

Border Wall Environmental Impacts



Today more than 650 miles of border wall stand in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Walls tear through wildlife refuges and wilderness areas, national monuments and national forests, damaging endangered species' habitat and damming natural watercourses. Environmental laws have been suspended and billions of dollars have been spent on barriers that have little or no effect on immigration, smuggling, or national security.

Waiving laws to build walls

To permit the construction of border walls that would violate our nation's environmental laws, Congress passed the Real ID Act, which allows the Secretary of Homeland Security to waive any law that he or she sees fit. No one else, including the President, is granted this power. Former Homeland Secretary Chertoff used the Real ID Act five times, setting aside 37 federal laws and "all federal, state, or other laws, regulations and legal requirements of, deriving from, or related to the subject of" the named laws. Waiving environmental laws to build border walls undermines the rule of law, and sets a dangerous precedent.

Impacts on Endangered Species

With laws such as the Endangered Species Act waived, walls were built through the habitat of many species on the Endangered Species List, including jaguar, Sonoran pronghorn, and ocelot. While



humans can build ladders or cut holes in border walls, many animals are stopped in their tracks. This fragments their available habitat, separating them from territory, food and water, and potential mates. For many of these animals, reduced and fragmented habitat was a key factor that led to their endangerment in the first place, and chopping up their territory further pushes them closer to extinction.

Deer stopped by the border wall in Arizona's San Pedro Riparian National Conservation Area; ocelot in Texas' Lower Rio Grande Valley National Wildlife Refuge.



Walls Worsen Flooding

Border walls built across washes and other natural drainages have repeatedly acted as dams and caused severe flood damage. In 2008, a seasonal rainstorm of the type that comes to the Arizona / Sonora border every couple of years brought a heavy downpour to Nogales, Sonora and Nogales, Arizona. The wall that bisects the sister cities acted as a dam, and the water backed up to over six

feet deep in Nogales, Sonora, whose residents suffered millions of dollars of property damage. Two people drowned.

The same storm caused flooding in the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. After the flood, Customs and Border Protection spent millions retrofitting border walls, installing flood gates. In 2011, shortly after that work was finished, the annual rains came and the wall again acted as a dam. A 40-foot wide section of wall in the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument blew out due to the force of the water and the undercutting of the wall's foundation. It was rebuilt, and Customs and Border Protection again claimed that the problem had been fixed. In the summer of 2014 the annual monsoon rains came, the retrofitted border wall again acted as a dam, and another 60-foot wide section blew out just outside of Nogales.



Border in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument washed away in 2011. National Park Service photo.

Border walls continue to harm ecosystems throughout the borderlands, cost huge sums to repair and maintain, and disrupt the lives of residents of border communities.

Pundits and politicians continue to call for hundreds of miles of new border walls and the expansion of waivers to cover a vastly greater swathe of the borderlands. Compounding the damage that existing walls and waivers have inflicted would be disastrous for the border. It is critical that those of us who care about our nation's precious natural heritage and the rule of environmental law speak out against any such assaults.

Laws waived to build walls:

National Environmental Policy Act
Endangered Species Act
Clean Water Act
National Historic Preservation Act
Migratory Bird Treaty Act
Clean Air Act
Archeological 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 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
Federal Grants and Cooperative
Agreements Act of 1977

The Sierra Club opposes the waiving of our nation's environmental laws and the construction of border walls. For more information go to sierraclub.org/borderlands or contact Dan Millis at dan.millis@sierraclub.org.