

\$48 Million Dollar Ross Lake Marijuana Seizure

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Here we go again. Yet another national news story goes unnoticed by the Bellingham Herald. After searching the Bellingham Herald online, I did find one sentence buried in a [Chelan County marijuana](#) story which referenced the [Ross Lake](#) marijuana discovery being "far eastern Whatcom County". To read the Herald story, you'd think this all occurred in Chelan County. One problem, Ross Lake is within the boundaries of Whatcom County, not Chelan County. Chelan County doesn't even border Whatcom County. It may not have been the story or crime of the year, but a \$48 million dollar marijuana bust still deserves some local recognition, no? Something about this story isn't passing the smell test.

This most recent bust was discovered in the rugged and scenic Ross Lake area of the Mt. Baker National Forest, which is part of the larger North Cascades National Forest. Ross Lake is unique in that it's length nearly traverses Whatcom County's entire narrow strip between Skagit County's northern border and the US-Canada border, yet the very northern tip of the lake is actually inside of BC, Canada. However, Ross Lake is still well within Whatcom County, making it a newsworthy story for Whatcom County residents. Apparently the television news sources, [Seattle Times](#), [Seattle PI](#) and [Skagit Valley Herald](#) thought so too, since they all wrote stories about it.

Local law enforcement personnel participated in the raid, including two Swat teams. In all, two large dump trucks full of marijuana plants were seized. The improvised marijuana farm and associated camp were found unoccupied and as a result the operation resulted in no arrests. According to Lt. Richard Wiley, head of the Washington State Patrol narcotics division, evidence and living arrangements were found at the camp to account for an estimated 6 persons. Missing any camping gear? Do you know anybody that recently returned nervous and in a hurry from a camping or hiking trip? From the Ross Lake area maybe?

According to the Skagit Valley Herald, Nicholas Brown, US Department of Justice Assistant Attorney, the marijuana farm was found growing on the side of a mountain about a half mile from the well-traveled East Bank hiking trail near Ross Lake. Skagit Valley Herald also reported that investigators do not have suspects in the crime at this time, however, they believe the growers were low-end crop tenders of a well-organized crime operation. Lt. Wiley was also quoted as saying "These people know what they're doing. They're not amateurs".

So why is it that I have to learn of these things from news and media sources outside of the very county in which they occurred? Where are you at Bellingham Herald? Another interesting thing. Try to find a published map that shows Ross

Lake on it. You'd think that Whatcom County stops at Kendall or Mt. Baker according to most maps, even the maps provided on the Whatcom County government website. Whatcom County is actually bordered on the east by Okanogan County, well past Ross Lake, as you can see in the image below.



I had to do some serious searching to find this map. As you can see from the map, Ross Lake is along the east edge of the Mt. Baker National Forest. It's very narrow and extends from the US/Canada border nearly to the Diablo dam area. Until more information is reported, its not known exacty where the marijuana farm was physically located. Based on the descriptions provided so far, it could have been on Mt. Baker National Forest land, or in Whatcom County proper.

The Ross Lake area is known to have more than its fair share of cross border smuggling activity, mostly for marijuana, which has been going since Whatcom County became a county it seems. It has also been an area where humans, guns, cocaine and other contraband items have been smuggled in and out of the US. They hop on a boat or kayak and paddle right down Ross Lake into the US. They also fly planes, helicopters, ride snowmobiles and just about any other conveyance you can imagine, to make some serious black market coin.

There have been untold numbers of intercepts by US Border Patrol and Forest Service employees, including an actual terrorist that was captured there in 2000 and the recent discovery of a BC man's body in May 2008. The East Lake trail is well travelled by hikers and smugglers alike. Estimates vary, but I've found references to there being, at most, a dozen or so law enforcers that patrol the area. With the kind of danger this recent marijuana farm represents to any hapless soul that might accidentally stumble upon one, as the operators are almost always armed to the teeth, you'd think there would be more officers assigned to these areas.

WC...[U](#) will provide further information as it becomes available.