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PRESS RELEASE

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San Jacinto County Sheriff's Office Joins Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force to Eradicate Illegal Marijuana Grow Operations

For many years, Mexican Drug Cartels have worked hard to cut their expenses by growing marijuana within the physical boundaries of the United States. Areas of dense National Forest and large rural land tracks of Southeast Texas have been especially inviting to those groups. With San Jacinto County being 66% National Forest, it is virtually impossible to locate such illegal grows from the ground. In 2015, with DEA and DPS helicopter assistance, over 20,000 plants were located and removed in San Jacinto County alone. Some of these cases were directly attributed to SJCSO investigative work, while the large portion were brought to bear by Federal and State investigators. A "better way" was sought out, thus the creation of the Drug Enforcement Administration's Multi-Jurisdictional Illegal Marijuana Eradication Program. In the spring of 2016, Sheriff Greg Capers was invited by the DEA to join their Task Force in our region.

Sheriff Capers placed his Patrol Tactical Unit (PTU) into the lead for San Jacinto County. Deputy Jesse Slaughter successfully attended a specialized school in Kentucky to learn how to deploy from an airborne helicopter. Sergeant David Cortez, with Deputies C.J. Duenas and Larry Fechner, attended a school in Texas to learn about the Tactical Aspects of the Marijuana Eradication Program. With no cost to our taxpayers, the DEA provided over \$40,000.00 of funding to the San Jacinto County Sheriff's Office to provide for the training and equipment required to operate this program. The DEA will continue to fund our participation in this program for years to come.

This year, the program kicked off on August 16, 2016 in Sabine County, Texas. Our team was utilized as a ground contact unit to search for the grow field and any possible suspects. Another team in the Task Force was utilized and deployed into the dense wooded area on the opposite side of our team. A search of the area was conducted in which a grow field was located and three suspects were spotted, however, apprehension of the suspects was not possible.

From September 5, 2016 through September 9, 2016, our PTU, along with the Task Force, participated in an operation closer to home to attempt to locate and eradicate marijuana grow fields. All members of our unit participated in flying with DEA or Military helicopter pilots in San Jacinto, Montgomery, Polk, Liberty and Harris Counties. No marijuana grow fields were observed in any of those counties. Other teams in the Task Force were flying in counties further to the north and east. From their efforts, two possible grow fields were located in the Tyler area. The SJCSO team was dispatched by DEA to assist in the eradication of those fields. One suspect was arrested in the Tyler grow field case and plants were eradicated.

The total number of illegal marijuana plants eradicated in the 2016 operation number around 39,750 in 6 counties to the North and East of San Jacinto County. Sheriff Capers believes the lack of grows in San Jacinto County are attributed to the aggressive search and eradication measures taken last year by our PTU and other agencies we work closely with. The Task Force will continue to work hard to identify and eradicate these illegal projects throughout the region.

The Multi-Jurisdictional Task Force includes US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA); US Immigrations and Custom Enforcement (ICE); Texas Department of Criminal Justice (TDCJ); Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS); Texas Parks & Wildlife Department (Game Warden); Anderson County S.O.; Angelina County S.O.; Henderson County S.O.; Lufkin County S.O.; Morris County S.O.; Sabine County S.O.; San Jacinto County S.O.; Smith Count S.O.; and Upshur County S.O.
