

US pot states try to curb smuggling

By Andrew Selsky
Associated Press

PORTLAND (AP) — Well before Oregon legalized marijuana, its verdant, wet forests made it an ideal place for growing the drug, which often ended up being funneled out of the state for big money.

Now, officials suspect pot grown legally in Oregon and other states is also being smuggled out, and the trafficking is putting America's multibillion-dollar marijuana industry at risk.

In response, pot-legal states are trying to clamp down on "diversion" even as U.S. Attorney General Jeff Sessions presses for enforcement of federal laws against marijuana.

Tracking legal weed from the fields and greenhouses where it's grown to the shops where it's sold under names like Blueberry Kush and Chernobyl is their so far main protective measure.

In Oregon, Gov. Kate Brown recently signed into law a requirement that state regulators track from seed to store all marijuana grown for sale in Oregon's legal market. So far, only recreational marijuana has been comprehensively tracked. Tina Kotek, speaker of the Oregon House, said lawmakers wanted to ensure "we're protecting the new industry that we're supporting here."

"There was a real recognition that things could be changing in D.C.," she said.

The Washington State Liquor and Cannabis Board says it's replacing its current tracking Nov. 1 with a "highly secure, reliable, scalable and flexible system."

California voters approved using a tracking system run by Lakeland, Florida-based Franwell for its recreational pot market. Sales become legal Jan. 1.

Franwell also tracks marijuana, using bar-code and radio frequency identification labels on packaging and plants, in Colorado, Oregon, Maryland, Alaska and Michigan.

"The tracking system is the most important tool a state has," said Michael Crabtree, who runs Denver-based Nationwide Compliance Specialists Inc., which helps tax collectors track elusive, cash-heavy industries like the marijuana business.

But the systems aren't fool-proof. They rely on the users' honesty, he said.

"We have seen numerous examples of people

'forgetting' to tag plants," Crabtree said. Colorado's tracking also doesn't apply to home-grown plants and many noncommercial marijuana caregivers.

In California, implementing a "fully operational, legal market" could take years, said state Sen. Mike McGuire, who represents the "Emerald Triangle" region that's estimated to produce 60 percent of America's marijuana. But he's confident tracking will help.

"In the first 24 months, we're going to have a good idea who is in the regulated market and who is in black market," McGuire said.

Oregon was the first state to decriminalize personal possession, in 1973. It legalized medical marijuana in 1998, and recreational use in 2014.

Before that, Anthony Taylor hid his large cannabis crop from aerial surveillance under a forest canopy east of Portland, and tended it when there was barely enough light to see.

"In those days, marijuana was REALLY illegal," said Taylor, now a licensed marijuana processor and lobbyist. "If you got caught growing the amounts we were growing, you were going to go to prison for a number of years."

ECLIPSE: Whoops went up across a very quiet Sisters

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he placed a spotting scope on a table and pointed it at the sun. It projected onto a canvas frame, provided by Kim Osgood, a visiting artist who lives in Portland, and displayed the sun as a slowly fading six-inch circle as the moon slowly overtook it in morning hours.

Watching through eclipse glasses and welding goggles the friends watched as the sun began to fade over the treetops. Whoops and hollers could be heard around the neighborhood at the point of totality, and a few cheered in excitement during the thirty-four seconds of darkness.

For the nine guests, Monday's eclipse was their first experience in totality. And choosing Sisters as their viewpoint was easy.

"I came through Sisters back in May of this year, and instantly loved this little town," said Tom Hickey, a resident of Longview, Washington.

Other members of the group shared their first impressions of the little mountain town and the thought of experiencing it in Madras or Prineville didn't appeal to them. The calm and quiet of Sisters made for their



PHOTO BY CODY RHEAULT

Visitors to Sisters took in the solar eclipse on Monday morning.

perfect getaway.

The smoke from the Milli Fire was a concern to them, too.

"This morning we were worried about the smoke and considered heading east, but we decided to stay and hope

for the best," said Jeff. "I'm glad we stayed."

Other small groups gathered along the nearly deserted streets of Sisters. As the moon slowly occluded the sun, whoops broke out across town.

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