

Marijuana Crop Is Blight On National Forests

WASHINGTON — Almost 1 million acres of National Forest System land in the United States are considered unsafe for recreational uses and by Forest Service employees because they have been commandeered by persons illicitly growing marijuana for profit, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In 1980, approximately 5 percent of the domestically grown marijuana crop was found on national forests. Today, approximately 20 percent of the crop is grown for profit on these lands. The street value is estimated at \$1 billion.

National forests are a popular place for growing marijuana because they are considered safe by growers. Millions of acres of the National Forest System are remote and infrequently visited, making them ideal for illegal activity. Also, using public lands reduces the risk of asset-seizure by the government if a grower is caught.

The high value of marijuana and the demand for the domestic crop make growers protective of their plots, making it extremely hazardous for people who inadvertently encounter marijuana plots and growers. A major concern of the Forest Service is the safety and well-being of forest visitors and its own employees.

During raids on approximately 5,000 marijuana plantings annually, law enforcement officials have found booby traps at more than 20 percent of the site. Of the average 350 people arrested each

year on national forest lands, approximately 60 percent of them were found to be carrying weapons, and about 13 percent of these were illegal weapons, such as sawed-off shotguns and machineguns.

Booby traps and firearms pose life-threatening hazards to forest visitors and Forest Service employees. Booby traps have included trip wires tied to firearms, pipe bombs, hand grenades, punji sticks in pits, fish hooks strung at eye level, and alarm systems. Employees as well as visitors have been shot at.

One aspect of growing marijuana usually, unpublicized is the environmental threat to the forests because of the growers' heavy use of herbicides, pesticides and fertilizers. These chemicals are used to keep the marijuana plants healthy and to protect them from animals and other plants. These substances are left behind after the growers harvest their crops and leach into the soil affecting water sources and continuing to harm or kill animals and plants. In addition, growers frequently slaughter deer and other wild animals that browse on the plants.

Unfortunately, the combined efforts of the Forest Service and state and local law enforcement agencies have not been successful in significantly reducing the problem.

Enactment of the "National Forest Drug Control Act of 1986" provides the Forest Service with a tool to deal with the marijuana problem on national forest lands. It

authorizes Forest Service special agents and law enforcement officers to enforce felony laws regarding the cultivation of marijuana on the national forests. These employees will concentrate on detecting marijuana sites and apprehending growers. The law also makes the use of booby traps a felony.

The Act adds to the Controlled

Substances Act a section which makes the use of booby traps in connection with marijuana growing a felony punishable by imprisonment of up to 10 years and a fine of up to \$10,000 (up to 20 years and \$20,000 for repeat offenses.)

Forest Service investigations of marijuana growing will emphasize the apprehension of growers

rather than mere eradication of plants. This Act authorizes the Forest Service, in addition to conducting normal enforcement investigation of arson, timber theft, vandalism and other crimes on National Forest lands, to conduct surveillance activities, make arrests, execute warrants and seize evidence related to drug law enforcement.

Avoid Fall Application Of Nitrogen

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Taking a cue from Cicero, an ancient Roman orator, Mid-Atlantic area farmers don't have to believe everything they hear—or read. In this case, the admonition refers to application of nitrogen fertilizers during fall and winter months in mid-winter states like Maryland.

Even using nitrification inhibitors, developed by some commercial companies in recent years, will not prevent big losses of available nitrogen over the winter from anhydrous ammonia, urea or other nitrogen fertilizers applied earlier than February for small grains or prior to spring-planting time for row crops like corn and soybeans.

That's the word from V. Allan Bandel, an Extension fertilizer specialist and professor of agronomy at the University of Maryland in College Park.

Dr. Bandel admits that some Maryland farmers may have had good results from fall application of anhydrous ammonia and a nitrification inhibitor to small

grain crops last year. But that was due to below-normal rainfall throughout the fall and winter. The nitrification inhibitor had little or nothing to do with it.

Similar results could have been obtained during the previous year—even without the nitrification inhibitor. But these were rare exceptions, and they should not be counted on to continue as a normal pattern.

Bandel notes that the effects of nitrification inhibitors last only two to three weeks during mild weather. But the inhibitors can be successful in the upper Midwest and other northern regions where winter months generally feature very cold, constant temperatures.

Bandel agrees with most commercial suppliers that fall is a good time to fertilize—as long as nitrogen fertilizer, other than small amounts at seeding time for small grains, is not applied and the fields involved are not subject to erosion losses.

For instance, fall is a good time to apply phosphorus and potassium

fertilizers to alfalfa, the hay crop which feeds heavily on phosphorus and needs potassium for winter hardness.

A small amount of nitrogen applied at seeding time helps small grains get off to a good start in the fall. But top-dressing with nitrogen definitely should wait until early spring.

Fall also is a good time to apply phosphorus and potassium fertilizers to fallow land which is to be fall-plowed under a conventional tillage system—as long as the soil is not subject to erosion.

To illustrate his point against fall application of nitrogen fertilizer, Bandel cited a study at the University of Maryland's Wye research farm on the Eastern Shore over an eight-year period. The study showed that nearly twice as much nitrogen was available to corn plants from spring application as from fall application. This ratio held constant regardless of application rate or type of nitrogen fertilizer used.

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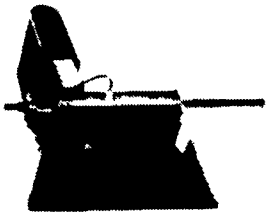
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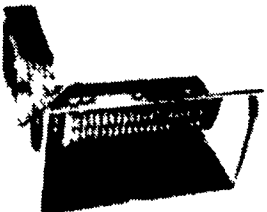
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