

Drug Trafficking in Tribal Communities

Matthew Hall
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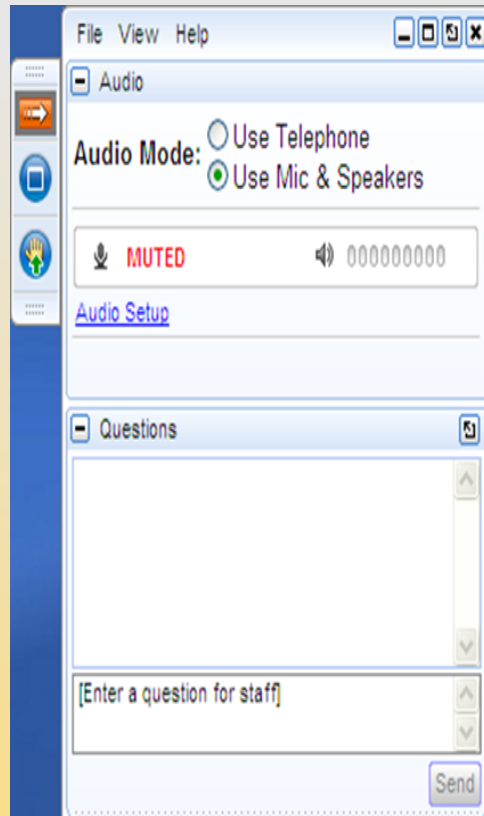
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Drug Trafficking in Indian Country

- There are over 560 federally recognized tribes in the United States
- Substance abuse in Indian Country is, on average, five times more prominent than non-Native communities
- Prescription drug abuse is the largest growing substance abuse issue in Indian Country
- Native Americans have one of the highest methamphetamine abuse rates of all ethnic groups

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

- Nationally, Native Americans have the highest rates of methamphetamine abuse
- In studies of “past year methamphetamine use” Native communities have the highest use rates:
 - 1.7 percent for American Indians/Alaskan Natives
 - 2.2 percent for Native Hawaiians.
- This rate is substantially higher than other ethnicities:
 - Whites (0.7 percent)
 - Hispanics (0.5 percent)
 - Asians (0.2 percent) and
 - African-Americans (0.1 percent)

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

- 80-85 percent of the Indian families in child welfare systems are estimated to have drug or alcohol abuse issues
- 48 percent of Tribal law enforcement respondents in the BIA Law Enforcement Survey reported an increase in child neglect/abuse cases due to recent increases in meth use

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

- According to recent research by UCLA, when reservation residents are asked, “What are the most significant criminal justice issues in your communities?”
 - They often respond that drug and alcohol abuse are the most difficult issues
 - In many cases, drug and alcohol abuse leads to domestic violence and child neglect, but not always

(UCLA Native Nations Law and Policy Center)

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

- The High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) definition of a DTO is:
 - Five or more members
 - Involved in the smuggling or distribution of narcotics
 - With a hierarchy/leadership structure within the organization

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

- Drug cartels have been targeting rural Native American reservations, both for the sale of meth and other drugs and to acquire distribution hubs
- With the above mentioned substance abuse issues in Indian Country, DTOs have recognized reservations to be a target rich environment for the distribution of narcotics

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

- Additionally, they are aware that Tribal police forces are typically underfunded and understaffed
- These issues give cartels fewer reasons to fear law enforcement or criminal prosecution

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

- Drugs and alcohol abuse is rampant in Indian Country, with dependency rates higher than any other reporting groups
- Alcohol and drug sales/transporting helps gangs survive by providing funding to the gang and its members

Drug Trafficking Organizations and Human Trafficking Ties

- An estimated 16 billion dollars in revenue is acquired by organizations in central/south America involved in Human Trafficking
- It is believed that many of these organizations are partnered with DTO's who have already established successful smuggling routes across the US Border regions.

Drug Trafficking Organizations and Human Trafficking Ties

- With substance abuse rates in tribal communities that are significantly higher than many other communities:
 - Users are often provided product for a significant discount if not completely free in an attempt to form a user base
 - As increase in drug dependency occurs there is an increase in other dangerous behaviors to include gang involvement
 - Gangs are increasingly involved in grooming members and associates to become victims of human trafficking

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

Wind River Case Review:

- 2.2 million acres at the foot of the Wind River Mountains
- The reservation appears to be the last place that would attract Mexican drug gangs that flourish in the immigrant barrios of major cities in the U.S.



Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

Wind River Case Review:

- A 1998 tribal study found that 38 percent of adults on the reservation were unemployed and that 57 percent lived in poverty
- Members of a Mexican gang discovered that alcohol sales on other reservations spiked after members received allotment checks, sources told investigators
- They believed they could tap into that cash

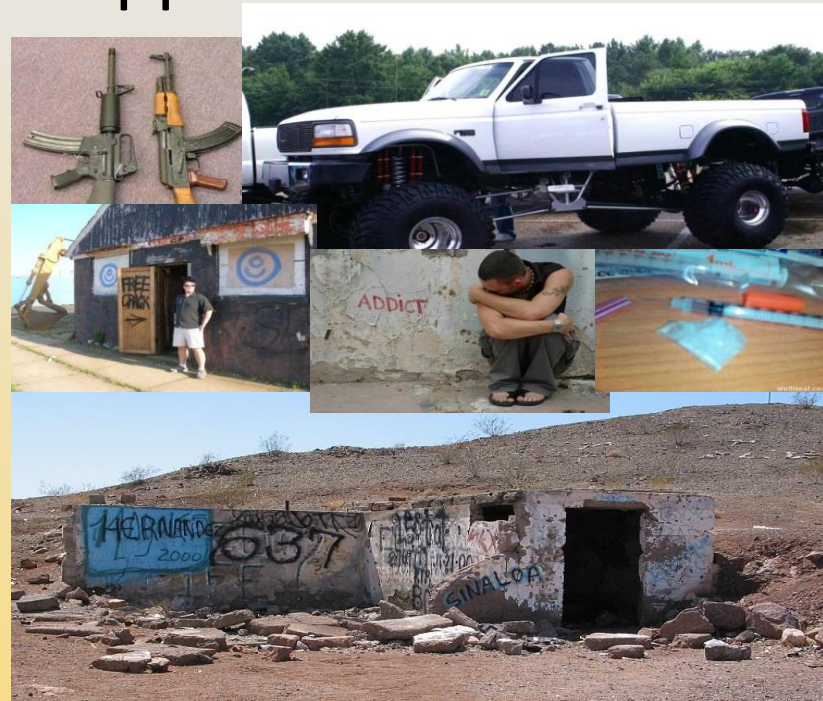
Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

Moving In:

- At least three gang members were dispatched from a Utah-based cell to reservation towns
- They rented houses and met girlfriends
- Using American Indian women, they gained entry to the reservation and established a network of more than a dozen dealers, many of them tribal members

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

- Outsiders with no apparent means of support
- New cars
- Guns
- Drug paraphernalia
- Strangers coming and going
- Graffiti
- Increase in violence
- Tribal youth gravitating towards the new comers



Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

- Over more than four years, the gang funneled nearly 100 pounds of meth with a value of over \$6.5 million into and around the reservation
- 1 pound of meth makes 454 grams of the drug
- Doses are usually one-tenth of a gram
- On a reservation of less than 9000
- Do the math.....

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

The Results:

- 2003 – 2004: A year tribal police said they saw the worst increase in meth use. Criminal charges for drug possession on the Wind River reservation increased 353 percent.
- 2004: Assaults quadrupled, thefts nearly doubled, and child neglect increased by 85 percent from the previous year.

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

The Results:

- Gang activity flourished in a community that had never seen it before.
- Assaults, weapons violations and random violence surged.
- Fremont County, where the reservation is located, is the highest in violent crime and substance abuse in the state of Wyoming.

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

The Aftermath

- Women trading sex for drugs
- Children addicted
- Families broken
- Dozens arrested and jailed
- Treatment facilities overwhelmed
- Federal intervention

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country (cont.)

