

Jenner & Block Secures Major Victory for the Navajo Nation in Fight Against Illegal Marijuana Operation News

News

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Jenner & Block achieved a significant victory for the Navajo Nation after Dineh Benally, the former President of the Navajo Nation Farm Board, pleaded guilty to 15 federal felonies stemming from a massive illegal marijuana operation that exploited workers and caused extensive environmental damage to tribal lands.

The case culminated in years of legal action that began in 2020 when the Nation discovered Benally had established over 30 farms covering more than 400 acres on Navajo land. After the Nation secured a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction, federal authorities conducted "Operation Navajo Gold," a multi-day raid that shut down the operation and seized approximately 260,000 marijuana plants and 60,000 pounds of processed marijuana from over 1,100 greenhouses.

Benally pleaded guilty to charges including drug trafficking conspiracy, environmental crimes for illegally discharging pollutants into the San Juan River, possessing firearms in furtherance of drug trafficking, and smuggling illegal pesticides. He faces a mandatory minimum of 15 years and up to life in prison, along with potential fines up to \$10 million.

Partner Charlie Galbraith and Special Counsel Krystalyn Kinsel represented the Navajo Nation in Shiprock District Court.

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