

Five-county sting seizes \$4.2 million worth of marijuana

Isabella County's future in drug enforcement team remains undecided

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SAGINAW - In a five-county sting, the Bay Area Narcotics Enforcement Team has recovered 4,241 marijuana plants in recent weeks with a street value of \$4,241,000.

About 1,430 of those plants were found in just Isabella and Clare counties, officials announced Friday at press conference in Saginaw.

Since investigations began in August, 25 people have been arrested and are facing criminal charges for manufacturing marijuana. Eight of those people were arrested for growing in Isabella County.

Despite the large number of arrests in the jurisdiction of the Isabella County team, the future of their involvement in the force is still undecided, said Sheriff Leo Mioduszecki. Isabella

County will decide Oct. 1, when they approve their 2011 budget, if they will remain in BAYANET.

"I know money's tight for everybody, but you have to look at what the team does," said Melvin Mathews, BAYANET section commander. "That team right now is leading in arrests and complaint investigations."

Collaboration between departments is the standard method for narcotic enforcement in Michigan, Mathews said. BAYANET would not exist without the collaboration between departments.

BAYANET collaborated with the Michigan State Police Aviation Unit and National Guard Raid Team in what has been dubbed the Domestic Cannabis/Hemp Eradication Program.

"This is a big year for us with the confiscation of marijuana in farm fields, ditch lines and farm lines," Mathews said. "This year had a good rainy season. A lot of people were aware this stuff was growing out there. They contact us, we got tips."

The most recent arrest was in Shepherd Wednesday, Mathews said. Arrests were also made

DRUGS

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in Midland, Bay, Saginaw and Clare counties.

Plants seized were mainly found growing on farms at the edges of wooded areas and fields. Marijuana plants are easy to spot during fly-overs when fall comes, Mathews said, as traditional crops are harvested.

"This has a negative impact on quality of life in this area," said Michigan State Police Inspector Dan Bateman. "It's

always an ongoing battle. It's always this kind of seizure that people expect to see."

Mioduszecki said none of the plants found were from farms authorized for the growth of medical marijuana, as those farms are required to be fenced and locked in.

"A large majority of it was up in the northern part," he said of the plants found in Isabella County.

For anyone with narcotic-related information, the BAYANET tip line is 888-286-2814.

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