



North Florida

High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area

Drug Market Analysis 2009



**NATIONAL DRUG INTELLIGENCE CENTER
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE**





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This assessment is an outgrowth of a partnership between the NDIC and HIDTA Program for preparation of annual assessments depicting drug trafficking trends and developments in HIDTA Program areas. The report has been coordinated with the HIDTA, is limited in scope to HIDTA jurisdictional boundaries, and draws upon a wide variety of sources within those boundaries.



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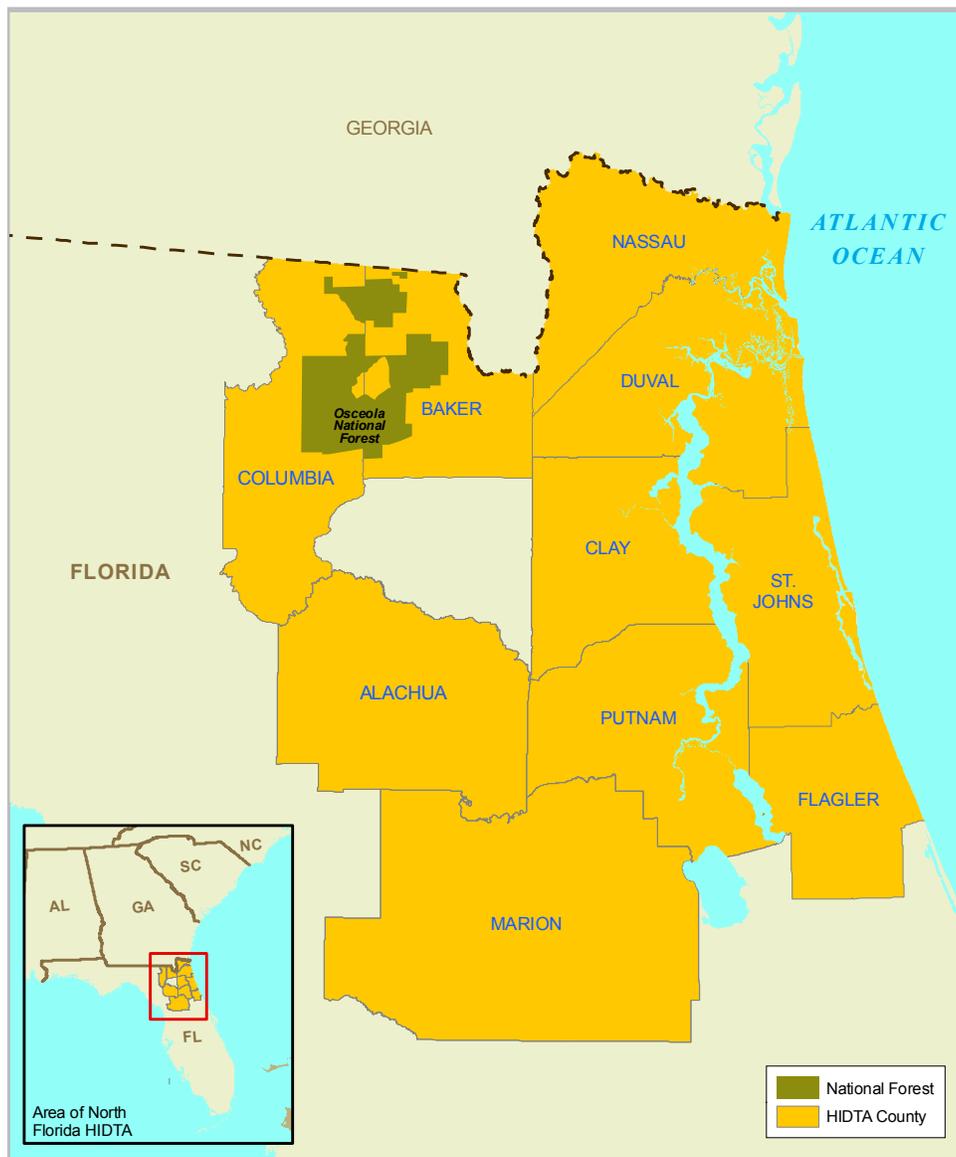
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Preface

This assessment provides a strategic overview of the illicit drug situation in the North Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), highlighting significant trends and law enforcement concerns related to the trafficking and abuse of illicit drugs. The report was prepared through detailed analysis of recent law enforcement reporting, information obtained through interviews with law enforcement and public health officials, and available statistical data. The report is designed to provide policymakers, resource planners, and law enforcement officials with a focused discussion of key drug issues and developments facing the North Florida HIDTA.

Figure 1. North Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area



Strategic Drug Threat Developments

- Mexican drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) and associated Hispanic criminal groups are the dominant transporters of cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine in the North Florida HIDTA region. These DTOs and criminal groups have gained control over much of the drug distribution in the region and in the entire state of Florida as a result of their access to sources of supply and their well-established drug smuggling routes from Mexico into the United States.
- Sporadic shortages of powder cocaine and slightly higher prices at the midlevel and retail level were reported by several law enforcement agencies in the North Florida HIDTA region during the second half of 2008. Cocaine usually is readily available throughout the region because of its proximity to reliable international sources of supply. However, large cocaine seizures in drug transit areas near the Southwest Border and in the Caribbean have resulted in sporadic cocaine shortages in the North Florida HIDTA region.
- The diversion, distribution, and abuse of controlled prescription drugs (CPDs) such as oxycodone, hydrocodone, and diazepam are significant threats to the North Florida HIDTA region.