The Aftermath

- Over 25 arrests
- Convictions resulting in more than 150 years in prison
- Federal programs and initiatives beginning to address drug issues

Drug Trafficking in Indian Country: Case Study



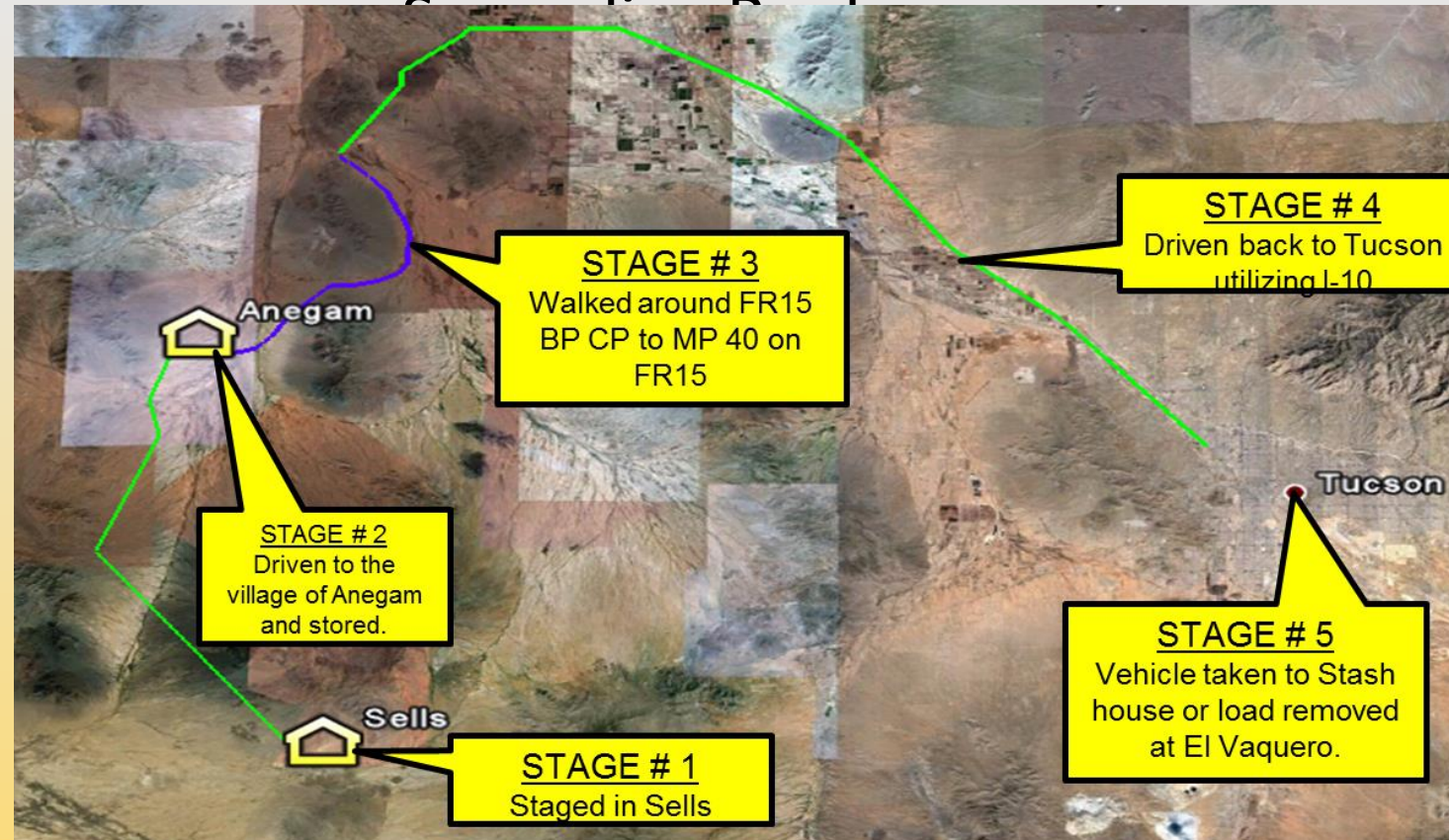
Operation Kickin Chicken

- February 2011: ASAC Sells HSI and TOPD officers begin to make connections between several marijuana loads being interdicted on the Tohono O'odham Nation
- March 2011: ASAC Sells HSI begin a southbound firearms investigation. Several targets are identified and an investigation is initiated
- April 2011: Agents realize that the targets in both the gun smuggling and marijuana smuggling organizations are the same. The cases are joined into one investigation

Operation Kickin Chicken

- May 2011: DEA Tucson Strikeforce initiates an investigation into Jose Herrera-Rascon for cocaine trafficking
- May 2011: HSI agents interdict a vehicle that was delivered to EL VAQUERO Auto Body in Tucson
- May 2011: DEA agents determine Herrera-Rascon has ties to EL VAQUERO. HSI and DEA begin communicating to de-conflict both operations
- October/November 2011: DEA , HSI (ASAC SELLS), and TOPD begin a joint OCDETF investigation into the overall operations of the DTO

Operation Kickin Chicken (cont.)



