

# **SPLITTING THE LAND IN TWO**

## **ECOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF BORDER MILITARIZATION**



Photo by Krista Schlyer



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## PREFACE

One can stand on either side of the border in the Chihuahuan or Sonoran deserts and still be in the very same ecosystem. The only things that the border wall and militarization bring to these environments are scars and disruption. The deserts and waterways and other areas that the border crosses are already among the areas most negatively affected by global warming, climate injustice and neoliberalism. We already see the Colorado and Rio Grande rivers losing their abilities to reach the sea, and rivers such as the New River that crosses from Baja California into California, carrying a load of contamination from a combination of maquiladora industry and agribusiness that renders it the continent's most polluted river. We see prehistoric and ancient animal migration routes bisected and the fragile vegetation of the deserts withering. Inasmuch as the one-two punch of neoliberalism and border militarization are an assault on workers, families, rural people—all humanity, they are also assaults against ancient ecosystems—ecosystems of which we can be part, or we can attempt to break and crush and bend them to our will and arrogance only to crush ourselves.

For this lesson, we want to feature an article and a video that come to us from the Sierra Club's Borderlands Team. The Coordinator for the team is Dan Millis. He and Scott Nicol wrote the article, and the film was produced by Steev Hise and written by Greta Anderson, Sean Sullivan, Dan Millis and Scott Nicol.

We want to call attention to the photos included in this lesson, including the photos included as part of the Sierra Club piece and those from Michael Hyatt, which are included below. Michael is a professional photographer, long time resident of the Sonoran Desert and a volunteer





with **No More Deaths**. He has a special relationship, and thus a special eye for, both the environment and the effects of border policy on the land and people.

Bartola Canyonlands Shrine. Photo by Michael Hyatt, michael-hyatt.com



Mysterious Form. Photo by Michael Hyatt, Michael-hyatt.com

# SIERRA CLUB

## WILD VERSUS WALL (2010)

***"the only thing the wall won't stop are people"***

Produced by the Sierra Club in 2010, *Wild Versus Wall* examines the ecological consequences of border militarization. It displays how prevention through deterrence efforts, like the border fence, have disrupted animal migration routes, feeding practices and mating traditions. Wildlife in the borderlands' ecosystems struggle to survive neglected by political decisions and in an environment built to divide.



Watch the video here:  
<https://afgj.org/wild-versus-wall>

# DAN MILLIS AND SCOTT NICOL (SIERRA CLUB BORDERLANDS TEAM)

## BORDERLANDS AT RISK

U.S. policies along our southern border are proving ineffective, costly, and harmful to people and the environment. Construction of border walls has not curbed undocumented immigration, but has cost taxpayers an average of \$4.5 million per mile! Over 600 miles of border walls and barriers have been constructed in all four southern border states, with dozens of miles still being constructed or planned. Former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff used the power granted to him by the 2005 Real ID Act to waive a variety of important federal laws along the border (see list of laws below). As a result walls, roads, and other harmful infrastructure have been built without regard to environmental protection or public health and safety.



In January, 2009, this border Wall construction road was plowed through the roadless Otay Mountain Wilderness in California. Photo courtesy ILCP and Lighthawk.

This reckless project has meant dire consequences for vast expanses of pristine wild lands, including wildlife refuges, wilderness areas, and national forest lands, among others. Several species of wildlife have been observed and photographed stranded by the border wall, suggesting that many endangered species are suffering the same fate.

If wildlife migration corridors are blocked, species can die out due to lack of access to food, water, territory, and genetic variability. From pygmy owls to desert bighorn sheep, studies have indicated that the border wall is a significant impediment to a variety of wildlife, including many imperiled species.

The border wall in Nogales caused severe flooding that buried downtown homes and businesses underneath six feet of water, drowning two people and costing millions of dollars in damages. Flooding in Arizona's Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in 2008 was determined to have been caused by border walls built without regard to environmental law, and another flood there in 2011 knocked down a 40-foot section of border wall. The construction of massive berms and waterways to accommodate border walls near the Tijuana Estuary near San Diego has also contributed to flooding, as well as severe erosion and sedimentation problems.