HIDTA Overview

The North Florida HIDTA region encompasses Alachua, Baker, Clay, Columbia, Duval, Flagler, Marion, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns Counties. (See Figure 1 on page 1.) The North Florida HIDTA region, particularly Jacksonville, is a significant transshipment area for illegal drugs transported north from Miami, Florida, to East Coast drug markets such as Boston, Massachusetts; New York,

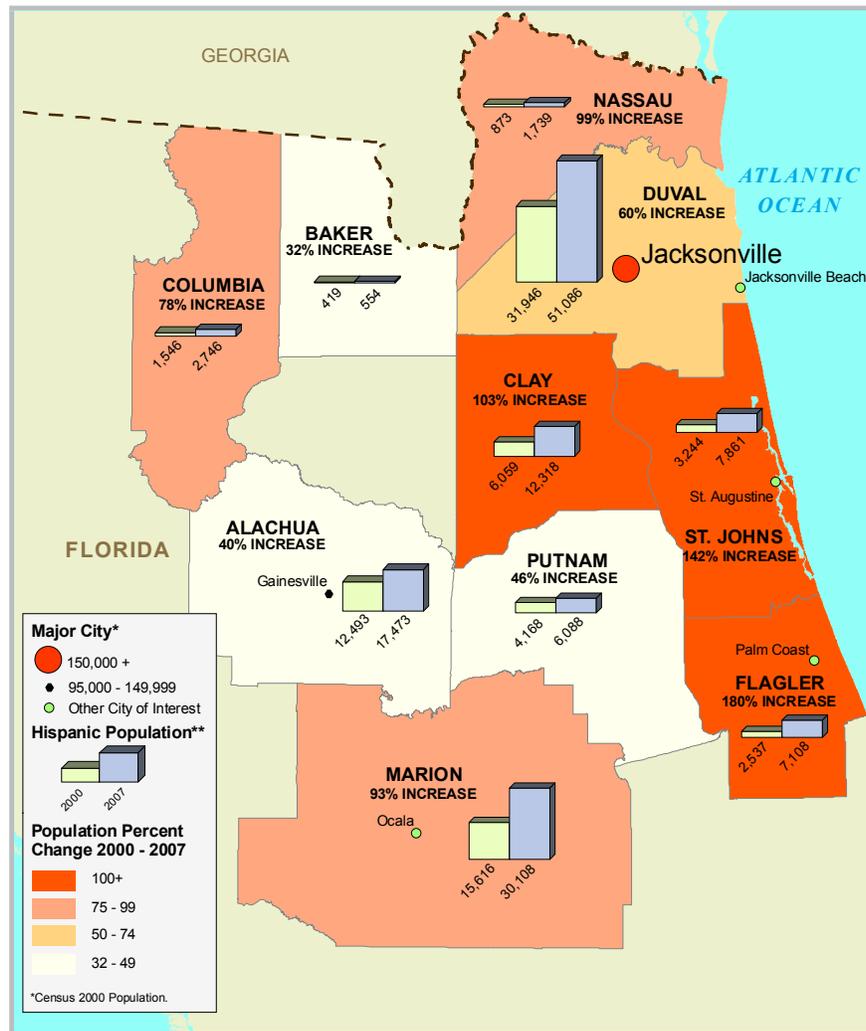
New York; and Savannah, Georgia, and for drugs transported south from Atlanta, Georgia, to drug markets throughout Florida. Jacksonville, which has the largest population of any city in Florida,¹ is the primary drug market in the North Florida HIDTA region. As such, drug trafficking activities in the Jacksonville area have a considerable influence on drug markets in the entire region.

The North Florida HIDTA region has a large and increasing population that is racially/ethnically diverse.² The Hispanic population in the region, which is the fastest-growing segment, increased 74 percent from 78,901 in 2000 to an estimated 137,081 in 2007. (See Figure 2 on page 3.) Many foreign nationals and/or immigrants have relocated to the region from drug source or transit areas such as Mexico, South America, and the Caribbean, allowing drug traffickers to blend into local communities and conceal their illegal activities.

The North Florida HIDTA region has a highly developed transportation system, including major roadways such as Interstates 10, 75, and 95, which link it to drug distribution centers in Atlanta and Miami and to major eastern U.S. drug markets. (See Figure 3 on page 11.) Moreover, Jacksonville is one of the principal ports of entry (POEs) for travelers, mail, and cargo into the continental United States; millions of tons of commercial truck and maritime freight and parcels as well as high volumes of commercial and passenger vehicles transit the HIDTA region daily. A large international airport, numerous international

1. According to U.S. Census Bureau data, the estimated population of Jacksonville, Florida, was 805,605 in 2007 (the latest year for which such data are available); the city of Miami, Florida, had the second-highest estimated population—409,719—in 2007. Census data further indicate that in 2007 the estimated population of Duval County (Jacksonville), Florida, was 849,159, while the estimated population of Miami-Dade County (Miami), Florida, was 2,387,170.
2. According to U.S. Census Bureau data from 2007 (the latest year for which such estimated data are available), Caucasians account for 74 percent of the North Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) region's population, followed by African Americans (20%), Hispanics (6%), Asians (2%), and other races (1%).

Figure 2. Estimated Hispanic Population Increase in North Florida HIDTA Counties, 2000–2007



parcel transshipment hubs, and a large commercial seaport facilitate high levels of legitimate commerce and drug trafficking activity.

Drug Threat Overview

Cocaine trafficking and abuse pose the greatest threat to the North Florida HIDTA region as evidenced by the high levels of violence associated with cocaine (particularly crack) distribution and the high number of cocaine-related treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities. According to data from the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug

Threat Survey (NDTS) 2009, 19 of the 28 law enforcement agency respondents in the North Florida HIDTA region report that cocaine is the greatest drug threat in their jurisdictions.³ Cocaine usually is readily available throughout the region because of its proximity to reliable international sources of supply; however, cocaine seizures in drug transit areas, such as the Southwest

3. National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) data for 2009 cited in this report are as of February 12, 2009. NDTS data cited are raw, unweighted responses from federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies solicited through either the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) or the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) HIDTA program. Data cited may include responses from agencies that are part of the NDTS 2009 national sample and/or agencies that are part of HIDTA solicitation lists.

Border and the Caribbean, and reported cocaine shortages in drug distribution areas such as Atlanta during 2008 resulted in sporadic cocaine shortages in the North Florida HIDTA region. Cocaine prices in the North Florida HIDTA region reflected the decreased availability at the midlevel and retail level during this period; prices in Jacksonville were slightly higher in the last 6 months of 2008 (\$750 to \$1,200 per ounce of powder cocaine and \$20 to \$75 per gram of crack cocaine) than in the first 6 months of 2008 (\$700 to \$1,000 per ounce of powder cocaine and \$20 to \$40 per gram of crack cocaine). As a result of the sporadic cocaine shortages and slightly elevated prices, some distributors in the North Florida HIDTA region have begun to travel to other areas of Florida to obtain cocaine for retail sales in Jacksonville. Distributors are also adapting to the sporadic shortages by cutting cocaine to stretch supplies, resulting in a slight decrease in cocaine purity at the retail level. Moreover, reporting from North Florida HIDTA Initiatives⁴ indicates that more than 129 kilograms of powder cocaine and 4 kilograms of crack cocaine were seized in 2008. (See Table 1 on page 5.)

