



Backgrounder

Marijuana Prohibition and Our Environment

Bringing marijuana out of the illicit market and into a legal, regulated market would help protect and conserve our natural resources and ecosystems.

Illegal outdoor marijuana grows are hurting Washington's public lands.

- In 2008, over half a million marijuana plants were found growing outdoors in Washington, many on publicly owned land. Grow sites were found in 33 of Washington's 39 counties. Over 200,000 plants were found in Yakima County alone.¹
- Large scale outdoor marijuana grows can cause significant environmental damage. Grow sites frequently use harmful chemicals, divert water sources, and produce large amounts of garbage. According to government estimates, "for every acre of forest planted with marijuana, 10 acres are damaged, and further, the cost to repair and restore an outdoor cultivation site is approximately \$11,000 per acre."²

Illegal indoor marijuana production wastes energy.

- Indoor growing, which requires intense lighting levels, dehumidification, air filtration, and forced air ventilation, is driven by marijuana's prohibited status. If marijuana production were legal, it could be grown outdoors on farms or in naturally ventilated greenhouses.
- In 2010, over 30,000 indoor marijuana plants were seized in Washington, only a fraction of the marijuana grown indoors. Almost 500,000 indoor-grown plants were seized nationwide. A recent study estimates that indoor marijuana grows consume a full 1% of the nation's energy supply.³

Industrial hemp is a renewable resource for food, fiber, and fuel.

- "Hemp" is generally defined as marijuana containing no more than 0.3% concentration of THC, the main psychoactive component. Hemp is used for variety of purposes including fabrics, textiles, paper, food and beverages, body care products, nutritional supplements, and industrial oils. It is currently illegal to grow hemp in the U.S., but it can be imported and processed.⁴
- It is estimated that current U.S. retail sales of all hemp-based products may exceed \$300 million per year. According to government reports, the "single largest supplier of U.S. imports of raw and processed hemp fiber is China."⁵

¹ National Drug Intelligence Center – *Domestic Cannabis Cultivation Assessment 2009* – Trends in M7 States

² National Drug Intelligence Center – *Domestic Cannabis Cultivation Assessment 2007* – Associated Environmental Damage

³ Evan Mills, *Energy Up in Smoke*, 2011, available at http://evan-mills.com/energy-associates/Indoor_files/Indoor-cannabis-energy-use.pdf

⁴ Congressional Research Service – *Hemp as an Agricultural Commodity* – 2010, available at <http://www.nationalaglawcenter.org/assets/crs/RL32725.pdf>

⁵ *Id.* at 6-7