In Texas, condemnation proceedings against border municipalities and landowners preceded construction of the wall that now blocks people and animals from access to the Rio Grande River. Homeland Security built border walls to the *north* of several U.S. homes, thereby leaving them stranded in a 'no-man's-land' between the wall and the border itself at the river. Most tragically, hundreds of people continue to die each year from dehydration and exposure as border walls contribute to the funneling of migrants deeper into the desert.

Over 40 percent of the land along our southern border is protected public land. The federal government should work to preserve these national treasures, support positive legislation, promote fair trade, end tragic border deaths, and ensure compliance with environmental laws such as the Clean Water Act, the Endangered Species Act, and the National Environmental Policy Act.

## **Federal Laws Waived for Construction of Border Wall**

Former Secretary of Homeland Security Michael Chertoff used the unprecedented power bestowed on him by the Real ID Act to "waive in their entirety" thirty-six federal laws. Although Chertoff was an unelected Bush administration appointee, with the stroke of a pen he dismissed decades of protective laws passed by Congress and signed by presidents, all to circumvent court challenges to border wall construction. The waiver provision of the Real ID Act is a grave threat

to the checks and balances of the United States Constitution, and constitutional challenges to it are pending. Note the variety of laws waived, including protections of archaeological sites, farmland, rivers, public health and freedom of religion:

National Environmental Policy Act  
Endangered Species Act  
Clean Water Act  
National Historic Preservation Act  
Migratory Bird Treaty Act  
Clean Air Act  
Archaeological Resources Protection Act  
Safe Drinking Water Act  
Noise Control Act  
Solid Waste Disposal Act  
Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act  
Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act  
Antiquities Act  
Historic Sites, Buildings, and Antiquities Act  
Wild and Scenic Rivers Act  
Farmland Protection Policy Act  
Coastal Zone Management Act  
Wilderness Act  
Federal Land Policy and Management Act



National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act  
Fish and Wildlife Act of 1956  
Fish and Wildlife Coordination Act  
Administrative Procedure Act  
Otay Mountain Wilderness Act of 1999  
California Desert Protection Act



National Park Service Organic Act  
National Park Service General Authorities Act  
National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978  
Arizona Desert Wilderness Act  
Rivers and Harbors Act of 1899  
Eagle Protection Act  
Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act



American Indian Religious Freedom Act  
Religious Freedom Restoration Act  
National Forest Management Act of 1976  
Multiple Use and Sustained Yield Act of 1960

## **Walls Don't Work**

Many assume that walls will stop people from crossing the border. In fact, the Border Patrol's own statistics show that border walls do not decrease cross-border traffic. Border Patrol apprehensions, which are used to gauge overall number of attempted crossings, dropped dramatically between 2005, the year before the Secure Fence Act was passed, and 2007, the year after. The greatest reductions in apprehensions, however, were seen in sectors that did not have walls. Texas' Rio Grande Valley sector saw a 45.3% decrease in apprehensions, bringing them to a 15 year low. The Del Rio sector saw a 66.5% decrease. Neither sector had an inch of border wall before 2008. The areas that saw an increase in crossings were California's San Diego and El Centro sectors, both of which already had border walls for over a decade. While unwalled borders witnessed dramatic decreases in crossings, heavily fortified San Diego saw a 20.1% increase.

In looking at the number of crossers apprehended by the Border Patrol between 1992 and 2004, when walls were being erected in the San

Diego sector, the Congressional Research Service found that there was no change. They concluded that, "While the increased enforcement in the San Diego sector has resulted in a shift in migration patterns for unauthorized aliens, it does not appear to have decreased the overall number of apprehensions made each year by USBP agents." Would-be immigrants were not stopped by the border wall; they simply went around it.

Two months before the passage of the Secure Fence Act, Wayne Cornelius, Director of the Center for Comparative Immigration Studies at the University of California-San Diego told the House Judiciary Committee that, "tightened border enforcement since 1993 has not stopped nor even discouraged unauthorized migrants from entering the United States. Even if apprehended, the vast majority (92-97%) keep trying until they succeed. Neither the higher probability of being apprehended by the Border Patrol, nor the sharply increased danger of clandestine entry through deserts and mountainous terrain, has discouraged potential migrants from leaving home."

