

# Organized Mexican Criminals Defile America's National Parks

BY BRENDA WALKER

Open borders have brought a new element to the seasonal news of fall: along with trees turning colors and harvest festivals being celebrated, Americans now have autumnal reports of the destruction done to formerly pristine wilderness.

Massive marijuana eradication from our national parks and forests has now been added to the predictable activities of harvest time. Camo-clad officers swoop down from military helicopters into hidden pot fields, arrest the caretakers and uproot the plants.

But these woodland nurseries have not been created by latter-day hippies raising a few plants as a druggie do-it-yourself project. On the contrary, today's public-lands marijuana patches are industrial size operations run by organized crime from Mexico and are guarded by heavily armed Mexicans who are often illegal aliens.

In this season's photo-op, the nation's drug czar John Walters remarked in mid-October, "Some of these groups not only engage in crime and violence not only in Mexico and along the border, but they come across and kidnap, murder, and carry out assassinations.... These groups do not respect the border."

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Walters made those statements in Sequoia National Park, which has been hit hard by Mexican drug syndicates. They have been growing pot there since at least 1998, when the plots were first discovered. The situation has worsened with some degree of increased border security following the 9/11 attacks.

Sequoia — one of the crown jewels of our treasured National Park system — has been occupied by Mexican crime syndicates for 10 years. What is going on? Why is Washington not protecting our most important natural heritage sites? And where are the environmentalists?

It's not just that marijuana worth millions of dollars is being grown as part of a violent criminal enterprise. From the viewpoint of park preservation, the problem is the extremely toxic way in which the cartels pursue illegal agriculture: all manner of dangerous and illegal chemical herbicides, pesticides and growth hormones have been used by the gangsters, which causes long-lasting damage to the environment.

National parks are supposed to be protected at the highest standard, preserving them as unspoiled places where nature is left alone. The Mexican infestation has corrupted that idea to its heart. John Walters testified in March that "10 acres of forest are damaged for every acre planted with marijuana, with an estimated cost of \$11,000 per acre to repair and restore land that has been contaminated with the toxic chemicals, fertilizers, irrigation tubing, and pipes associated with marijuana cultivation."

The Mexican gangsters routinely cut down trees, divert streams with systems of PVC pipe, and poach wildlife to eat. They create an ecological disaster in areas that are supposed to remain virgin for-



est. And these operations are big business: In 2007, more than 20,000 plants were found in Yosemite National Park and 43,000 plants in Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park. The eradication operations cost the government millions of dollars, but there is no money budgeted for the necessary environmental clean-up, so funds are either diverted from other projects or volunteers help out. Sadly, park protection and maintenance do not rank high on Washington's priorities, and budgets are slim.

In addition, there is the danger to hikers of wandering into a pot grove guarded by Mexican thugs equipped with full-auto weapons. Several law enforcement officers have been shot in altercations

with growers, but no hiker has been killed — yet.

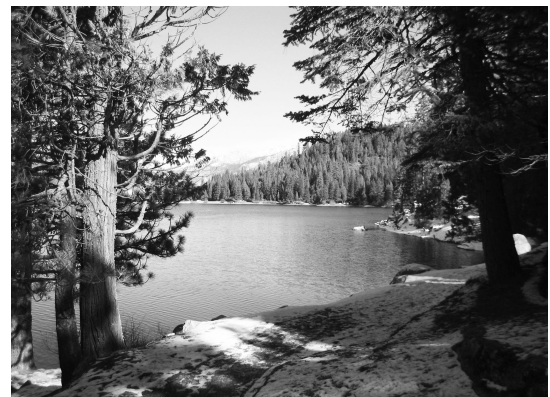
The conservation groups that should be front and center — like the Sierra Club — are apparently not interested that our pristine parks have been invaded and despoiled. The Sierra Club in particular has moved from non-partisan environmental protection to far left partnership with open-borders extremists; therefore speak-

ing out against Mexican criminals poisoning our protected lands doesn't fit with the organization's current politics. As an example of the group's new priorities, the Sierra Club has been highly engaged in fighting against the U.S.-Mexico border fence, despite the tons of trash left every year by illegal crossers. Obviously, the environmentally appropriate position would be pro-fence. But the flagship organization of the environmental movement has gone over to the dark side.

The Sierra Club cashed in its conservationist integrity when it secretly accepted a donation of over \$100 million on the condition that the organization not mention massive immigration/population explosion as being environmentally harmful. The donor, Wall Street investor David Gelbaum, stated, "I did tell [Executive Director] Carl Pope in 1994 or 1995 that if they ever came out anti-immigration, they would never get a dollar from me." (See end-

note 2, Fred Elbel on Alan Kuper, pp. 63-67.)

As a result of environmentalists' corruption, there is no powerful voice to prod Congress to stop Mexican crime syndicates taking over park lands. In particular, poison-drenched marijuana plots shouldn't be allowed to grow to nearly harvest stage, when toxics and trash have reached maximum accumulation. Early intervention is required to prevent the Mexicans' pollution, and that means more surveillance, particularly using helicopters. But those measures mean more money and personnel. The political will has not been there in Washington.



**Sequoia National Park**

Western writer Wallace Stegner called national parks "America's best idea," a sentiment which is only a slight overstatement. It is shameful that so little is being done today to preserve them — particularly by self-described environmentalists — and how we citizens sleepwalk through the loss of once-protected wilderness to the vilest sort of exploitation by foreign criminals.

The parks have been targeted by Mexican criminals because they are open places with a premium on freedom; like much of America, they were designed for use by a responsible, law-abiding population. When gangs of ruthless foreign criminals invade, it is a case of wolves flung amidst sheep. If the parks are to be saved from destruction by foreigners, far more policing will be needed, which will alter the basic nature of the parks. But it's late in the day to worry about that; the borders have been open for too many years. Hopefully it won't take the death of an innocent hiker to convince Washington to do what's necessary, and soon. ■