

Cannabis Cultivation Manager Sentenced to Prison

Merced Man Sentenced to 10 Years for Cannabis Cultivation and Depredation of Public Lands

SACRAMENTO – A Merced man was recently sentenced to 10 years in prison and ordered to pay \$17,930.30 in restitution to the United States for conspiracy to cultivate marijuana, marijuana cultivation, and depredation of public lands in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest.

Illegal Marijuana Cultivation Operation

Custodio Ibarra Nunez, 42, of Merced, played a managerial role in a conspiracy to cultivate over 4,000 marijuana plants on public lands in the Shasta-Trinity National Forest. This illegal operation took place between May 23 and July 8, 2019, south of Rays Peak. Nunez was not working alone; his co-conspirators included Francisco Madrigal Magana, Mario Alberto Lopez Pena, and an uncharged 17-year-old minor.

Arrests and Convictions

USFS agents arrested Magana and Lopez at the cultivation site during a raid. Both were later convicted and sentenced, with Magana receiving 18 months and Pena 24 months for conspiracy to manufacture marijuana and depredation of public lands and resources.

Continued Illegal Activities

Nunez was not present during the initial raid at the cultivation site. However, a follow-up investigation led to his identification and revealed that he had continued illegal marijuana cultivation activities in Merced with the uncharged minor.

Search and Discovery

The investigation culminated in a search of Nunez's residence, uncovering additional marijuana plants, cultivation tools, vacuum sealing devices, packaging materials, and USPS tracking receipts for shipments across the county. This evidence solidified Nunez's involvement in the ongoing illegal operations.

Indictment and Sentencing

Nunez was indicted and arrested in February 2020 and has remained in custody since. His recent sentencing to 10 years in prison and the order to pay restitution marks a significant step in the enforcement of laws against illegal marijuana cultivation and the protection of public lands.

Ongoing Efforts to Protect Public Lands

The case highlights the continuous efforts by law enforcement agencies to combat illegal marijuana cultivation on public lands, which can cause significant environmental damage and pose public safety risks. The Shasta-Trinity National Forest, like many other public lands, is under constant threat from such illicit activities, making enforcement and rehabilitation efforts critical.

Nunez's conviction serves as a warning to others engaged in similar illegal activities and underscores the commitment of federal agencies to preserve and protect national forests and public lands.

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