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Cleanup crew arrives to active pot grow in Humboldt Redwoods

‘Heavily armed’ individuals flee from cleanup crews

By Hunter Cresswell, hcresswell@times-standard.com

Tuesday, May 10, 2016



Organizers of cleanup efforts on a long-time, large-scale marijuana grow operation got more than they bargained for Monday morning when they showed up at the site in Humboldt Redwoods State Park near Cuneo Creek Horse Camp and found the grow newly activated with several “heavily armed” people camping there.

“We encountered three to four people that woke up very quickly and ran away very quickly,” California State Parks Ranger Chris Glenn said.

He said he had hiked into the site several times in recent months to make sure it was safe for civilian clean up crews to come in but these new growers set up quickly without him noticing.

One man even dropped his AK-47 rifle as he fled into the woods after seeing all the law enforcement agents, but no arrests were made, Glenn said.

About 30 people from State Parks, Fish and Wildlife, National Guard, California Highway Patrol, AmeriCorps and LEAR Asset Management were involved with the cleanup efforts, California State Parks Public Safety Superintendent John Vallett said.

“That went all real smooth,” he said.

The operation cleared 11 different grow sites over 100 acres of park land, LEAR Asset Management Founder and CEO Paul Trouette said. He and his team of five ex-law enforcement and ex-military personnel operated the helicopter that flew 11 loads of trash off-site and provided protection. The team has done similar land reclamation work for the Yurok Tribe in recent years.

“Each load was 400 to 500 pounds,” Trouette said.

With LEAR’s help crews were able to get the job done by 3 p.m., Vallett said.

“That helicopter really helps haul stuff out,” he said.

The site was in thick, steep and rough terrain that took about two hours of hiking to reach by foot, AmeriCorps team leader Will Clancy said.

In the weeks leading up to the operation Glenn organized for Clancy and his team to go out and assist

with the cleanup but when they hiked out on May 2, the day clean up was scheduled to start, they found evidence that the grow was active again and had to go back.

“There were people that had been there recently,” Clancy said. “So we had to turn around and go back down and figure out what to do for the rest of the week.”

Clancy and his team of six young AmeriCorps volunteers arrived in the county in March to help out with state park projects. They ended up helping out at the drop zone where trash was flown in and put into a large garbage bin, Clancy said. Debris included hoses, tarps, fertilizers, propane tanks, as well as cooking and sleeping supplies.

“Everything and anything you can think of,” he said.

Three of the helicopter loads flown out were hazardous materials including chemicals, fertilizers, nutrients and other related items, Trouette said.

“There was a lot of animal teeth marks all over the fertilizer,” he said.

Some of the chemicals with bear teeth marks could have been used as poisons to kill wildlife, Trouette said.

The Mendocino County Blacktail Deer Association, Jere Melo Foundation and a private donor funded the operation.

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