

Feds go after pot grows throughout Western states

By Richard Marosi, Los Angeles Times

More than 550,000 marijuana plants with an estimated street value of \$1 billion have been seized during an eight-week crackdown targeting illegal marijuana growing operations on public lands across seven Western states, federal authorities announced on Tuesday.

Operation Mountain Sweep, which started July 1, netted 96 illegal marijuana grows in California and resulted in the indictments of 28 suspects. Pot farms were discovered in several national parks, including Death Valley, and in Sequoia and Mendocino National Forests, authorities said.

Rugged terrain on federal lands have become favored areas for pot growers who often live for weeks in the remote areas. Authorities discovered huge amounts of trash, miles of irrigation line, fertilizer and pesticides at the various grow sites.

“Marijuana trafficking organizations seek to turn our nation’s parks and public lands into their own drug havens,” said DEA Administrator Michele M. Leonhart. “Operation Mountain Sweep is a concerted effort to reclaim these wild and beautiful areas and protect them from further destruction and exploitation.”

The operation in California also resulted in the seizure of eight firearms. About 100,000 marijuana plants were eradicated in Arizona, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Washington.

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