go areas” due to DTO grows
- Recreation, hunting and other uses of public lands poses toxicant exposure risk
- Undercuts the legal cannabis market
- Loss in ecosystem services, such as clean water and air

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References:

1Estimates from ONDCP, HITDA, Don Hoang (Forest Service Special Agent in Charge of the Pacific SW Region), Dr. Mourad Gabriel (Co-Director at the Integral Ecology Research Center), Tommy Lannier (Director of the National Marijuana Initiative)


3Law enforcement statistics based on eradication.


5Integral Ecology Research Center trespass grow test results and first-hand reclamation.


8California Department of Pesticide Regulation. 2018. An Investigation of anticoagulant rodenticide data submitted to the Department of Pesticide Regulation. California Department of Pesticide Regulation, Sacramento, CA, USA.


Basic calculation based on law enforcement estimates of number of plants removed, and water requirements per plant per growing season

Estimates from IERC trespass grow GIS modelling and analysis