

Re: Apps 11892, Big River Farm

Rodney Silva <rodneysilva1957@gmail.com>

Wed 12/29/2021 1:06 PM

To: Holtermann, Michael <mholtermann@co.humboldt.ca.us>

Good afternoon,

As we have told you we own the property 9350 Wilder Ridge Road next door to the grow for Ivan Illieve, Big River Farms 9320 Wilder Ridge Road application 11892. I have been in contact with neighbors at other parcels he owns on Wilder Ridge who have also had problems with him and have asked them to write to you. We still hear a lot of guns being fired which is very disturbing to my tenants. Here is an article that explains a bit of what this man is about. Unfortunately the permit is an LLC which a lot of these people hide behind making it more confusing for the authorities and the county to understand who is getting permitted which was explained to us by the FBI. I have other articles to send and recordings of the gunfire for you to put in the staff report.

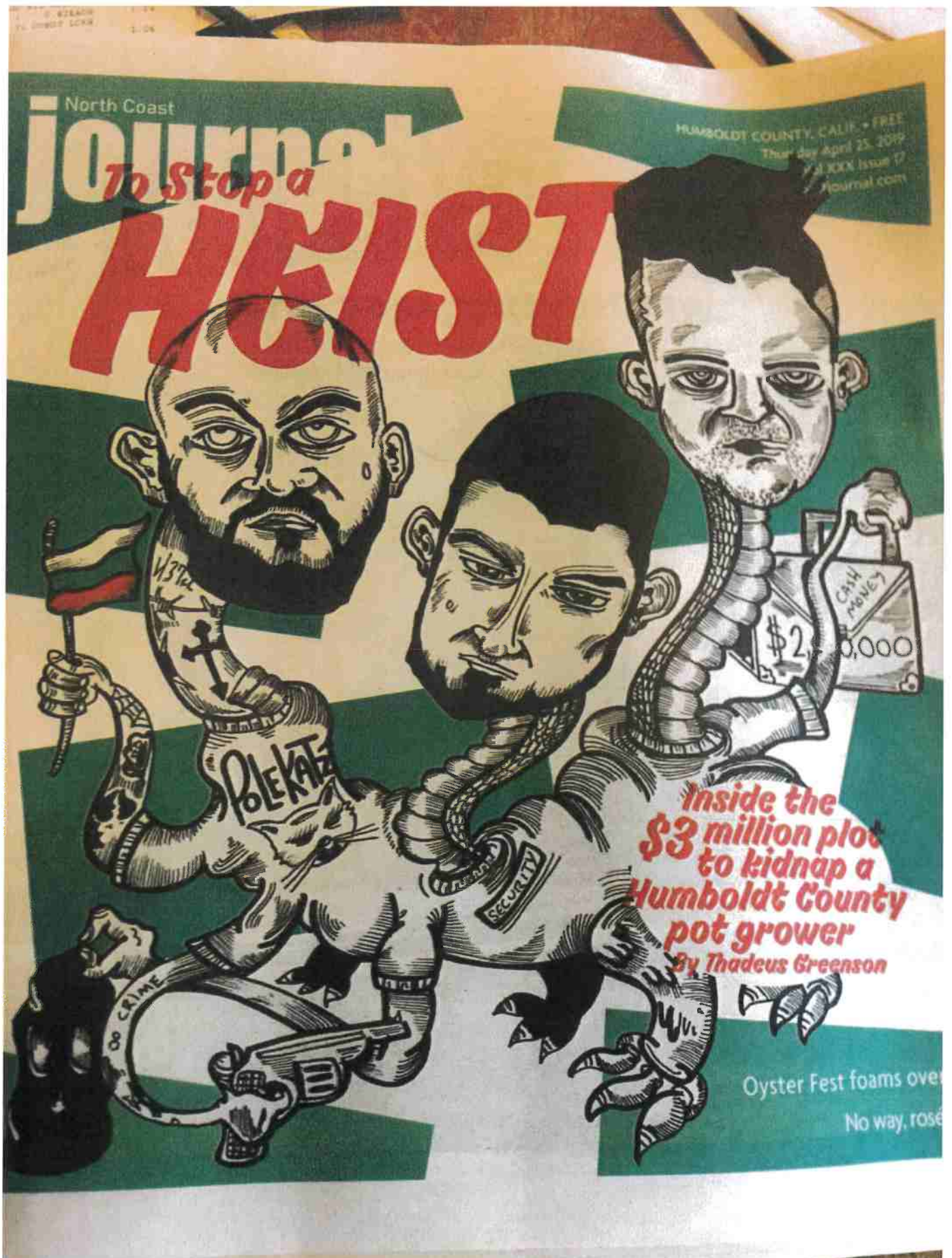
I would like to follow up on the permitted well on the property to find out if it is the original well or if it is a new well that has been recently drilled. I know Ivan has tried to drill in the past since the old well near the 50'000 gallon tank dries up in the summer. I would like to know where the well is located on the map. As I have told you we have a house that uses an artesian spring that has provided plenty of water for the past 20 years we have known this property. Last year was the first year we have had a water shortage. I am deeply concerned about losing our only source of water if this grow is allowed to operate considering the fact that Ivan's property is above our water source and additional water usage could severely impact our spring water. We have no other water source on the property and cannot afford to drill a well. Of course we are also concerned for the safety of our tenants living on our property considering Ivan is still being investigated by the FBI and the gun fight that took place on our property line. We still hear gunfire from his property.

