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Board of Supervisors
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March 11, 2014

The Honorable Patti B. Saris, Chair
United States Sentencing Commission
One Columbus Circle N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002-8002

Dear Judge Saris:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the direct threat to our environment and public safety posed by the production and cultivation of controlled substances, in particular marijuana, on public lands or while trespassing on private property. We would like to urge the Sentencing Commission to take action. This is an important topic in our region and we are concerned that existing guidelines do not adequately address the long-term detrimental threats these operations pose to the environment and nearby communities.

The environmental harms caused by drug operations that trespass on public, resource, and private lands are well documented. The type of damage includes: the wholesale poisoning of wildlife, large-scale alterations to the landscape and fragile ecosystems, illegal water diversions and water pollution, and the dumping or abandonment of fertilizers, pesticides, and waste. This environmental destruction is expensive to remediate and often undoes significant, federal, state, local, and private investment in the landscape.

Rural communities with large ranching, agriculture, and public lands are particularly vulnerable to criminals trespassing to cultivate and produce narcotics. Worker safety is a growing concern, and the reclamation of abandoned cultivation sites can be both dangerous and expensive to landowners. Trespass drug operations can also have a detrimental impact on tourism and outdoor recreation, the primary economic drivers in many rural communities.

As the Sentencing Commission reviews sentencing guidelines, we urge you to consider the significant impacts of drug cultivation operations on public and trespassed lands and add new enhancements to counter the harmful impact caused to the environment and public safety.

Thank you for your consideration on this important matter.

Sincerely,


David Finigan
Chairman
Del Norte County Board of Supervisors