The main impact of the border wall was a redirection of crossers from cities into the mountains and deserts. The Border Patrol assumed that the danger inherent in a long trek through the desert would cause migrants to decide not to undertake the journey. It did not, and the bodies of more than 5,000 migrants have been found in the desert. This has led to the increased use of guides, known as coyotes, to assist border crossers. This, in turn, resulted in an increase in the fees that they are able to charge. As human smuggling has become more profitable it has attracted the attention of criminal organizations, who now dominate the business.

The assertion that walls will allow the U.S. to "secure" its southern border is patently false. Spokespersons for the Border Patrol tend to describe it much more modestly. Del Rio, Texas, Border Patrol Chief Randy Hill said, "[We're going to see steel barriers erected on the borders where U.S. and Mexican cities adjoin. These will slow down illegal crossers by minutes.](#)" Not stop crossers, but slow them down by "minutes." As Border Patrol spokesperson Mike Scioli said, "[The border fence is a speed bump in the desert.](#)"

If a border wall had stretched from sea to shining sea before September 11, 2001, it would have made no difference to the terrorists. None of the hijackers came into the United States across a land border. Instead, according to the [9/11 Commission](#), the 19 hijackers applied for and received visas which allowed them to enter

and reenter the U.S. 33 times. Each time they came in through an airport, not by land. Only one terrorist is known to have tried to come into our nation by crossing a land border. The [Millenium Bomber](#) was caught trying to smuggle explosives in his vehicle through an official border crossing station at the Canadian border. To reach the nearest border wall, just south of San Diego on the U.S.-Mexico border, he would have needed to drive another 1,257 miles.

## **Billion-Dollar Boondoggle**

The “symbolic significance” of the border wall comes with a real price tag. In 2007 the Congressional Research Service estimated that the border wall could cost as much as \$49 billion to build and maintain. Since then the costs of construction have risen dramatically. Between February and October of 2008, the [Army Corps of Engineers reported](#) that the cost of building border walls had increased by 88%, from an average of \$3.5 million per mile to \$7.5 million per mile. The cost of building vehicle barriers on the border increased by 48%, to \$2.8 million per mile.

Some sections of border wall are particularly expensive: the walls that are being inserted into the levees in south Texas are averaging \$12 million per mile; in California, a 3.5 mile section that involves filling a canyon with 2.5 million yards of earth so that the wall does not have to dip down into it costs taxpayers [\\$57 million](#). In 2008, the Department of Homeland Security asked Congress to [allocate an additional \\$400 million](#) for border wall construction, because the \$2.7 billion already spent was not enough to finish out the year.

A 2009 estimate from the non-partisan group Taxpayers for Common Sense pegged the average mile of border wall construction cost at \$4.5 million per mile and estimated at least another \$8 billion would be needed to maintain the wall over the next 25 years.

# WILDLANDS NETWORK

## MAMMALS AT THE BORDER

For detailed scientific insight into the devastating impacts of the US Mexico border wall on large mammals, please explore the scholarly articles below to get started. Thank you to Juan Carlos Bravo, Director of the Wildland's Network Mexico Program for providing us with this list. For more information about the program, please visit <https://wildlandsnetwork.org/campaigns/borderlands/>.

La Jornada Ecológica, no. 213

<http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2017/07/28/ecologica213.pdf>

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Caroll C., Fredrickson R.J., Lacy R.C. 2013 [Developing metapopulation connectivity criteria from genetic and habitat data to recover the endangered Mexican wolf](#). Conservation Biology, vol. 28, no.1, pp. 76-86

Culver M. and Hein A.O. 2016, [Jaguar taxonomy and genetic diversity for southern Arizona, United States, and Sonora, Mexico](#): U.S. Geological Survey Open-File Report 2016-1109.

Deflín-Alfonso C.A., López-González C.A., Equihua M. 2012 [Potential distribution of American black bears in northwest Mexico and Implications for their Conservation](#). Ursus, vol. 23 no. 1, pp. 65-77.

