

The Environmental Impact of Drugs... Know the Truth

THREATS TO NATURAL RESOURCES



WILDLIFE

- Illicit cultivation of the marijuana plant, coca bush, and opium poppy can destroy biodiversity and natural habitat as a result of illegal clearing of land and timber harvesting, loss of wildlife due to rodenticide ingestion, destruction and contamination of streams, and diversion of surface water for crop irrigation resulting in diminished or eliminated flow.¹⁻⁴



WATER

- Marijuana cultivation in California causes reduced stream flows that can threaten salmonids (fish) by diminishing other water quality parameters, decreasing habitat availability, stranding fish, delaying migration, increasing competition, decreasing food supply, and increasing the likelihood of predation. These impacts can have deadly effects.⁵
- In the arid country of Afghanistan, the cultivation of the opium poppy increases the impact on the already scarce water resources. Crop irrigation, unsustainable development, and a severe period of drought caused a 98% reduction in the flow of the lower Helmund River and loss of vital wetlands.⁶

Globally, the natural environment faces serious challenges and degradation on a scale never before seen in human history. Illicit drug crop cultivation, drug production, trafficking, and drug use all contribute to this degradation by accelerating loss of biodiversity, destroying sensitive natural habitats, and creating pollution. Programs that reduce cultivation, production, and demand for drugs limit the environmental damage due to the drug trade. Such programs play an important role in preserving the integrity of the natural environment essential to the continued survival of humanity.

Drug Free America Foundation, Inc. is a drug prevention and policy organization committed to developing strategies that prevent drug use and promote sustained recovery. The Drug Free America Foundation, Inc. vision is a world where all people live free of the burden of drug abuse. Drug Free America Foundation is a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

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DEFORESTATION AND DESTRUCTION OF HABITAT

- In addition to the ravaging effect to wildlife, cultivation of drug crops causes deforestation, degradation, and fragmentation of the forests.³
- In the period of 2006 – 2016, it is estimated that 15 – 30% of national forest loss that occurred in Central America was attributed to cocaine trafficking operations.¹⁰
- Between 2001 and 2013 in the fragile ecosystem of the northern Andes of Colombia, roughly 290,000 ha (1,120 miles² or 2,900 km²) were deforested for coca cultivation 2001 and 2013.¹¹
- The method of using fire to clear forest lands, such as that to cultivate coca bush in Colombia and other areas, destroys the plants and trees that protect the soil leading to increased erosion.^{11, 12}
- Significant deforestation has taken place in the forests of Cambodia due to production of Safrole Rich Oil (SRO) from the Mreas Prov Phnom trees, a government classified rare species. SRO is used in the production of the drug ecstasy.¹³

Trash and Waste

- In 2011, a multiagency marijuana grow site eradication operation in California produced “more than 26 tons of trash, 40 miles of irrigation line, 5,445 pounds of fertilizer, and 260 pounds of pesticides and rodenticides.”¹⁴
- In 2013, 329 U.S. National Forest marijuana grow sites in California were restored by removing “over 118,901 pounds of trash, 80.5 miles of tubing, 244 propane tanks, and 61 car batteries.”¹⁵



Soil and Water Contamination

- Chemicals, pesticides, fertilizers, both legal and illegal, used for the cultivation and processing of illicit drugs such as marijuana, coca, opium, and methamphetamine can be destructive to biological diversity through contaminated surface water run-off.³
- An account in the UNODC World Drug Report from Colombia's National Illicit Crop Monitoring System reported the gravity of the environmental impact of drug cultivation through pollution: “In 2005 alone, 81,000 tons and 83,000 barrels of fertilizers, pesticides and herbicides, many of them considered highly toxic, were used for coca bush cultivation in Colombia. These, together with the gasoline, alkaline bases, sulphuric acid, ammonia and potassium permanganate required to transform coca leaf into cocaine, end up in the soil and water table.”⁶





Urban Pollution

- Clandestine laboratories that process plant-based and synthetic drugs require significant quantities of precursors and other chemicals that are hazardous to human health and the environment. In addition to being a toxic hazard to the proximate population, chemical by-products are often dumped into urban sewage systems, buried, burned, released into surface water, or dumped at sea.^{6, 16}

Energy Consumption

- Current practices for indoor marijuana cultivation, processing, and distribution cause tremendous energy consumption and unimpeded greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁷
- The estimated electricity usage for U.S. marijuana cultivation and processing in 2012 was similar to 1.7 million homes.¹⁷
- Energy consumption of U.S. marijuana cultivation, processing, and distribution is estimated to cost USD 6 billion and produces 15 million tons of greenhouse gases annually, the equivalent to emissions from 3 million automobiles.¹⁷



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