



Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests
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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Safety in the National Forests
What to do if you encounter a marijuana cultivation site

(Columbia, SC) - The Francis Marion and Sumter National Forests seeks to provide a safe environment for the public, its employees, and natural resources. So while only a fraction of [National Forest System lands](#) are affected by illegal marijuana cultivation, the Forest Service believes that safety risks are real and visitors and employees should be informed about them.

“The safety of forest visitors and our employees is our top priority,” said Forest Supervisor Paul Bradley. “Marijuana cultivation occurs on some National Forests and it’s important for visitors and employees to be aware of their surroundings.”

The disturbances that marijuana cultivation makes on natural resources causes extensive and [long-term damage to ecosystems](#) and impacts the supplies of public drinking water for hundreds of miles. Growers clear native vegetation before planting and sometimes use miles of black plastic tubing to transport large volumes of water from creeks that are often dammed for irrigation. The use of banned herbicides and pesticides by marijuana growers kill wildlife and competing vegetation. This loss of vegetation allows rain water to erode the soil and wash poisons, human waste, and trash from the grow sites into streams and rivers.

Here are some clues that you may have come across a marijuana cultivation site:

- Sometimes marijuana smells like a skunk on hot days.
- Hoses or drip lines located in unusual or unexpected places.
- A well-used trail where there shouldn’t be one.
- People standing along roads without vehicles present, or in areas where loitering appears unusual.
- Grow sites are usually found in isolated locations, in rough steep terrain.
- Camps containing cooking and sleeping areas with food, fertilizer, weapons, garbage, rat poison, and/or dead animals.
- Small propane bottles, used to avoid the detection of wood smoke.
- Individuals armed with rifles out of hunting season.

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South Carolina’s National Forests
Celebrating 75 Years of Restoring Forests, Protecting Water and Reducing Catastrophic Wildfires.

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Safety in the National Forests – What to do if you encounter a marijuana cultivation site

As soon as you become aware that you have come upon a cultivation site, back out immediately. Never engage the growers as these are extremely dangerous people. If you can identify a landmark or record a GPS coordinate, that's very helpful. The growers may be present and may or may not know that you have found their grow site.

Get to a safe place and report as much detail about the location and incident as you can recall to any uniformed member of the Forest Service or to your local law enforcement agency. Leave the way you came in, and make as little noise as possible.

The mission of the USDA Forest Service is to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations. The Agency manages 193 million acres of public land, provides assistance to State and private landowners, and maintains the largest forestry research organization in the world.

For more information on the national forests in South Carolina, please visit <http://fs.usda.gov/scnfs>. For more information on the Weeks Act Centennial Celebration, please visit <http://www.fs.fed.us/r8/weeksact>.

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