

Project Summary

Rocky Mountains Cooperative Ecosystem Studies Unit

Project Title: Science Develop Outreach and Interpretive Materials to Communicate Best Management Practices for Confronting Illegal Marijuana Cultivation in Parks

Discipline: Interdisciplinary
Type of Project: Technical Assistance/Education
Funding Agency: National Park Service
Other Partners/Cooperators: Utah State University
Effective Dates: 9/1/2012 - 12/31/2015
Funding Amount: \$14,229 [FY13: \$3,229; FY12: \$11,000]

Investigators and Agency Representative:

NPS Contact: Sean Denniston, Chief of Interpretation and Resources Management, Whiskeytown NRA, 14412 Kennedy Memorial Drive, Whiskeytown, CA 96095; Sean_Denniston@nps.gov; Phone 530/242-3445

Investigator: Mark Brunson, Utah State University, EnvS Dept. 5215 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-5215; mark.brunson@usu.edu; 435/797-2458

Researcher: Emily Yost, Utah State University, EnvS Dept. 5215 Old Main Hill, Logan, UT 84322-5215; esyost@gmail.com; 610/360-9152

Project Abstract: Resource Management staff at Whiskeytown National Recreation Area, Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks, and Yosemite National Park have been collaborating with Law Enforcement personnel to develop a series of Best Management Practices (BMPs). These BMPs will be incorporated into an overarching NPS strategy to address law enforcement and resource management issues, with a strong emphasis on public education of the full scope of this issue. The purpose of this project is to take the work products produced as a result of this collaboration and develop them into outreach materials and interpretive products.

Illegal marijuana cultivation on public lands not only is a threat to park staff and visitor safety, it also impacts the NPS's abilities to conduct research, monitoring and restoration activities as it is often unsafe to leave established roads and trails. While it is not realistic to believe that the NPS can seriously curtail illegal drug cultivation through interpretation, it is important to inform the public on the issue and to give basic safety information to those who may encounter illegal cultivation sites and/or those associated with such activities.

Consistent, clear communication across the NPS is necessary to support the efforts to keep public lands free from illegal marijuana cultivation. Law enforcement and media reports regarding eradication efforts typically discuss the number of plants and potential street value in detail, yet rarely communicate the resource damage to public lands or threats to visitors and park staff.

Although the illegal cultivation of marijuana is commonly considered a matter of "legalization", it is critical to communicate to the public that the issue is really about preventing the impairment of park resources and keeping public lands safe. Messages developed should emphasize personal safety and provide information on what and how to report suspicious activities, particularly for park staff, contractors, researchers, and volunteers.

Several audiences need to be targeted. The general public and media need to understand the numerous impacts of marijuana cultivation on public lands on the environment and public safety. In addition to understanding the impacts of cultivation sites, government officials, congressional staff, and management-level staff need to hear about the possible approaches to addressing the issue, successes, best practices, and funding needs. Park staff, park partners, and gateway communities also need a deeper awareness of the issue in order to learn about personal safety in the field and to communicate about the issue in a consistent manner. And the Reclamation and Restoration Best Management Practices developed by the Pacific West Region's (PWR) multi-disciplinary marijuana work group should be made available to all other NPS units struggling with illegal marijuana cultivation.

Outcomes with Completion Dates: Final Report Due Date - October 30, 2015

Keywords: Whiskeytown NRA, Utah State University, messaging, outreach, interpretive products, marijuana cultivation, public lands