The diversion, distribution, and abuse of CPDs⁵ pose a significant threat to the region. CPDs are becoming widely abused in the region, particularly among Caucasian adolescents and

adults; law enforcement and public health officials in the region report that the average age of CPD abusers is decreasing. The most widely available and commonly abused CPDs are methadone, morphine, OxyContin (oxycodone), Valium (diazepam), Vicodin (hydrocodone), and Xanax (alprazolam).⁶ CPD abusers are enticed in part by the ease with which they can obtain the drugs over the Internet and from retail-level distributors. The North Florida HIDTA region is also a source area for CPDs available throughout a large portion of the eastern United States; abusers travel to the region to illicitly purchase CPDs from a majority of Caucasian distributors or use the Internet to order the drugs from rogue Internet pharmacies⁷ based in Florida.⁸ In addition, North Florida HIDTA intelligence indicates that CPD traffickers are obtaining CPDs from pain clinics in Florida that are not judicious in checking and verifying injuries; these traffickers are then transporting CPDs from these clinics to areas outside the region. Federal legislation designed to reduce the number of rogue Internet pharmacies selling CPDs was enacted in 2008. (See text box on page 5.)

4. North Florida HIDTA funds are allocated to 10 initiatives (program areas): Combined Alachua Drug Enforcement Team, Gateway Initiative, Fugitive Apprehension Strike Team, Cash and Asset Seizure Team, Prescription Drug Squad, Maritime and Land Investigation and Interdiction Initiative, North Florida HIDTA Task Force, Tri-County Task Force, Unified Drug Enforcement Strike Team, and Violent Crime and Narcotics Task Force.
5. Not all prescription drugs are controlled prescription drugs (CPDs) under the Controlled Substances Act. However, many prescription drugs are listed in Schedules I through V of the Controlled Substances Act because of their high potential for abuse or addiction. Schedule I through V prescription drugs are primarily narcotic pain relievers and central nervous system depressants and stimulants. A complete list of CPDs, by schedule, is available on the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) Office of Diversion Control web site <http://www.deadiversion.usdoj.gov/schedules/schedules.htm>.

6. Schedule II drugs include several prescription drugs, such as Duragesic (fentanyl), methadone, morphine, OxyContin (oxycodone), and Percocet (oxycodone in combination with acetaminophen). Schedule III drugs include several prescription drugs, such as Vicodin (hydrocodone in combination with acetaminophen). Schedule IV drugs include several prescription drugs, such as Ambien (zolpidem), Ativan (lorazepam), Darvon (propoxyphene), Valium (diazepam), and Xanax (alprazolam).
7. Rogue Internet pharmacies are unlicensed, fraudulent, and disreputable businesses that sell CPDs illegally.
8. The full extent of prescription drug sales from Florida-based Internet pharmacies is an intelligence gap.

Table 1. Drug Seizures in the North Florida HIDTA, in Kilograms, 2008*

Powder Cocaine	Crack Cocaine	Powder Methamphetamine	Marijuana	Hydroponic Marijuana	Heroin	MDMA (in dosage units)
129.843	4.285	6.132	3,659.117	385.885	57.916	19,447.224

Source: North Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.

*Seizures of hashish, CPDs, and methamphetamine precursors are not included in this table.

The Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008

The Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008 was enacted in October 2008. The federal law amends the Controlled Substances Act and prohibits the delivery, distribution, and dispensing of CPDs over the Internet without a prescription written by a doctor who has conducted at least one in-person examination of the patient. Provisions of the law increase the criminal penalties for illegal Internet prescribing of Schedules III, IV, and V controlled substances. The law will most likely deter some Internet pharmacy operators from engaging in “script mill” practices, which provide alleged medical consultations (for a fee) and prescriptions that are sent to local pharmacies or directly to customers, who can take them to a pharmacy to be filled.

The production and distribution of marijuana, particularly marijuana produced from high-potency, indoor-grown cannabis, pose a serious threat to the North Florida HIDTA region. Marijuana is widely available throughout the HIDTA region and is abused by members of all racial/ethnic and social groups. The demand for high-potency marijuana is increasing in the region. Most indoor cultivation sites are established and operated primarily by Cuban and Caucasian DTOs.

Methamphetamine, other dangerous drugs (ODDs)—principally MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy)—and heroin pose comparatively lower threats to the North Florida HIDTA region. Methamphetamine

availability and abuse are at relatively low levels in the region; however, some law enforcement officials report that the demand for high-purity ice methamphetamine is rising in the region. Nonetheless, the number of methamphetamine laboratories seized in the region decreased from 2007 through 2008. The availability and abuse of ODDs, principally MDMA, are limited in the North Florida HIDTA region. Heroin availability and abuse are most likely stable at low levels. Nonetheless, seizure data indicate that 57.9 kilograms of heroin were seized in the HIDTA region in 2008, compared with 1.7 kilograms in 2007; however, this increase was the result of a single seizure of 57 kilograms of heroin and appears to have been an isolated incident.

Drug Trafficking Organizations

Mexican DTOs, Hispanic DTOs and criminal groups, and criminal groups of various races/ethnicities as well as street gangs and outlaw motorcycle gangs (OMGs) transport and distribute a variety of drugs throughout the region. In 2008, law enforcement officials affiliated with North Florida HIDTA initiatives targeted 63 DTOs and four money laundering organizations operating within the region; 32 of these organizations were dismantled, and 24 others were disrupted. Most of the DTOs (45 of the 63) operated in the HIDTA region, 11 operated internationally, and 7 operated in multiple states. The majority of the organizations identified through the HIDTA initiatives were African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, and Mexican; in addition, Dominican, Jamaican, and Haitian DTOs were identified.

Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups routinely supply wholesale quantities of cocaine, heroin, Mexican marijuana, and some methamphetamine in the North Florida HIDTA region. They have gained control over much of the wholesale drug distribution in the North Florida HIDTA region and in the entire state of Florida as a result of their access to sources of supply and their well-established drug smuggling routes from Mexico to the United States and from the Southwest Border area to Atlanta and locations throughout Florida. Consequently, these organizations are able to efficiently transport and distribute large quantities of illicit drugs into and through the North Florida HIDTA region. The control exercised by these tightly coordinated and compartmentalized organizations and groups is facilitated by the growing Hispanic population in northern Florida. Mexican traffickers easily assimilate into these Hispanic communities, where they can conceal their drug trafficking activities. Moreover, Mexican traffickers rely upon strong familial ties in Mexico and northern Florida to further facilitate their transportation and distribution of drugs in the region. Members of Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups have established residency in upscale suburban and rural communities, where they store and distribute illicit drugs and consolidate drug proceeds.

Colombian and Dominican DTOs transport wholesale quantities of powder cocaine to the North Florida HIDTA region, particularly Jacksonville, from the South Florida HIDTA region, particularly Miami, for distribution in local drug markets. Dominican DTOs also transport cocaine directly from the Dominican Republic. These traffickers typically transport cocaine using vehicles or package delivery services from South Florida to and through the North Florida HIDTA region to various destinations in northeastern states.

Drug Trafficking Organizations, Criminal Groups, and Gangs

Drug trafficking organizations are complex organizations with highly defined command-and-control structures that produce, transport, and/or distribute large quantities of one or more illicit drugs.^a

Criminal groups operating in the United States are numerous and range from small to moderately sized, loosely knit groups that distribute one or more drugs at the retail level and midlevel.

Gangs are defined by the National Alliance of Gang Investigators' Associations as groups or associations of three or more persons with a common identifying sign, symbol, or name, the members of which individually or collectively engage in criminal activity that creates an atmosphere of fear and intimidation.

a. The HIDTA program defines drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) as organizations consisting of five or more persons that (1) have a clearly defined hierarchy or chain-of-command and (2) whose principal activity is to generate income or acquire assets through a continuing series of illegal drug production, manufacturing, importation, or distribution activities.

Cuban DTOs establish and operate numerous high-potency, indoor cannabis grow sites in the North Florida HIDTA region and have expanded such operations throughout the southeastern United States. These organizations, frequently based in Miami, purchase real estate in northern Florida for the sole purpose of indoor cannabis cultivation. Cuban DTOs, which have rapidly expanded their operations throughout Florida, often use illegal immigrants from Cuba and other Caribbean islands to work at the grow sites.

Other DTOs and criminal groups of various races/ethnicities, including African American, Caucasian, Haitian, and Jamaican, distribute drugs at the midlevel and retail level in the North Florida HIDTA region. Most of these traffickers obtain

powder cocaine, methamphetamine, and Mexican marijuana from Mexican DTOs. African American criminal groups distribute powder and crack cocaine, heroin, marijuana, MDMA, and CPDs at the retail level. Caucasian criminal groups distribute powder cocaine, CPDs, heroin, marijuana, MDMA, methamphetamine, and steroids at the midlevel and retail level. Jamaican DTOs distribute powder cocaine and marijuana; these traffickers have established ties with Mexican DTOs located in northern Florida and the Southwest Border area and obtain wholesale quantities of cocaine and Mexican marijuana from these DTOs for distribution in the North Florida HIDTA region. Jamaican DTOs also transport and distribute wholesale quantities of powder cocaine and marijuana obtained from suppliers in southern Florida and the Puerto Rico/U.S. Virgin Islands (USVI) HIDTA region.

Street gangs, both locally based and nationally affiliated, distribute drugs at the retail level in many areas of the North Florida HIDTA region. The level of drug distribution by street gangs in the region is generally low to moderate; however, law enforcement officials in Clay County and Flagler County report that the level of drug distribution by street gangs in their jurisdictions is high. Street gang members typically distribute significant amounts of powder and crack cocaine, marijuana, and CPDs; they distribute smaller amounts of heroin, methamphetamine, and MDMA. African American street gangs are the primary retail distributors in urban areas of the region, and Hispanic street gangs are the primary retail distributors in suburban areas. Most street gangs in the area are violent, operate in a defined area or turf, and are homogeneous, typically reflecting the racial/ethnic population of the areas in which they operate. Most gang-related violence is the result of gang rivalries or disputes over drug territories; however, some gang violence occurs among members of the same gang, prompted by jealousy or acts of theft. Violent

Florida House Bill 43—Criminal Activity

On June 30, 2008, the governor of Florida signed into law House Bill (HB) 43 to address the growth of street gangs in Florida. Primary provisions of the law include a gang kingpin statute that mandates a first-degree felony punishable by life imprisonment for initiating, organizing, or financing criminal gang-related activity. The bill also establishes new offenses under Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations (RICO) provisions to reflect common gang behavior, such as fleeing to elude or accessory after the fact, and prohibits the use of electronic communications to further the criminal interests of a gang. An additional provision allows for civil injunctions against convicted gang members who knowingly associate with other criminal gang members or associates.

Source: Florida Attorney General's Office.

encounters also occur between street gangs and other DTOs. Moreover, some street gangs also trade illicit drugs for firearms, elevating the threat of violence in the region.

Local street gangs such as 103rd Street Gang, 45th Street Boys, and Eastside Boys distribute illicit drugs in the North Florida HIDTA region; these gangs are the principal retail distributors of powder and crack cocaine, marijuana, and other drugs in the region. Most street gangs are composed of members with similar racial/ethnic backgrounds, and most are established and based upon street or neighborhood affiliations, especially in northwestern Jacksonville. Some gangs, however, have memberships that consist of African American and Hispanic individuals. Local street gangs commonly adopt multiple facets of the gang culture from national-level street gangs, often from information on the Internet, but typically do not have ties to those national-level gangs. Many local street gangs in the region are formed for a

collective pursuit of profits derived from illicit drug distribution.

Nationally affiliated street gangs such as Black Disciples, Bloods, Crips, and Latin Kings are expanding drug distribution activities, particularly those involving crack cocaine and marijuana, at the retail level in the region. The Flagler County Sheriff's Office reports that in addition to distributing illicit drugs, these nationally affiliated street gangs are attempting to incorporate the local street gangs to increase their membership and decrease or eliminate competition within local drug markets. Moreover, law enforcement officials in Gainesville and Jacksonville report a limited but growing presence of Mara Salvatrucha (MS 13) street gang members in their jurisdictions.

