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Off-Trail Safety Bulletin

District Volunteers -

Last year in June 2008, we sent you a notice to inform you about illegal marijuana cultivation occurring on District preserves. The occurrence has not abated, and continues to increase on public and private lands in rural areas throughout California and the U.S. The District takes this issue very seriously and works closely with the San Mateo, Santa Clara and Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Departments, who are responsible for the prevention and eradication of marijuana gardens.

Over the past 20 years the type of marijuana cultivation has changed from small individually-operated cultivation sites to large operations (5,000+ plants) run by organized crime groups. It has become typical to have armed guards camped out at growing locations, particularly during the harvest season in August, September and October. Cultivation sites continue to be discovered at various preserves throughout the District and are not limited to remote locations. The District's main concern is for the safety of the general public and all District Volunteers and Docents.

Until further notice, please limit off-trail use to well known or frequently visited special features. These features include grinding stones, vistas, significant trees, etc. Do not go off-trail into areas that cannot be seen from designated/well-established public trails. Please remember in that El Corte de Madera Preserve all off trail use is prohibited and of course horses, dogs, and bicycles are required to stay on trail at all times in all District preserves where access is permitted for such uses.

Volunteers who notice anything unusual should immediately retreat from the area for your own safety and contact a District Ranger. Signs of possible marijuana cultivation include vehicles regularly parked along roadsides at the same locations, people going into the woods with supplies, well-worn or flagged foot paths, black irrigation piping, fertilizer, pesticides or trash, stockpiles of food, camouflaging, and water impoundments. Please report any suspicious activities to the 24-hour Ranger Dispatch at (650) 903-6395.

District staff is working diligently with applicable Sheriff's Departments to try to eliminate this public safety threat and environmental harm to our public lands. Further advisories and guidelines will be provided to you as they are developed.

Thank you for your cooperation,
Paul and Renee,
and Area Superintendents, Brian Malone and Michael Newburn

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