We were really upset, not relieved with the fact the county including John Ford knew who this person was and decided to transfer our problems to another neighborhood in Honeydew under the RRR program. The residents of that community in Honeydew were upset they were being dumped on with Ivan's problems. Now here we are again having to fight for our community's safety and peace of mind. This should be a no brainer for the county.

I will be sending you other articles about Ivan when I have time including a recording of gunfire from a former tenant.

Thank you and Happy New Year!

Mark Hilovsky and Rodney Silva





On the Cover

# To Stop a HEIST

Inside the \$3 million plot to kidnap a Humboldt County pot grower

By Thadeus Greenson

Art By Dave Orchard

thad@northcoastjournal.com

**T**he story begins with a strip club bouncer and an Iraq War veteran meeting in Polekatz, a sprawling 18,000-square-foot bar about 15 miles outside of Chicago with all nude, full-contact lap dances, poor Yelp reviews and a shady reputation. It ended 2,200 miles west, with an FBI agent chasing down the two men and one other, and arresting them before they could allegedly kidnap, torture and rob a Humboldt County marijuana grower of \$3 million.

The story is cut from a Hollywood script, with characters straight from central casting. But it is also very real, drawing light to rumors long murmured yet never confirmed of multi-national crime organizations operating in Humboldt County and pulling in seven-figure profits while cultivating and trafficking on a massive scale.

According to an affidavit in support of an arrest warrant that was apparently penned just a couple of hours before the three men arrived at the McKinleyville airport to reportedly carry out a multi-million-dollar heist, it started with an informant's phone call Dec. 20. The informant — referred to

throughout the document as Confidential Human Source, or CHS — told FBI agents that a Bulgarian national named Emanoel Borisov had approached him about committing a robbery.

Borisov, 28, hulking and covered in tattoos, told the informant he'd learned of the imminent arrival of approximately \$2.3 million in cash to a Humboldt County home belonging to another Bulgarian, who cultivated and trafficked large quantities of cannabis. The guy — to whom he later referred as "Ivan" — also had at least \$400,000 in cash in his home, Borisov said, making the total haul for the robbery at least \$2.7 million, according to the affidavit.

The plan, as Borisov allegedly laid it out to the informant, was to snatch Ivan at the gate to his property and kidnap him, holding him until he gave up the location of the millions in cash. If needed, Borisov said he would "do the hard part," according to the affidavit.