OMGs such as Hells Angels Motorcycle Club (HAMC), Outlaws, and various support clubs distribute illicit drugs in the North Florida HIDTA region to a limited extent. OMGs distribute small amounts of marijuana, cocaine, powder methamphetamine, heroin, MDMA, CPDs, and ODDs in the region. OMGs transport these drugs into the region from sources throughout the United States as well as from Canada, the Caribbean, and Mexico.

Production

Illicit drug production in the North Florida HIDTA region primarily involves the conversion of powder cocaine to crack, indoor cannabis cultivation, and small-scale powder methamphetamine production. Crack cocaine conversion takes place principally in urban areas of the region. Cannabis cultivation and small-scale methamphetamine production often take place in rural areas of the North Florida HIDTA region; some cannabis cultivators have begun to move their sites to suburban neighborhoods in the region.

Retail-level crack cocaine distributors, frequently members of local street gangs, convert powder cocaine to crack near intended markets,

most of which are located in urban areas of the region. The conversion and distribution of crack are serious concerns to law enforcement officials because these activities are frequently associated with high levels of abuse and related property crime and violence. Local street gang members generally distribute crack on an as-needed basis, typically in ounce quantities.

Much of the marijuana available in the North Florida HIDTA region is produced locally at indoor and, to a lesser extent, outdoor cannabis grow sites; some marijuana available in the region is produced in Canada and Mexico.⁹ Indoor cannabis cultivation is prevalent throughout Florida and the North Florida HIDTA region. According to cannabis eradication data, the total number of indoor cannabis plants eradicated in the North Florida HIDTA region increased overall from 2005 through 2007 and then decreased 28 percent from 2007 through 2008.¹⁰ (See Table 2 on page 9.) The Florida Department of Law Enforcement reports that marijuana producers have moved many cannabis cultivation operations indoors to avoid law enforcement detection and to increase the quality of the marijuana produced. The controlled environment, combined with sophisticated growing techniques such as hydroponics, typically yields high-potency marijuana, which commands higher prices.¹¹ For

9. According to Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program (DCE/SP) data, 983 cultivated plants were eradicated from 78 outdoor plots in the North Florida HIDTA region in 2008.
10. North Florida HIDTA officials report that fluctuations in the number of cannabis plants eradicated each year are frequently the result of available eradication resources and are not necessarily indicative of a change in the amount of cannabis cultivated in the region.
11. According to the University of Mississippi Potency Monitoring Project, the THC (delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol) quantifications of marijuana samples submitted by federal, state, and local law enforcement officials in the North Florida HIDTA as of September 30, 2008, (the latest date for which such data are available) indicate that marijuana produced in the region had an average THC content of 11.5 percent.

Table 2. Indoor Cannabis Cultivation Sites Seized and Plants Eradicated in North Florida HIDTA Counties, 2005–2008

County	2005		2006		2007		2008	
	Cultivation Sites	Plants Eradicated						
Alachua	1	197	8	491	14	1,478	22	2,262
Baker	0	0	1	5	1	1	0	0
Clay	1	542	2	95	11	973	9	879
Columbia*	3	209	0	0	1	15	10	1,079
Duval	20	556	26	1,692	71	4,282	45	1,529
Flagler	3	146	1	4	5	642	0	0
Marion	3	1,293	4	16	21	3,394	18	1,842
Nassau	0	0	2	104	8	117	7	286
Putnam	0	0	3	321	2	17	3	83
St. Johns*	0	0	0	0	3	182	0	0
Total HIDTA region	31	2,943	47	2,728	137	11,101	114	7,960

Source: Florida Department of Law Enforcement; Domestic Cannabis Eradication/Suppression Program.

*Columbia and St. Johns Counties did not participate in Florida's Domestic Marijuana Eradication Indoor Grow Program in 2006.

example, in Jacksonville the wholesale price for commercial-grade marijuana ranged from \$600 to \$800 per pound in 2008, while the wholesale price for hydroponic marijuana ranged from \$3,500 to \$5,000 per pound. Moreover, indoor cannabis operations can be conducted year-round, yielding four to six harvests per year, compared with the two harvests per year that are typical for outdoor cultivation.

Many of the indoor cannabis grow sites in the North Florida HIDTA region are established and operated by Cuban DTOs and criminal groups; some Caucasian DTOs and criminal groups also cultivate cannabis indoors in the region. For several years Cuban growers cultivated high-potency cannabis at indoor grow sites in southern Florida. Cuban growers have expanded their indoor cannabis grow operations to other parts of Florida as well as other areas of the southeastern United States, such as Georgia and North Carolina. Law enforcement reporting and seizure data indicate that Cuban DTOs are the principal producers of

indoor cannabis in the southeastern United States. Moreover, intelligence derived from recent law enforcement investigations reveals that cannabis cultivation by Cuban growers has advanced from the operation of a limited number of grows by independent Cuban groups for a relatively small profit to a coordinated effort by these groups to operate large-scale indoor cannabis grow sites.

Many of the indoor grow sites in the North Florida HIDTA region are located in residences, such as rental houses and apartments, in suburban and rural communities in the region. Further, the depressed housing market throughout Florida has resulted in increased home foreclosures, a circumstance that provides opportunities for DTOs to acquire bargain-priced properties that can be used to expand their indoor cannabis grow operations in the region. The DTOs and criminal groups (primarily Cuban) that establish these indoor grow sites often require illegal immigrants of various races/ethnicities who cultivate the plants to live

Table 3. Methamphetamine Laboratories Seized in the North Florida HIDTA Region, 2004–2008

County	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008
Alachua	1	0	0	0	0
Baker	0	0	0	0	0
Clay	0	0	3	2	0
Columbia	0	0	0	0	0
Duval	0	3	5	0	0
Flagler	0	0	0	0	0
Marion	6	11	7	7	15
Nassau	0	0	0	1	0
Putnam	1	1	2	10	0
St. Johns	1	0	0	0	0
Total in HIDTA region	9	15	17	20	15

Source: National Seizure System, data run on March 4, 2009.

at the sites; this arrangement provides the appearance of typical residential activity and is accepted by the DTOs as reimbursement for the illegal passage of these individuals into the United States. As a result of the increasing number of residences used for indoor cannabis cultivation, the state legislature passed Florida HB 0173 into law on June 17, 2008.¹²

Caucasian independent producers operate a limited number of small-scale powder methamphetamine laboratories in the North Florida HIDTA region. According to National Seizure System (NSS) data, the number of methamphetamine laboratories seized in North Florida HIDTA counties increased overall from 2004 through 2007 and then decreased from 2007 through 2008. All of the methamphetamine laboratories seized in the region during 2008 were discovered in Marion County. (See Table 3.) In addition, the North Florida HIDTA reports that 23 methamphetamine

laboratories were dismantled in 2008; 20 of the 23 laboratories were located in Marion County. Moreover, most of the methamphetamine laboratories that were seized used the anhydrous ammonia method (commonly referred to as the Birch or Nazi method) of production. Less than 2 ounces of methamphetamine can be produced in these laboratories per production cycle.

