

Major Drug Trafficking Organizations on US Forest Service lands in Wisconsin and Northern Michigan

"Observations from the Field; why we are unprepared and how we can fix it"

This document contains no classified material or open case material that has not already been publicly released and reported upon.



Special Agent

US Forest Service

Law Enforcement and Investigations

Region 9

EXCEPT AS NOTED, REDACTIONS MADE UNDER EXEMPTION 5.

Background on Drug Trafficking Organizations on National Forest lands

“DTO” stands for Drug Trafficking Organization, which are criminal organizations created for the sole purpose of manufacturing and distributing illegal drugs.

In the past we have dealt with individuals, usually from the local community, or occasionally small groups of two or three. This situation is different; these DTO's are highly organized and are supported by a significant organizational infrastructure. Their operations are larger, much more organized, and more dangerous. Cultivators and security people live inside the grow site in small encampments and they are typically armed.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The dangers associated with DTO growing operations include, but are not limited to the following:

1. DTO growing sites are typically occupied at all times by cultivators, as well as people responsible for protecting the operation. These people are armed.
2. **Drug traffickers have harmed and threatened innocent civilians and law enforcement. There have been attempts to kidnap civilians and there have been several shootings this year alone.**
3. Some of these grow sites may be booby trapped with early warning or harmful devices.
4. Some DTO activities have caused large forest fires in the past.
5. The amount of resource damage caused by these operations is significant.

Preface

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In fact, 2008 brought the first ever discovery of a Mexican Drug Trafficking Organization ever on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (CNNF); which brought with it a plant count of over 9,000. In previous years, the eradication count had never exceeded 1,000. In fact, in 2007 the largest site discovered was a traditional "local grower" operation of only 200 plants. [REDACTED]

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DTO's are new to the Midwest [Redacted text block]

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Purpose

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History

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For this region (Wisconsin and Michigan), it began in 2007 when two Mexican Nationals were arrested operating a 57,571 plant grow site in a Forest Preserve area of Cook County, Illinois. Until that point, Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO's) had *never* established themselves before for cannabis growing operations in the area.

In 2008, the problem had spread; seven grow sites were located in Wisconsin and Michigan that were all multi-thousand plant grows. Operations of this size were *unprecedented* in the Upper Midwest, not just in size, but in terms of operational set up and obvious Drug Trafficking Organization (DTO) indications; never before have DTO operations been knowingly present in the region. All indicators suggest a Mexican DTO operating in the Midwest. Summarized information on those sites is as follows, all examples are publicly available:

- **June 2008.** 9,000 plants discovered in a DTO style grow site on the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest (CNNF). Two Hispanic males were encountered at the site within an encampment. Unfortunately, both suspects were gone on arrival of law enforcement. At the scene, supplies for several weeks and three different types of ammunition were discovered. A great deal of cultivation equipment was also present and seized.
- **September 2008.** Approximately 7,500 plants were seized at three abandoned grow sites in Shawano County, Wisconsin. The sites were located approximately 50 miles from the 9,000 plant site on the CNNF.
- **Summer 2008.** Kenosha County Wisconsin. A DTO style grow of over 5,000 plants was discovered. The encampment, ground preparation, cultivation methods, and cultivation equipment was nearly identical to the scene on the CNNF.
- **Summer 2008.** Walworth County, Wisconsin. A DTO style grow of 5,000 plants was discovered. Scene was nearly identical to the other sites listed above.
- **Summer 2008.** A 4,000 plant grow was discovered in Gladwin, MI
- **Summer/Fall 2009.** A large DTO operation was discovered on the Navareno Wildlife Area in Shawano County, Wisconsin. Several sites were located, thousands of plants were eradicated, and numerous encampments dismantled.

Current Situation

[REDACTED] The problem began in 2008 (Likely it began before that, but we did not discover it until 2008), in Northern Wisconsin and over the last three years it has spread locally and to the rest of the Midwest.

[REDACTED]

For the Hoosier, Ottawa, and Huron-Manistee NF's, this year represents the first time they have ever experienced DTO activity. [REDACTED]

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Past Failures and Missed Opportunities to Prepare

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2010 DTO Season Review

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- **Summer 2010.** Another large DTO operation was discovered on the CNNF and surrounding public lands. 12 Suspects were arrested; nine of them at a stash house full of processed marijuana and freshly harvested marijuana from the forest sites. Numerous firearms were seized and hundreds of pounds of processed marijuana was seized Most of those arrested were in the country illegally from Mexico. The total estimated plant count was 50,000 plants.
- **Summer 2010.** [REDACTED]
- **Summer 2010.** An additional operation was discovered on private land in Sawyer County, Wisconsin. Approximately 15,000 plants were seized. Several armed DTO members were confronted.
- **Summer 2010.** An additional DTO operation was discovered near the Ottawa NF in Northern Michigan. This operation consisted of several sites and over 5,000 plants.
- **Summer 2010.** Another DTO operation was located on the Huron-Manistee National Forest in Michigan. Thousands of plants were seized and two people were arrested.
- **Summer 2010.** Several DTO sites were located on the Hoosier NF in southern Indiana.

EXEMPTION 7A

As one can see, the DTO problem is no longer a problem just for western and southern states. In fact, the issue has now expanded within Wisconsin and Michigan, but also to other parts of the Midwest.

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Fortunately, [REDACTED]

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Closing

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