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1ST DISTRICT, CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE ON  
NATURAL RESOURCES

COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

COMMITTEE ON  
TRANSPORTATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

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June 28, 2017

The Honorable Ryan Zinke  
Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke,

We write today regarding the detrimental impacts illegal marijuana grow operations have on public lands. These illegal grow operations cause irreparable damage to our environment and create an unsafe atmosphere for the public, as well as staff for federal land management agencies like the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS).

The destruction caused by illegal water diversions, pesticide use, grading of the terrain, and human waste have devastating impacts on our land and wildlife in western states. Miles of irrigation lines illegally divert water from nearby streams, impacting water supply and threatening aquatic species. The hundreds of pounds of illegal toxicants and pollutants used cause widespread destruction to our forests. In 2016, the USFWS studied the effects of marijuana cultivation toxicants on fishers and northern spotted owls. The study found that all fishers tested in California within an 11-month period tested positive for poison and that seven out of ten northern spotted owls tested positive for contaminants. The preliminary results of a separate study being done by regional hunting groups in Northern California are showing that game animals have been contaminated by these toxicants as well. Protecting our federal lands from this type of environmental degradation and pollution should be a priority.

In many western states, drug cartels are using the network of resources our national forests have to engage in large-scale illegal grow operations. These criminals come carrying the means to protect their assets from individuals that approach their illegal grow sites. The Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program Statistical Report put out by the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) shows that in California alone, more than 1,600 illegal weapons were seized annually in 2013, 2014 and 2015 at illegal marijuana grow sites. This creates a considerable safety risk to USFWS and BLM staff patrolling our national forests, as well as to

the public. Families and outdoor enthusiasts that enjoy utilizing our public lands for hunting, fishing, camping and recreating could unknowingly expose themselves to danger by innocently stumbling across one of these illegal grow operations that is being protected by individuals with weapons.

Protecting our public lands from these destructive environmental threats, and making sure our forests are safe for the public, is of utmost concern. According to the DEA Cannabis Eradication Program, total annual suppression costs in 2015 amounted to nearly \$30 million nationwide, an increase of 10% from the previous calendar year.

While confronting the challenges of illegal marijuana cultivation on our public lands is a large undertaking, it is extremely important that this matter be addressed by the federal government. We therefore ask that the Department of the Interior make illegal marijuana cultivation enforcement a top priority. The Department must act to eradicate illegal grow sites, address their impacts on our public lands and prevent future exploitation. It is far past time that we take a powerful stance against this criminal element and all that derives from this illegal activity in order to make our forests safe again for the public to enjoy. Please let us know how you plan to address these issues moving forward.

As always, we ask that this request be handled in strict accordance with existing rules, regulations and ethical guidelines. We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,



Doug LaMalfa  
Member of Congress



David G. Valadao  
Member of Congress



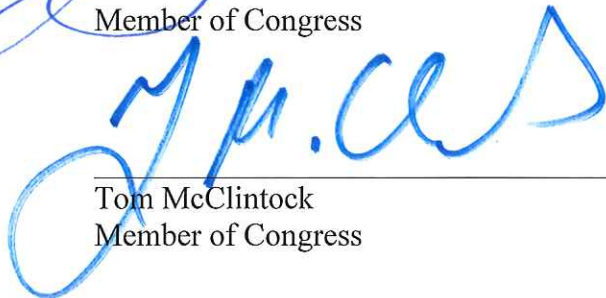
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