Transportation

DTOs use various methods and means of conveyance to transport illicit drugs into, through, and from the North Florida HIDTA region. These traffickers frequently transport wholesale quantities of illicit drugs to the North Florida HIDTA region for local distribution; some of these drugs are further transported to other drug markets in central and southern Florida as well as to drug markets on the East Coast.

The North Florida HIDTA region's highly developed transportation infrastructure is routinely exploited by drug traffickers to transport wholesale quantities of cocaine, heroin, Mexican marijuana, and methamphetamine into the region from Atlanta and locations along the Southwest Border area. The most common method of transportation is the use of private and commercial vehicles on Interstates 10, 75, and 95. Traffickers often use independently owned commercial trucks and private or rental vehicles to transport multihundred-kilogram quantities of powder cocaine and marijuana, which they commingle in shipments of legitimate goods or conceal in hidden compartments. Moreover, some traffickers are attempting to avoid law enforcement interdiction efforts along major interstates in the region by using more indirect routes, such as state roads, to transport drugs into and through the HIDTA region. Traffickers also transport illicit drug proceeds back to the Southwest Border area using the same conveyances and routes.

12. Florida House Bill (HB) 0173 prohibits the cultivation of cannabis for specified purposes and prohibits owning, leasing, or possessing a place, structure, or trailer, or other described place with the knowledge that it will be used to manufacture, sell, or traffic in a controlled substance; and provides that possession of 25 or more cannabis plants is prima facie evidence of intent to sell or distribute.

Figure 3. North Florida HIDTA Transportation Infrastructure



Traffickers of various races/ethnicities transport illicit drugs into the North Florida HIDTA region. Mexican, Colombian, Cuban, Dominican, Hispanic, and Jamaican DTOs and criminal groups and African American and Caucasian criminal groups transport wholesale quantities of illicit drugs into the North Florida HIDTA region. Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups transport wholesale quantities of cocaine, heroin, Mexican marijuana, and methamphetamine from the Southwest Border and Atlanta into northern Florida. Colombian and Dominican DTOs and criminal groups transport wholesale quantities of cocaine from South Florida into the North Florida

HIDTA region; Dominican DTOs also transport cocaine directly from the Dominican Republic. Cuban DTOs transport indoor-grown marijuana from the region to distributors in the New York/New Jersey HIDTA region. Jamaican DTOs and criminal groups transport wholesale quantities of cocaine and marijuana into northern Florida from southern Florida and the Puerto Rico/USVI HIDTA region. African American criminal groups transport primarily powder cocaine, crack cocaine, and marijuana into the region. Caucasian criminal groups transport primarily CPDs and ODDs into the region from source areas throughout the United States as well as Canada.

Traffickers transport illicit drugs into the North Florida HIDTA region using the U.S. Postal Service and package delivery services; they also use couriers to transport drugs on commercial flights and maritime conveyances. Drug traffickers and some abusers frequently transport illicit drugs such as marijuana, methamphetamine, and CPDs through package delivery services. In fact, several transshipment facilities and international parcel shipping companies are located in the Jacksonville area. Moreover, the Jacksonville International Airport¹³ and the Port of Jacksonville¹⁴ provide drug traffickers with additional opportunities to transport illicit drugs into and from northern Florida.

Distribution

Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups dominate the wholesale-level and midlevel distribution of powder cocaine, heroin, methamphetamine, and Mexican marijuana in the North Florida HIDTA region. Most midlevel and retail-level distributors, regardless of their race or ethnicity, depend on Mexican DTOs to supply them with these illicit drugs. Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal groups have expanded their illicit drug operations into suburban and rural communities,

where drugs are often stored in residences for eventual midlevel distribution to criminal groups, street gangs, and local independent dealers.

Various DTOs, criminal groups, and local independent dealers distribute illicit drugs at the midlevel and retail level in the region. (See Table 4 on page 13.) Their methods of operation change little from year to year. Retail-level distribution typically takes place at open-air drug markets, in local clubs, in apartment buildings, in local motels, in vehicles, at college residence halls, on local beaches, and at prearranged meeting sites such as parking lots. MDMA is generally distributed in dance clubs and is frequently abused in Gainesville (where a large college population resides) and Mayport (the location of numerous gentlemen's clubs). Methamphetamine is typically not distributed in open-air markets because of the erratic behavior often displayed by methamphetamine abusers; methamphetamine distributors usually deliver the drug directly to abusers at their residences or other locations that receive limited law enforcement and public scrutiny. Retail quantities of most drugs are typically packaged in sandwich bags, pill bottles, plastic wrap, or duct tape. CPDs are obtained by abusers who "doctor-shop" or from unscrupulous doctors; some of these drugs are sold to other abusers for profit. Local or out-of-state abusers may conduct such transactions in person or order drugs through the Internet and distribute them using package delivery services.

Traffickers facilitate drug sales in the North Florida HIDTA region using electronic communications, usually cellular telephones and the Internet. Drug traffickers typically use disposable cellular telephones as well as those that are activated through prepaid calling cards. Most traffickers use such phones for a limited time to reduce the risk of having conversations monitored by law enforcement personnel. Traffickers also prefer to conduct drug-related conversations on cellular telephones with point-to-point capabilities, believing that these communications are difficult

13. The Jacksonville International Airport provides nonstop flights to major U.S. cities, including those that serve as international gateways. More than a dozen major airlines and a network of regional carriers provide some 200 daily arrivals and departures at Jacksonville International Airport. Additionally, Jacksonville's passenger air service market has grown dramatically throughout the past decade. As of November 2008, approximately 6 million passengers traveled through the Jacksonville International Airport. The extent of drug-related transportation through the Jacksonville International Airport is an intelligence gap.