There were to be two other players in the robbery, as well. The affidavit states that Borisov told the informant he was also recruiting his friend Paul Brooks, a 34-year-old Marine and Iraq War veteran,

whom Borisov had met while Brooks worked security at Polekatz, to be back-up. Another man — Evgeni Kopankov, a U.S. citizen of Bulgarian descent — had identified the target and would provide guns and masks. Borisov allegedly told the informant that he was needed to help get all that cash back to Illinois after the successful heist.

"The plan is we're gonna probably snatch the guy outside his house, probably at the gate," Borisov said, according to a transcript of a recorded conversation with the informant contained in a court filing.

"By himself?" the informant asked.

"We're gonna wait until he comes up to the gate in his car or something," Borisov replied. "We're gonna take the guy with us. We'll keep him for a day or two until he tells us where the money is at."

When agents received this information, it seems to have immediately been taken seriously, in part, because the bureau was familiar with Kopankov.

Back on Dec. 19, the Humboldt County Drug Task Force was contacted by an "out of state law enforcement agency" that notified it that "possible illegal items" would be coming into the county

on a private jet that afternoon, according to an affidavit in support of a search warrant obtained by the *Journal*. The document filed in Humboldt County Superior Court doesn't identify the agency but notes it was investigating a drug trafficking organization

that included people of Bulgarian descent. The FBI affidavit, meanwhile, notes that both the bureau and the Drug Enforcement Administration participated in the case.

At about 3:15 p.m. that day, agents watched from afar as three men — including Edgar Garcia, who had allegedly chartered the plane — exited the jet and loaded numerous large suitcases into a pair of waiting cars, a silver Nissan Titan and a black Jeep SUV. Police stopped the vehicles less than a mile away, as they turned into the Holiday Inn Express. A narcotic sniffing dog named Reese signaled he smelled drugs in both cars, which were subsequently searched. Inside, officers reported finding eight suitcases carrying a combined \$2 million in cash. During the search, Kopankov came out of his hotel room and was

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# On the Cover

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turned to the vehicles, according to the affidavit, which noted his cell phone was later found inside one of them.

About a week after he first notified the FBI of the heist plot, the informant met with both Borisov and Brooks on March 28, recording the conversation. According to the affidavit, Borisov relayed the story of the \$2 million seized in McKinleyville a few months earlier, saying it had been Garcia's money. Further, Borisov relayed that Kopankov had told him that Garcia and "Ivan" were in the midst of an ongoing dispute over a property sale the year before, and Kopankov said he'd started spreading rumors that "Mexicans" were plotting to go after Ivan because of it.

"Kopankov hoped that the rumors about 'the Mexicans' would make Ivan incorrectly assume that 'the Mexicans' had robbed him," the affidavit states, adding that Kopankov hoped the story would give him, Brooks and Borisov a layer of cover for the robbery they were plotting.

Then on March 30 and April 1, the informant recorded a series of follow-up conversations about the heist. At one point, one of the conversations allegedly

**"You're not gonna go empty handed, you know?"**

**"Oh, no. Fuck no."**

turned to guns and Borisov assured the informant that Kopankov would provide them in California.

"You're not gonna go empty handed, you know?" the informant asked according to the transcript.

"Oh, no. Fuck no," Brooks replied. "Of course not," Borisov added. "I'm not doing that," Brooks allegedly said. "Fuck no. ... You're out of your fuck-

ing mind. I'm crazy, dude, but ..."

In another conversation, the informant expressed some concern about the plan.

"You kidnap the guy, before the gate, OK, he's gonna say the money is (inside)," the informant says. "What if in the house is five more people with guns? What you gonna do then?"

"That's why we're thinking of you guys

coming," Borisov allegedly said. "But then you need to walk up and see everybody?" the informant asked. "Then we do what we gotta do," Borisov allegedly said.

During one of the meetings on March 30 or April 1, Borisov allegedly told the informant and Brooks that Kopankov had decided Ivan's property was too well guarded for the kidnapping to work, and pivoted the plans toward robbing a store one named "Sergey," who Kopankov believed was holding \$3 million.

