



Joint News Release



For Immediate Release
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Operation 'Southern Sweep' Targets Commercial Marijuana Growers

Around 7 a.m. Tuesday approximately 450 local, state, and federal law enforcement personnel executed 29 search warrants in Humboldt and Mendocino Counties. The warrants stemmed from a nearly two-year investigation targeting a large commercial marijuana cultivation and distribution organization.

Law enforcement officers raided grow houses and residences in Shelter Cove, Whitethorn, Redway, Ettersburg, Garberville, Miranda, Phillippsville, Arcata, and McKinleyville. They also secured and are searching almost 2000 acres in southern Humboldt County and northern Mendocino County belonging to the targets of the investigation.

Over the course of Tuesday's activity, officers located around ten thousand marijuana plants estimated to be worth between \$25 and \$60 million on the street. They seized 30 firearms, including fully automatic weapons, one vehicle, and over \$160 thousand in cash.

No charges have been filed and none of the targets of the investigation were arrested during yesterday's raids. However, FBI agents arrested one man for assault on a federal agent during the execution of the search warrants.

"This is not a medical marijuana operation or a group of people growing for personal use," said FBI Special Agent in Charge Charlene B. Thornton. "It's a large-scale, for-profit, commercial business. The targets of our investigation are reaping huge profits while contributing to the crime and violence oppressing communities across the state."

California Department of Justice Bureau of Narcotic Enforcement Special Agent in Charge Sara Marie Simpson said, "Californians voted for reasonable personal use of medicinal marijuana for qualified patients—not massive wholesale growing operations. When large quantities of cash start changing hands, crime and violence soon follow and that will not be tolerated by law enforcement."

Beginning in early 2006, members of BNE's Redding regional office initiated an investigation into a California-based organization which had purchased a large parcel of mountainous land in the southern Humboldt and northern Mendocino County areas, and was suspected of growing large amounts of marijuana on the land and selling it for profit. Due to the large scale and scope of the investigation, BNE invited the FBI to participate.

Upon checking the area, agents located numerous buildings and greenhouses on the properties. No building permits had been issued for any of the structures on the properties. A review of aerial photos showed construction and grading in the area had increased year to year.

Investigators believed the subjects were working together on the rural properties to grow marijuana to be sold for profit.

This investigation has been a cooperative effort between the FBI, BNE, Internal Revenue Service, United States Postal Inspection Service, United States Drug Enforcement Administration, California Highway Patrol, California National Guard Counter Drug Task Force, United States Forest Service, Campaign Against Marijuana Planting, California Department of Fish and Game, Eureka Police Department, Humboldt County Sheriff's Office, Mendocino County Sheriff's Office, and the Siskiyou County Sheriff's Office. CA DOJ/BNE task forces included the North and South Butte Interagency Narcotic Task Force, Tehama Interagency Drug Enforcement, Glenn Interagency Narcotic Task Force, Shasta Interagency Narcotic Task Force, Siskiyou County Interagency Narcotic Task Force, Humboldt County Drug Task Force, Mendocino County Major Crimes Task Force, San Jose Unified Narcotic Enforcement Team, and the Madera County Narcotic Enforcement Team.