14. The Port of Jacksonville is an international trade seaport in northeastern Florida and one of the largest seaports on the eastern seaboard of the continental United States. In fiscal year 2008, the seaport's three public marine terminals handled a total of 8.3 million tons of cargo. Moreover, the Port of Jacksonville transships large quantities of U.S. waterborne commerce to and from Puerto Rico; Puerto Rico is a significant U.S. arrival zone for cocaine. Shipping from Puerto Rico to other parts of the United States, including northern Florida, is considered to be coastwise trade; therefore, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officials do not routinely inspect such cargo. Nonetheless, the extent of drug-related transportation through the Port of Jacksonville is an intelligence gap.

Table 4. Distribution Activities in the North Florida HIDTA Region, 2008

Distributors	Wholesale Distribution	Midlevel Distribution	Retail Distribution
African American	Powder cocaine, marijuana	Powder and crack cocaine, heroin, marijuana, MDMA	Powder and crack cocaine, heroin, marijuana, MDMA, CPDs
Caucasian	Powder cocaine, marijuana, CPDs	Powder and crack cocaine, CPDs, heroin, marijuana, MDMA, methamphetamine, steroids	Powder cocaine, CPDs, heroin, marijuana, MDMA, methamphetamine, steroids
Colombian	Powder cocaine	NA	NA
Cuban	High-potency marijuana	High-potency marijuana	NA
Dominican	Powder cocaine	Powder cocaine	NA
Jamaican	Powder cocaine, marijuana	Powder cocaine, marijuana	Powder cocaine, marijuana
Hispanic	Powder cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana, heroin	Powder cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana, heroin	Powder cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana, heroin
Mexican	Powder cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana, heroin	Powder cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana, heroin	Powder cocaine, methamphetamine, marijuana, heroin

Source: North Florida High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area.
NA—Not applicable.

for law enforcement to intercept. Drug distributors use cellular telephones primarily to facilitate prearranged meetings with individuals to conduct drug sales. They also use the text messaging capabilities of these telephones to communicate and arrange meetings. Further, some drug transactions are conducted through instant messaging capabilities on the Internet. Draft e-mail messages written and saved to a shared account are also used by some individuals to facilitate drug sales through the Internet. These messages can be accessed by any organization member using a predetermined password, thus avoiding the necessity of actually transmitting an e-mail message that may be intercepted by law enforcement personnel.

Drug-Related Crime

High levels of violent and property crime in the North Florida HIDTA region are associated with the distribution and abuse of illicit drugs, particularly crack cocaine.¹⁵ According to data from the NDTs 2009, 23 of the 28 law enforcement agency

15. Many crimes perpetrated in the North Florida HIDTA region have a drug nexus; however, such crimes are not specifically defined as drug-related by law enforcement or public agencies operating in the region.

respondents in the North Florida HIDTA region report that crack cocaine is the drug that most contributes to violent crime and property crime in their jurisdictions. Law enforcement officials report that much of the violence in the North Florida HIDTA region is a result of conflicts among rival drug distributors, particularly street gangs, over increasingly limited drug markets.

Abuse

Marijuana is the primary illicit substance identified in treatment admissions to publicly funded facilities in Florida. However, the most severe drug-related societal and personal consequences are often associated with powder and crack cocaine (the second most identified illicit substance in treatment admissions). According to data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS), the number of marijuana-related treatment admissions in Florida from 2003 through 2007 (the latest year for which data are available) exceeded the number of treatment admissions for the abuse of

Table 5. Drug-Related Treatment Admissions to Publicly Funded Facilities in Florida, 2003–2007

Drug	2003	2004*	2005	2006	2007
Marijuana	20,129	30,489	10,652	13,322	12,918
Cocaine (by all routes of administration)	16,648	21,511	8,918	11,074	9,736
Other opiates, sedatives, and tranquilizers	4,253	6,321	2,504	4,315	4,341
Heroin	4,021	4,227	1,222	1,782	1,184
Amphetamines (including methamphetamine)	1,022	1,753	893	1,051	815

Source: Treatment Episode Data Set, as of February 17, 2009.

*Florida changed its methodology for reporting treatment admissions to TEDS between 2004 and 2005, resulting in a significant decline in the number of reported treatment admissions between these years. (Public health officials believe that significant duplicate admissions were taking place under the prior reporting mechanism.) As such, trend analysis cannot be conducted for years prior to 2005.

cocaine; other opiates, tranquilizers, and sedatives; heroin; or amphetamines (which include methamphetamine).¹⁶ (See Table 5.) Moreover, 46.6 percent of marijuana-related treatment admissions in 2007 involved individuals aged 12 to 17 at the time of admission.

CPDs are widely available and frequently abused throughout the North Florida HIDTA region. The most widely available and commonly abused CPDs are methadone, morphine, OxyContin, Valium, Vicodin, and Xanax. Florida medical examiner data reveal that the number of deaths associated with the combined class of CPDs, used either alone or in combination with other drugs,¹⁷ exceeded the number of deaths associated with cocaine and heroin in the North Florida counties of Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns from January through July 2008 (the latest period for which such data are available). (See Table 6.) Moreover, law enforcement and public health officials in the region report that the average age among CPD abusers in the region is decreasing.

Methamphetamine, ODDs, and heroin are abused at low levels throughout most of the North Florida HIDTA region. Methamphetamine abuse levels, while low, are increasing because

of the rising availability of high-purity ice methamphetamine. Law enforcement officials report that most methamphetamine abusers are Caucasians. ODDs available in the region, particularly MDMA, are generally abused in combination with other substances, including alcohol, CPDs, cocaine, and marijuana. MDMA is most commonly used by youth. Heroin availability and abuse are stable at low levels.

Illicit Finance

The movement of illicit drug proceeds in the North Florida HIDTA region typically involves the transportation of bulk currency from the region to the Southwest Border and southern Florida. Mexican DTOs and Hispanic criminal

Table 6. Drug Mentions in Deceased Persons in Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam, and St. Johns Counties, 2004–2008*

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008*
Prescription benzodiazepines**	145	179	206	124	128
Prescription narcotics***	328	327	383	209	201
Cocaine	225	219	263	146	119
Heroin	5	5	4	2	1

Source: Florida Department of Law Enforcement; Florida Medical Examiner's Commission.