The plan was in place: Kopankov would drive out to Humboldt County. Borisov and Brooks would fly, purchasing one-way tickets; the three would meet at the airport in McKinleyville, where Kopankov would show up with masks and guns; the three would travel to Sergey's property and camp nearby until the opportunity arose to kidnap Sergey and "hurt him" until he disclosed the location of the hidden cash. Borisov allegedly told the informant he then planned to double back and rob Ivan afterward.

After the meeting on the first, the informant went with Borisov and Brooks to Walmart in Northlake, Illinois, where the



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bought boots, pants and backpacks. The same day, the informant purchased one-way airline tickets to Humboldt County for Borisov and Brooks, departing April 3. They were scheduled to arrive on the 5:30 p.m. flight from San Francisco. In a roundabout way, the FBI affidavit

**"But then you need to walk**

the most using passports from Eastern European nations as ID. But the property isn't owned by V&B Construction — at least not anymore. According to county records, it had been the registered owner until June of 2016, when he sold it to Georgi Mollov

makes mention of a massive cannabis bust on Nov. 27 on Wilder Ridge Road in which the Humboldt County Drug Task Force reported destroying more than 10,000 pounds of processed marijuana, prompting Lt. Mike Endrey to say it was the "most bud I have ever seen in one place." The affidavit states that Borisov was talking to the informant and Brooks about other potential robberies when he mentions robbing Ivan's partners "Vlado" and "Gala," who Borisov said have \$5 million to \$6 million hidden in a home in Illinois. The affidavit, penned by Special Agent Richard Smith, states he believes Borisov was referring to Vladimír Pavlov and Galina Nedelkova, who own V&I Construction with Ivan Iliev. Smith further states that he believes Iliev was the initial robbery target.

"I am familiar with V&I because, on Nov. 27, 2018, I assisted in a seizure

**up and kill  
everybody?"  
"We do what  
we gotta do."**

of over 10,000 pounds of processed marijuana on a property owned by V&I," Smith wrote.

According to a Humboldt County Superior Court search warrant, the bust took place on an 18-acre property located on Wilder Ridge Road in Southern Humboldt and came after Bureau of Land Management Special Agent Matt Knudson spotted a large greenhouse on

the property during a flyover and later learned it wasn't in the county permitting process. While conducting surveillance on the property, officers spotted a vehicle registered to Iliev coming and going from the property, and a water tender registered to an Illinois address servicing the property.

Additionally, after serving warrants, officers reported finding 30 workers on

for \$250,000. Zillow estimates the property's value to be closer to \$450,000. Paperwork filed with the California Secretary of State's Office by V&I Construction, meanwhile, lists its headquarters at a location just down the road, and near another property bought Nov. 27 that also has ties to Iliev.

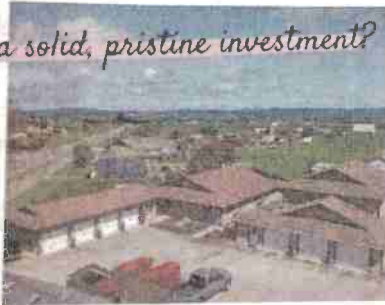
Regardless of exactly how the properties do or don't tie together, it's clear that come April 3, the FBI is taking this bust plot very seriously. The bureau is notified — it's unclear whether by TSA or an agent on the ground at the airport — when Borisov and Brooks arrive in San Francisco. One of the last lines in Smith's affidavit notes that the suspects are there and their plane "is expected to depart at 4:10 p.m. for their final destination, ACV in McKinleyville."

According to court records, agents

Continued on page 17

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## On the Cover

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conducted a traffic stop just off U.S. Highway 101 shortly before 5:30 p.m. and took Kopankov into custody. At just about the same time, Terrie Cengia was arriving at the airport with her 2-year-old grandchild. They were picking up a friend flying in from San Francisco but as they approached the airport, they noticed a dark-colored SUV and three Humboldt County Sheriff's Office patrol cars.

"There were two cops there and they told us to get back," Cengia recalls.

Local attorney Allison Jackson, meanwhile, was on the plane, returning from oral arguments before the court of appeals in San Francisco. Two other passengers told the *Journal* that two large men had been acting oddly, seemed intoxicated and kept getting up to use the bathroom, but Jackson says she was reading and hadn't noticed.