Operation Kickin Chicken

- Aerial photo of address EL VAQUERO AUTO SHOP
- Vehicle traps are installed here
- Staging point for marijuana and cocaine coming in from Mexico

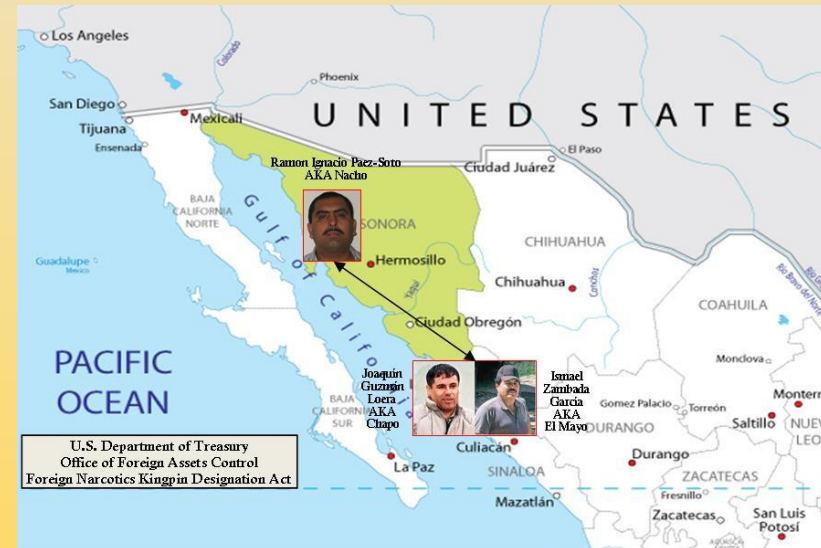


Operation Kickin Chicken

- Through the course of the investigation, it is determined that the controlling the flow of marijuana on the eastern half of the Tohono O'odham Nation is CPOT Ramon Ignacio PAEZ-SOTO who is the leader of the PAEZ-Soto DTO
- This is determined through interviews, historical data, phone analysis, and source information



Ramon Ignacio "NACHO" PAEZ-Soto



Operation Kickin Chicken



Operation Kickin Chicken

- Agents develop a CS who has contact within the PAEZ-Soto DTO.
- Agents utilize CS to determine phone numbers of potential targets within the DTO.
- A consensual intercept is conducted on CS phone and agents identify the structure of the organization.
- CS has direct daily conduct with PAEZ-Soto's son.
- Agents continue conduct operations that produce evidence against the DTO

Operation Kickin Chicken

ARRESTS	102
CONVICTIONS	98 (Remaining 4 fugitives and are pending extradition); 33 tribal members convicted; 17 had gang ties.
MARIJUANA	15,900 pounds (Street Value: \$7,950,000)
COCAINE	20 Kilograms (Street Value: \$ 748,000)
US CURRENCY	\$2,778,172
FIREARMS	38
AMMUNITION	6,100+
VEHICLES SEIZED	43

Operation Kickin Chicken

- 6th Target in the History of ICE/HSI/US CUSTOMS to be successfully nominated and approved as CPOT target
- 1st CPOT to be indicted since ICE/HSI created in 2003
- Case has been referred to as the “definition” of “a working OCDETF case.” With true collaboration between HSI, DEA, and state and local partners
- Through the success of this OCDETF case HSI and TOPD have successfully created the 1st HIDTA task force of its kind in Indian Country

Operation Kickin Chicken

- NATIVE AMERICAN TARGETED INVESTIGATION of VIOLENT ENTERPRISES (NATIVE)
- HIDTA initiative between HSI, TOPD, FBI, and Border Patrol
- Fully functioning task force addressing drug issues, and violence associated with the drug issues, from a local level up to the highest levels of the DTOs
- Investigation based initiative focusing on the disruption and dismantlement of DTOs

Comments/Questions?

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