*January through July 2008.

**Prescription benzodiazepines include alprazolam and diazepam.

***Prescription narcotics include oxycodone, hydrocodone, methadone, morphine, and propoxyphene.

16. Treatment Episode Data Set (TEDS) data are available only at the state level; thus, the number of admissions is not limited to the North Florida HIDTA region but reflects the entire state of Florida.

17. More than one drug type may be associated with each deceased person because of mixed drug toxicities.

groups are the primary transporters of bulk currency and typically conceal it in the same private and commercial vehicles used to transport drugs into the area. Colombian DTOs use Colombian and Dominican criminal groups to transport bulk currency to money laundering cells in southern Florida. They, in turn, use financial institutions and other methods, such as the Colombian Black Market Peso Exchange (BMPE), to launder drug proceeds.¹⁸

Traffickers operating in the North Florida HIDTA region also launder proceeds from drug distribution by purchasing real estate and luxury items, using money services businesses, structuring bank deposits, and commingling drug proceeds with revenue generated by cash-intensive businesses such as auto repair shops, auto dealerships, construction companies, and hair salons. For instance, Cuban DTOs frequently reinvest drug profits in residential properties that they use to house indoor cannabis grow sites in the region. Retail-level distributors in the HIDTA region typically use their drug proceeds to purchase tangible items such as real estate, vehicles, and jewelry. Moreover, some criminal groups and street gangs are investing in upstart record labels and recording studios.

18. The Colombian Black Market Peso Exchange (BMPE) system originated in the 1960s, when the Colombian Government banned the U.S. dollar with the intention of increasing the value of the Colombian peso and boosting the Colombian economy. The government also imposed high tariffs on imported U.S. goods, hoping to increase the demand for Colombia-produced goods. However, this situation created a black market for Colombian merchants seeking U.S. goods and cheaper U.S. dollars. Those merchants possessed Colombian pesos in Colombia but wanted cheaper U.S. dollars (purchased under official exchange rates) in the United States to purchase goods to sell on the black market. Colombian traffickers had U.S. dollars in the United States—from the sale of illicit drugs—but needed Colombian pesos in Colombia. Consequently, peso brokers began to facilitate the transfer of U.S. drug proceeds to Colombian merchants, and business agreements were forged enabling those Colombian merchants to purchase U.S. dollars from traffickers in exchange for Colombian pesos. Although the ban on possession of U.S. dollars was later lifted, the black market system became ingrained in the Colombian economy, and Colombian drug traffickers continue to rely on this system to launder their U.S. drug proceeds.

Outlook

The dominance that Mexican DTOs exert over wholesale cocaine, heroin, marijuana, and methamphetamine distribution in the North Florida HIDTA region is quite unlikely to be challenged by other groups in the near term. As the Hispanic population in the region expands, Mexican traffickers will assimilate into these communities and easily mask their drug distribution operations.

Cocaine trafficking and abuse will remain the primary drug threat to the North Florida HIDTA region. Despite reported cocaine shortages in the North Florida HIDTA region, local distributors will be able to acquire adequate supplies to meet demand, albeit at higher prices. If cocaine shortages continue, local distributors may seek new sources of supply in the Caribbean, the Southwest Border area, Atlanta, or Florida cities outside the HIDTA region, including Miami and Tampa, in an effort to purchase sufficient supplies of cocaine at lower prices. If cocaine prices at midlevel and retail level ranges continue to increase, some abusers may switch to other, less expensive drugs such as methamphetamine or CPDs.

Established diversion networks in the North Florida HIDTA region will continue to supply CPDs to distributors and abusers throughout the eastern United States. Compounding this situation are illicit Internet pharmacies operating in Florida, including those in the North Florida HIDTA region. However, the Ryan Haight Online Pharmacy Consumer Protection Act of 2008 will most likely deter some Internet pharmacy operators. CPD-related deaths, particularly among youths, may increase as the average age of CPD abusers in the region decreases and these younger abusers increasingly use CPDs alone and in combination with other drugs.

Sources

Local, State, and Regional

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 Alachua County Sheriff's Office
 Alachua Drug Enforcement Team and Gateway Combined Initiative
 Alachua Police Department
 Baker County Sheriff's Office
 Bradford County Sheriff's Office
 Clay County Sheriff's Office
 Columbia County Sheriff's Office
 Crescent City Police Department
 Fernandina Beach Police Department
 Flagler County Sheriff's Office
 Gainesville Police Department
 Gilchrist County Sheriff's Office
 Green Cove Springs Police Department
 High Springs Police Department
 Jacksonville Beach Police Department
 Jacksonville Sheriff's Office
 Lake City Police Department
 Levy County Sheriff's Office
 Marion County Sheriff's Office
 Marion County Drug Task Force
 Nassau County Sheriff's Office
 Neptune Beach Police Department
 Ocala Police Department
 Orange Park Police Department
 Palatka Police Department
 Polk County Sheriff's Office
 Putnam County Sheriff's Office
 St. Augustine Beach Police Department
 St. Johns County Sheriff's Office
 State of Florida
 Department of Corrections
 Florida Department of Law Enforcement
 Domestic Marijuana Eradication Program
 Medical Examiner's Commission
 Tri-County Task Force
 Highway Patrol
 Contraband Interdiction Unit
 Office of Drug Control
 Sumter County Sheriff's Office
 Unified Drug Enforcement Strike Team
 Union County Sheriff's Office
 University of North Florida Police Department

Violent Crime and Narcotics Task Force—Jacksonville
 Williston Police Department

Federal

Executive Office of the President
 Office of National Drug Control Policy
 High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area
 North Florida
 U.S. Department of Commerce
 U.S. Census Bureau
 U.S. Department of Defense
 U.S. Navy
 Naval Criminal Investigative Service
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 El Paso Intelligence Center
 National Seizure System
 Jacksonville District Office
 Federal Bureau of Investigation
 U.S. Attorneys Offices
 Middle District of Florida
 Northern District of Florida
 Southern District of Florida
 U.S. Marshals Service
 U.S. Postal Service

Other

University of Mississippi
 Potency Monitoring Project

**Questions and comments may be directed to
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