She says after the plane landed, she got up, walked down to the tarmac, grabbed her carry-on bag from the luggage rack and turned to walk inside when she saw a group stopped at the metal turnstiles, with Humboldt County Sheriff William Honsal in street clothes — jeans and a backpack — halting the crowd. Behind him, Jackson says she could see six or eight deputies and some officers in plain clothes handcuffing two men before leading them out the door.

When it was all over, Jackson says she walked by Honsal.

"I went, 'Hey, Billy, where the hell was the big guy sitting on the plane?' And he said, 'Next to me,'" Jackson recalls with a laugh.

Honsal declined to comment on whether he was on the plane as a part of the investigation or just happened to be traveling, saying he can't speak publicly about the FBI's case. Generally, though, he said his department is well aware of an organized crime element operating within Humboldt County's illicit cannabis industry.

Since their arrests, Kopankov, Borisov and Brooks have all pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiracy to commit robbery affecting interstate commerce and conspiracy to commit kidnapping. If convicted, they face a maximum of life in prison.

The federal government has already been dealt a blow in the court case. A federal judge, citing that neither has a criminal record, ruled over the federal government's objections that Kopankov and Borisov should be allowed to post \$200,000 bail and await trial from their homes, subject to curfews and electronic monitoring.

Both men had been released from federal custody and Brooks' detention



Mug shots of the three men accused in the heist plot, Brooks, Borisov and Kopankov, inset in a picture of a marijuana bud pile from the Nov. 27 bust at a property in Southern Humboldt that may be connected to the failed plan to allegedly kidnap, rob and torture a Humboldt County grower.

hearing was taking place as the *Journal* went to press with this issue.

Assistant U.S. Attorney Neal Hong had argued that releasing the men would put the public at risk, noting that the FBI carefully planned to arrest Borisov and Kopankov while still inside the airport and before they could arm themselves. Further, Hong argued, releasing them would put the FBI's informant at risk.

"The defendants plotted to abduct and rob an individual that is involved in marijuana trafficking," Hong wrote to the court. "Robbing a marijuana trafficker of millions of dollars is fraught with danger

... Borisov and Brooks insisted on being armed, and Borisov was willing to 'do what we gotta do' when faced with the possibility of encountering five armed men. Given the facts that the defendants were willing and bold enough to abduct and rob some potentially dangerous individuals for personal gain, it stands to reason that it is very realistic that they would be willing to harm or intimidate the CHS, especially given the nature and weight of the evidence against them. A curfew and electronic monitoring will not alleviate this concern."

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On Nov 30, 2021, at 12:03 PM, Holtermann, Michael <[mholtermann@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:mholtermann@co.humboldt.ca.us)> wrote:

Good morning Rodney,

This email is to follow up regarding application 11295 on APN 108-011-026. The light complaint was referred to Blake Batten on the Post Approval team. I spoke to him today and he said that he had sent a letter to the applicant, and they had ten working days to remedy the issue. If after December 6th, 2021, the greenhouse is still emitting light pollution, please send photos to Blake and he will follow up with you. Blake said the letter did not mention noise, so it may be a

good idea to contact him regarding how to address that concern. I checked the staff report for the original project and the applicant has been conditioned to limit noise levels to 50 decibels within 100 feet of the cultivation sites to protect Northern Spotted Owls and Marbled murrelet. I hope this information helps, and if you have any other questions or concerns, please feel free to reach out and I will do my best to accommodate.

Blake's contact info is [bbatten1@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:bbatten1@co.humboldt.ca.us) and his direct line is (707) 268- 3739.

