

SIERRA COUNTY

Board of Supervisors
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6 September 2016

Quentin Youngblood, District Ranger
U.S. Forest Service
Sierraville Ranger District
PO Box 95
Sierraville, CA 96126

Subject: Marijuana cultivation trespass on national forest system lands

Dear Ranger Youngblood:

This letter is to voice our concern and frustration with the recent investigation of marijuana trespass on national forest lands that resulted in the discovery of over 30,000 plants and the arrest of four undocumented nationals on national forest lands. We applaud the efforts of our local sheriff to assist the law enforcement resources of the Forest Service with this effort and want to be part of a system that discourages such abuse of public lands. We are aware of some reported extensive pesticide clean up costs with this event that the federal government is facing as all activities occurred on national forest system lands.

What we fail to understand, however, is why the full resources of the federal government are not coming to bear on this criminal issue, and instead the US government seems to expect tiny Sierra County to now absorb the costs of incarceration and prosecution of these offenders. The incarceration costs alone to Sierra County for the four are some \$9,000 per month for these individuals to be housed under contract in the Nevada County jail. Depending on the timeline of any trials, the total costs to the county for this investigation could easily exceed \$250,000. Sadly, just weeks ago the Tahoe National Forest was arguing with us over nominal law enforcement contact costs of less than \$6,000.

As you know, Sierra County is 980 square miles with a permanent population of just 3000, and is 70% national forest lands. While it is the county with the largest percentage of the Tahoe National Forest, the valuable resources to manage these lands are primary located in adjacent counties. Even more frustrating is upon inquiry as to why this issue is not being handled by the US Attorney, is to be told that the federal government cannot absorb the cost of any additional personnel in the form of federal prosecutors.

So while the federal Forest Service is supported by the population of the United States that numbers in excess of 330 million and the Forest Service has a nationwide enforcement budget of some \$125 million, in this instance the cost of prosecuting this case is expected to be absorbed by a county of just 3000.

It is hard for this board to comprehend why your enforcement folks argue for state peace officer authority both on and off national forest lands, and now faced with a criminal enterprise no doubt tied to drug activities elsewhere and is clearly within the jurisdiction of the federal government, drops this hot potato on local government. The federal government comes armed with law enforcement authority, US prosecutors, US judges, and US prisons, yet all now take a very limited involvement or no responsibility for this event. This entire event occurred on national forest system lands and was in it's entirely a crime against lands belonging to the people of the United States.

We have directed the sheriff and district attorney to track all costs associated with this event and will be presenting a bill to the federal government for payment. We would appreciate a continued dialog with you on this subject, one that has serious ramifications on the budget of Sierra County. With a contingency budget of just \$100,000 for this fiscal year, we are quite concerned with what this case alone can do to our ability to provide all over services necessary for both residents and visitors to Sierra County.

Sincerely,

SIERRA COUNTY
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

BY:

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Chairman

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