List R., Valdés M. and Zarza H. [Amenazas a las poblaciones del berrendo en el norte de México](#). Investigación ambiental, vol. 5 no.1, pp. 94-100. 2013.

López González C. A., Lara Díaz N.E., Espinosa Flores E. 2010 [Diagnóstico poblacional del oso negro \(Ursus americanus\) en las serranías de los estados de Sonora y Chihuahua y sus posibles afectaciones por el muro fronterizo](#). Informe parcial para el Instituto

Nacional de Ecología. September 2010.

Martínez-Meyer E., González-Bernal A., Velasco, J. A., Swetnam, T.L., González-Saucedo, Z.Y., Servín, J. López González, C.A., Lara Díaz, N.E., Aguilar Miguel, C. Chávez García, C. & Oakleaf J.K. 2017, [Mexican wolf habitat suitability analysis in historical range in the southwestern U.S. and Mexico.](#) Report to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. April 2017.

McCain E.B., Childs, J.L. 2008. [Evidence of resident jaguars \(\*Panthera onca\*\) in the southwestern United States and the implications for conservation.](#) Journal of Mammalogy, vol. 89, no. 1 pp. 1-10

Povilitis T. 2015. [Recovering jaguar \*Panthera onca\* in peripheral range: a challenge to conservation policy.](#) Oryx vol. 49, no. 4 pp. 626-632.

Stephen C. L., Devos J. C. Jr., Lee, T.E., Bickham, J. W., Heffelfinger, J. R., Rhodes O.E. Jr. 2005 [Population genetic analysis of Sonoran pronghorn \(\*Antilocapra americana sonoriensis\*\).](#) Journal of Mammalogy, vol. 86 no.4, pp. 782–792.

Stoner K. J., Hardy A. R., Fisher K., and Sanderson E. W. 2015, [Jaguar habitat connectivity and identification of potential road mitigation locations in the Northwestern Recovery Unit for the Jaguar.](#) Wildlife Conservation Society final draft report to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in response to Solicitation F14PX00340. March 2015.

Theobald D. M., Landau V., McClure M., Dickson B. G. 2017. [Potential jaguar habitat and structural connectivity in and surrounding the Northwestern Recovery Unit.](#) Report submitted to Wilburforce Foundation. March 2017.

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2016. [Recovery Plan for the Sonoran pronghorn \(\*Antilocapra americana sonoriensis\*\), Second Revision.](#) U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Southwest Region, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA. November 2016.

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U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2017. [\*Mexican Wolf Captured in Chiricahua Area of Arizona\*](#). Press release. April 6 2017.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2017. [\*Draft Mexican Wolf Biological Report: Version 2\*](#). Region 2, Albuquerque, New Mexico, USA. June 2017.

# LINKS

## RESOURCES

US Fish and Wildlife Service, Trump Wall

<https://www.scribd.com/doc/311396117/Trust-Resources-TrumpWall#>

*This report released by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service lists the proposed, candidate, threatened and endangered species that live in the ecosystems where Trump plans on building the border wall. Under the Endangered Species Act, federal agencies are required to request a list of species from the USFWS that are in the area of any proposed government actions.*

International League of Conservation Photographers, Border Photo

Exhibit [http://www.enviro-pic.org/Enviro-pic.org/Border\\_Exhibit\\_Border\\_wall\\_and\\_wildlife.html](http://www.enviro-pic.org/Enviro-pic.org/Border_Exhibit_Border_wall_and_wildlife.html)

The Border and Birds, Cornell Lab of Ornithology

<http://www.birds.cornell.edu/page.aspx?pid=1345>

Leah Donnella, The Environmental Consequences of a Wall on the US Mexico Border, NPR

<http://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/02/17/514356130/the-environmental-consequences-of-a-wall-on-the-u-s-mexico-border>

Jonathan Sullivan, What Would Trump's Wall Mean for Wildlife?, BBC

News <http://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-37200583>

Ben Goldfarb, Where Wildlife is Up Against the Wall, High Country

News <http://www.hcn.org/issues/49.3/Where-wildlife-is-up-against-the-wall>