Best,

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**Michael Holtermann**  
Planner - Cannabis Services Division  
[Planning and Building Department](#)  
(707) 445-7541  
3015 H Street | Eureka, CA 95501  
Email: [mholtermann@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:mholtermann@co.humboldt.ca.us)

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From: Holtermann, Michael <[mholtermann@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:mholtermann@co.humboldt.ca.us)>  
Sent: Friday, November 19, 2021 4:50 PM  
To: [Rodneysilva1957@gmail.com](mailto:Rodneysilva1957@gmail.com) <[Rodneysilva1957@gmail.com](mailto:Rodneysilva1957@gmail.com)>  
Subject: Re: Apps 11892, Big River Farm

Good afternoon Rodney,

I received your emails today, and I am responding keep you updated on the items we discussed yesterday.

- I have been in touch with the Code Enforcement Unit, who informed me they will reach out to the Garberville Sheriff Department to follow up on the investigation. I was told they would get back to me by Monday, and I will be in touch when I receive news.
- I sent the photos of the light pollution to a Supervising Planner, who will work with the Post Approval Inspections Team to determine an appropriate course of action. I will follow up with you when I have an update, hopefully by the middle of next week.

I hope to be in touch by next Wednesday at the latest. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out.

Best,

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**Michael Holtermann**  
Planner - Cannabis Services Division  
[Planning and Building Department](#)  
(707) 445-7541  
3015 H Street | Eureka, CA 95501  
Email: [mholtermann@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:mholtermann@co.humboldt.ca.us)

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From: Holtermann, Michael  
Sent: Thursday, November 18, 2021 6:09 PM  
To: [Rodneysilva1957@gmail.com](mailto:Rodneysilva1957@gmail.com) <[Rodneysilva1957@gmail.com](mailto:Rodneysilva1957@gmail.com)>  
Subject: Apps 11892, Big River Farm

Good evening Rodney,

This email is to serve as a record of our conversation over the phone today, as well as to ensure that you have my contact information. The issues we discussed are as follows:

- You stated that you would like to be informed of when Big River Farm, application 11892, is scheduled for hearing. This project is currently being continued to a date uncertain due to the proposed use of a groundwater well. The project will likely be heard near the end of December or the beginning of January. I cannot offer any dates more specific than that at this time, however I will contact you via email when the project is ready to move forward.
- You asked me to reach out to the Garberville Sheriff Department regarding the investigation into the altercation detailed in the 2019 supplemental. I will reach out and update you by next week.
- You stated that the cannabis operation on APN 108-011-026 has been producing light pollution, and are concerned that this will impact Northern Spotted Owls. I will speak to my supervisor tomorrow to determine an appropriate course of action. I understand you have photographs, and the light is difficult to see from other adjacent parcels. The photographs may be helpful, and I would appreciate it if you could email me copies of the photos that I can show my supervisor during our discussion.



If I have missed any issues we discussed, or if you have any questions or further concerns, please feel free to reach out via email or over the phone. My desk line is (707) 268-3737.

Best,

<Outlook-  
acemgpcg.png>

**Michael Holtermann**  
Planner - Cannabis Services Division  
[Planning and Building Department](#)  
(707) 445-7541  
3015 H Street | Eureka, CA 95501  
Email: mholtermann@co.humboldt.ca.us

## Johnson, Cliff

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**From:** Lesley Doyle <Hsom16@hotmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, May 2, 2019 4:26 PM  
**To:** Johnson, Cliff; Steve Doyle; Luther, Stephen  
**Subject:** Big River Farm

Hi Everyone,

We would like to continue Big River Farm, LLC for tonight commissioners meeting. With the short notice from BLM's Referral response we would like additional time to review their response. Please let me know if you need any additional information from us. I will be there tonight in case there is anything needed from us.

Lesley Doyle  
Humble servants of the Mattole  
Sent from my iPhone



**From:** [Rod Silva](#)  
**To:** [Planning Clerk](#)  
**Subject:** Fwd: Cannabis Permit Application 11892  
**Date:** Wednesday, May 1, 2019 5:05:03 PM

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Please find enclosed our complaint that was sent to the board of supervisors, John Ford, Stephen Luther, Warren Black, and the Humboldt County Sheriff. In addition to this we wish to bring to your attention the cover story in the current issue of the North Coast Journal titled, "To Stop a Heist, Inside the \$3 million plot to kidnap a Humboldt County pot grower." The grower identified in the article is Ivan Illiev, our neighbor at 9320 Wilder Ridge Road.

