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U.S. Department of the Interior

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Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks News Release

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Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks Participate in Interagency Marijuana Raid

For the last two weeks, National Park Service law enforcement personnel participated in intense field operations with 15 other agencies under Operation S.O.S. (“Save Our Sierra”), organized by the Sheriff’s Office in Fresno County, California. Northern portions of Kings Canyon National Park are located within Fresno County, as well as a highway corridor connecting its two front-country subdistricts.

During this operation, over 400,000 marijuana plants were eradicated from 71 illegal cultivation sites. Most cultivation sites were located on public lands and tied to Mexican Drug Trafficking Organizations. Law enforcement also made over 80 arrests, served 5 warrants, confiscated 32 weapons, and seized 46 pounds of processed marijuana, 3 vehicles, and over \$40,000 cash.

“Collaboration between these multiple agencies has made Operation S.O.S. the huge success,” said Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks Superintendent Craig Axtell, “Organization and professionalism enhance officer safety in the field and the public’s safety at large. We really appreciate the emphasis S.O.S. placed on the major resource threat that marijuana cultivation presents to our public lands.”

Drug trafficking and associated support activity has been detected with increasing frequency by Rangers in Kings Canyon in recent years. Much of this illegal activity has occurred along the Highway 180 corridor between the Grant Grove and Cedar Grove in Kings Canyon.

Twenty-nine NPS Rangers, Park Police, and Special Agents conducted highway interdiction during Operation S.O.S., disrupting drug trafficking supply lines for two weeks during what is considered peak marijuana season. Over 40 arrests were made by NPS personnel. One known cultivation site in adjacent Sequoia National Park was abandoned due to nearby pressure and activity by law enforcement.

In addition to the parks’ staff, NPS personnel came from Yosemite National Park and throughout the region from the Pacific West Regional Special Events and Tactics Team (SETT).

Operation S.O.S. took a multi-tiered approach to combating the marijuana problem, focusing on education, investigation, prosecution, eradication, and restoration. A media tour was permitted during the clean-up of a site by the High Sierra Volunteer Trail Group. U.S. Office of National Drug Control Policy Director Gil Kerlikowske, the “Drug Czar”, was also present and briefed on the detrimental environment impacts of the grow sites on federal lands.

Working on this operation strengthened interagency ties between National Park Service and other Law Enforcement agencies involved in marijuana eradication. This is the second year the parks have participated in a major, interagency eradication operation. Those two operations were responsible for eradication of over 900,000 marijuana plants with a street value of \$ 3.6 billion.

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