

# Indian Reservations: Drug Conduits

## Spaced Out In The Wide-Open Spaces

Drug smuggling has reached epidemic proportions on Indian lands. While we usually associate drug smuggling with the Mexican drug cartels – entering the nation through our Southern border – the problem reaches far beyond the American Southwest. Large-scale criminal organizations have found havens and allies in the wide-open and isolated regions of Indian country.

In the eyes of law enforcement, reservations have become a critical link in the drug underworld. They have helped traffickers transport high-potency marijuana and the drug Ecstasy from eastern Canada into cities like Buffalo, Boston, and New York and have facilitated the passage of cocaine and methamphetamine from cities in the West and Midwest into rural America.

In some cases, outside drug gangs are working with Indian criminals to distribute drugs on Indian and non-Indian lands. On a growing number of reservations, Mexican criminals are marrying Indian women to integrate themselves into the community.

As one of a multitude of examples, the US Department of Justice reports that as much as 20% of all high-potency marijuana produced in Canada is smuggled through the **St. Regis Mohawk Reservation**. This reservation, which straddles the US-Canada border, is also a hotbed for smuggling multi-thousand tablet quantities of Ecstasy into the US every week.

Another important example is that remote areas of the **Tohono O'odham Nation** in Arizona are used to funnel drugs, weapons and humans into the United States, and to re-direct weapons

and the proceeds from racketeering back into Mexico. An extremely well organized criminal enterprise operates on this reservation.

There are many similar examples. The lack of jurisdictional cooperation from the reservations, inadequate border patrol activity on the US/Canada border by both nations, the ease of going back and forth between the two nations, the thinly populated and isolated terrain, and the minimal role played by the states in which the reservations are located allow Indian reservations to harbor all manner of illegal activities.

Indian reservations come under the jurisdiction of tribal councils rather than the states in which they are located, making detection and arrests incredibly difficult. Tribal police forces are vastly undermanned—so that, for example, by 2009, the ***Pine Ridge Indian Reservation*** in South Dakota became home to at least 39 criminal gangs with over 5,000 members.

Of course, there are definite financial advantages to average reservation dwellers to aid the drug smugglers.

Most Indian reservations now bear more of a resemblance to inner city Detroit or Baltimore than they do to the great open plains. Rundown trailers, piles of trash, and empty beer cans dominate the landscape in these places, where both unemployment and substance abuse are rampant.

Drug smugglers will run rampant on the reservations until the federal government begins patrolling these and adjacent areas in earnest, and fences off these lands—which would probably accomplish as much as the proposed wall on the Mexican border with regards to enforcement activities.”

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