

20,000 marijuana plants seized in outdoor growing operation

Local News

Posted by: David Haviland

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On 6-24-09, at about 11 a.m., the Pacific County Narcotics Enforcement Team and the Grays Harbor Drug Task Force teamed up to harvest a large outdoor marijuana grow in Pacific County. The growing marijuana was located with the assistance of the Air National Guard. Deputies approached the location on foot and encountered several armed men in the grow. Deputies were able to take one male in to custody. The other men fled in to a heavily wooded area, dropping two rifles as they ran. The rifles were later determined to be pellet rifles. Deputies recovered a loaded 10mm, semi-automatic handgun from the waistband of the male in custody. PACNET and GHDTF deputies then called for additional assistance in attempting to locate the fleeing suspects.

Officers from the Pacific County Sheriff's Office, the Raymond Police Department, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, the Washington State Patrol, and the Grays Harbor Sheriff's Office K-9 all responded to the scene to assist. The South Bend Police Department assisted with containment of the surrounding area. After a search of the immediate area, the other men were not located.

Deputies and officers harvested over 20,000 growing marijuana plants from the site. The street value of the marijuana at full maturity is potentially \$60,000,000.00.

Rafael B. Mendoza, age 48, was booked in to Pacific County Jail for manufacturing marijuana and unlawful possession of a firearm. Mendoza listed his address as homeless.

The sophisticated grow operation incorporated an elaborate gravity fed watering system. The growing marijuana was spread out throughout an area with 15 to 20 year old tree growth. Large plots had been cleared out for the marijuana plants. There were several camp sites strategically placed around the growing marijuana.

According to Sheriff Mike Whelan, "This is the largest marijuana plantation in western Washington that I am aware of in over 30 years of law enforcement. We would not have been able to do this without the close working relationship between the Grays Harbor Drug Task Force and the Pacific County Narcotics Enforcement Team".

Sheriff John Didion said, "This is a great example of what can be accomplished with resources, communication, and cooperation. Working closely with the Grays Harbor Drug Task Force and the air National Guard, PACNET was able to locate and seize the grow, make an arrest, and keep millions of dollars of narcotics out of our communities".

Anyone wishing to call in a marijuana tip can call 1 800 388 GROW. Your identity can remain anonymous and you can receive a reward.

The investigation in this matter is open and ongoing. Anyone with information about this or other

incidents of narcotic activity are encouraged to contact Deputy Mike Ray at 360-642-9459 or Deputy Pat Matlock at 360-875-9440.