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** "Madrone, Steve" <[smadrone@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:smadrone@co.humboldt.ca.us)>  
**Subject:** Re: Cannabis Permit Application 11892  
**Date:** April 30, 2019 at 1:28:15 PM PDT  
**To:** Rod Silva <[rsilva@wildblue.net](mailto:rsilva@wildblue.net)>, "Luther, Stephen" <[SLuther@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:SLuther@co.humboldt.ca.us)>  
**Cc:** "Black, Warren" <[wblack2@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:wblack2@co.humboldt.ca.us)>, "Ford, John" <[JFord@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:JFord@co.humboldt.ca.us)>, "Fennell, Estelle" <[EFennell@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:EFennell@co.humboldt.ca.us)>, HSO-MAILBOX <[HSO@co.humboldt.ca.us](mailto:HSO@co.humboldt.ca.us)>

To Whom it may concern.

I am very concerned about the incidents of violence in our communities. Permitting grow activities on farms that have a history of this violence is not something I can support. Thanks for your consideration. Steve

Steve Madrone  
County of Humboldt  
Supervisor, District 5  
(707) 476-2395

---

**From:** Rod Silva <[rsilva@wildblue.net](mailto:rsilva@wildblue.net)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 25, 2019 9:54:44 AM  
**To:** Luther, Stephen  
**Cc:** Madrone, Steve; Black, Warren; Wilson, Mike; Bass, Virginia; Ford, John; Bohn, Rex; Fennell, Estelle; HSO-MAILBOX  
**Subject:** Cannabis Permit Application 11892

April 24, 2019

Stephen Luther  
Planner, Humboldt County Planning Department

Dear Mr. Luther,

We are in receipt of the County's notice, dated April 4th, 2019 which we only received recently. The notice is for an application for a conditional use permit for 22,000 square feet of existing mixed light cannabis cultivation by Big River Farm LLC in connection with APN 108-023-008, owned by Wilder Ridge LLC from New Jersey.

This letter shall serve two purposes: First to object to the permit for reasons stated below.

Second to place the County on notice that should it grant a permit to APN 108-023-008 for cannabis cultivation we and adjacent neighbors shall hold the county liable for any harm caused to neighbors' persons and/or proper

On November 27, 2018 in the 4100 block of Wilder Ridge Road authorities conducted a raid on an illegal grow. Some 16,000 pounds of processed marijuana were seized and several arrests were made the nationality of which was Bulgarian. Days after that raid there was a gun fight which took place on our property APN 108-023-013 adjacent to the driveway of property APN 108-023-008. The residents of APN 108-023-008 are Bulgarian. The day of the gun fight there were several vehicles parked at the driveway entrance of APN 108-023-008 as though they were trying to prevent someone from entering APN 108-023-008. There were also vehicles parked across the street from APN 108-023-008. Gunfire erupted. There were people hiding behind vehicles on both sides of the road shooting at each other. We learned from a deputy at the sheriff's office in Garberville, Officer Nathan Cumbow, that a Bulgarian was hospitalized for gun shot wounds around the same time of this gun fight. He refused to reveal the circumstances of his injuries.

This kind of violence is enough to deny any permit. Known or suspected violence must be as important as any environmental concerns the county may have when considering to issue a permit for cannabis cultivation.

Additionally we believe the work conducted on APN 108-023-008 in the recent past is possibly unpermitted and has impacted the neighboring Bear Creek watershed. The King Range drains into Bear Creek which is a salmon habitat. Its entire course is pristine and very uninhabited with a few exceptions. APN 108-023-008 is one of those exceptions. After the last storm of this season we saw sedimentation so severe in Bear Creek that we have not seen during the entire 15 years we have lived here. We feel that 22,000 square feet of cultivation will have a severe detrimental impact on the Bear Creek watershed.

Rod Silva  
Mark Hilovsky

Cc: Federal Bureau of Investigation  
California Bureau of Cannabis Control