

SECTION III: VALUES

A: VALUES

Mendocino Unit has a wide range of both natural and man-made assets at risk to wildfires. Fires threaten the natural environment as well as commercial and residential property. It is difficult to prioritize or rank these assets, but homes, infrastructure including water and power supply, rivers and watersheds, air quality, soil, wildlife habitat, recreation areas including tourist attractions, scenic beauty, historical buildings, timber, and rangeland all rank high in this Unit.

Over the past decade, marijuana has become a lucrative asset to many in Mendocino County. The plant is still federally illegal but has drawn large numbers of people from all over the world to Mendocino County. This population growth has primarily been in the Wildland Urban Interface. Not only does the increased rural population present dangers, but many of the “hi-tech” growing operations are conducted indoors, increasing the fire danger to structures throughout the county. Both indoor and outdoor growing operations present safety concerns to firefighters and a tactical challenge to fire suppression efforts.

Environmentally, marijuana comes with substantial social costs due to the need to cultivate covertly, rather than openly. Grow operations in state parks, national forest, and private landholdings, are a significant issue that infringes upon public safety, in addition to creating environmental concerns. In state and national parks and private holdings, growers clear native vegetation, use illegal pesticides and chemicals, leave garbage behind at their illicit operations, divert precious water from streams and often kill bears, deer, and other large and small animals that threaten their operation. Diesel spills associated with use of generators to provide light to grow operations often leak in to precious water supplies. These growing operations pollute local ecosystems on an industrial scale most of which require the parks, national forests, or private entities to pay for the cleanup. The secrecy around the illegal product means diesel spills go unreported, spikes in electricity overlooked, wildlife are slaughtered and gallons of toxic pesticides wash into rivers and creeks. Without tax revenue from marijuana, state agencies struggle to find funds for cleanup and prevention. Meanwhile, these public and private areas become dangerous places for residents, tourists, and public safety personnel due to the militant defence of grow operations worth millions of dollars.

For example, during the summer of 2011, a two-week operation to purge the Mendocino National Forest (MNF) of illicit pot gardens uprooted 460,000 pot plants and led to more than 100 arrests. Additionally, approximately 1,500 pounds of processed marijuana, 27 guns and 11 vehicles were seized. The MNF is a 900,000-acre forest spanning six counties including Mendocino County. Law enforcement officers raided more than 50 gardens teeming with trash, irrigation pipes and chemicals that damage forestland and waterways. After the raids were conducted the California National Guard troops, Forest Service workers and volunteers removed 46,000 pounds of trash, 120 propane tanks, 116,000 feet of pipe, 13 manmade dams, 57 pounds of pesticide and tons of fertilizer from the 50-plus raided grow sites in the Mendocino National Forest.

During raids similar to the ones conducted in the summer of 2011, law enforcement operations to eradicate illegal marijuana grows periodically end in violence. This violence has resulted in multiple law enforcement shootings, including several in which deaths occurred.

Much of marijuana's environmental impact stems from the enormous amount of light needed to grow marijuana. Grower plants marijuana indoors so that they can thrive year round and remain somewhat hidden from law enforcement. Some indoor growers power their "grow lights" with electricity from the grid. But those in more rural locations use large diesel generators for power. The diesel is often stored in shoddy or homemade containers and not suited for diesel fuel storage, which become huge risks for fires and toxic spills. In typical outdoor grows utilizing generators, extension cords often traverse through the vegetation from the generator to the growing structure. Extension cords not properly rated for exposure to the nature's elements become stressed leading to an increase chance of failure potentially resulting in a wildland fire, especially as the weather turns warmer and the vegetation becomes drier.

On-grid grows carry another set of problems. In a recent report conducted by Humboldt State University, it was estimated that Humboldt County marijuana growers use 90 million kilowatt hours per year, enough to power 13,000 typical homes. The extra electricity pumps an estimated 20,000 metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere each year, and that's just in one county. There is also the risk of fire since indoor cultivation can require substantial modifications to electrical systems to power grow lights and fans, particularly in whole-structure conversions. These modifications are rarely performed to code and can involve overloaded circuits, modified circuit panels, exposed wiring, extension cords, powerful grow lights, fans and exhaust systems. These modifications result in skyrocketing energy usage and serious increases for house fires. Fire doesn't just pose a risk to the homes themselves, but also to neighbouring structures and the wildland. In addition to the increased fire risk, fire fighting and law enforcement safety can also be put in jeopardy when electrical wiring deviates from the norm.

Water consumption is also an issue when it comes to the environmental impacts of marijuana growth. Each marijuana plant can use between 3 and 5 gallons of water per day to grow to fruition. As the size and number of illegal grows increases, the stress to the water resources within drought prone California also increases. Not only does this pose a risk to environmental values and resources, but it can also create for logistical problems during fire suppression efforts.

B: COMMUNITIES

**CALIFORNIA FIRE ALLIANCE LIST OF “COMMUNITIES AT RISK”
IN THE MENDOCINO UNIT**

Community	Federal Threat	Hazard Level
Albion		
Anchor Bay		3
Boonville		3
Brooktrails		3
Calpella	Yes	3
Camp Rest	Yes	
Caspar		3
Cleone		3
Comptche		3
Covelo	Yes	3
Coyote Valley	Yes	
Cummings	Yes	3
Dos Rios	Yes	3
El Roble		3
Elk		3
Fort Bragg		3
Gualala		3
Hopland	Yes	3
Inglenook	Yes	3
Laytonville	Yes	3
Leggett	Yes	3
Little River		3
Longvale		3
Manchester	Yes	3
Manchester Rancheria	Yes	
Mendocino		2
Navarro		3
Northspur		3
Philo		3
Piercy		
Point Arena	Yes	3
Pomo	Yes	
Potter Valley	Yes	3
Redwood Valley	Yes	3
Rogina Heights		3
Sylvendale		
Talmage	Yes	3
The Forks	Yes	3
Ukiah	Yes	3
Vichy Springs	Yes	
Westport		3
Willits	Yes	3
Whale Gulch		

1-Moderate, 2-High, 3-Very High