

Wildlife advocates applaud report on environmental protection, US-Mexico border security

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

WASHINGTON - Defenders of Wildlife applauded the Environmental Protection Agency's Good Neighbor Environmental Board's new report on Thursday, which outlines recommendations to protect habitat and wildlife along the U.S.-Mexico border. The report, "Environmental Protection and Border Security on the U.S.-Mexico Border," was released earlier this week at a conference held by the independent federal advisory committee commissioned through the Environmental Protection Agency.

"Defenders is extremely pleased to see this report detail very specific ways to address problems associated with undocumented border crossings and security activities, and what can be done to lessen the damage to the area's wildlife and habitat," stated Rodger Schlickeisen, Defenders of Wildlife president. "Our organization respects the need to ensure a safe border, but we believe strongly that our security needs can be met while ensuring that wildlife and the surrounding habitat are not severely damaged or destroyed in the process."

To address problems associated with unauthorized flows of people across rural areas of the U.S.-Mexico border, and to continue to protect the environmental quality of the region, the Good Neighbor Environmental Board recommends:

* Strengthening "communication and collaboration between security agencies and environmental protection agencies, including land management agencies, on both sides of the border;" and,

* Strategically "employ[ing] a mix of technology and personnel to meet the security and environmental needs of different sections of the border region," including vehicle barriers and sensor technology "that permit habitat connectivity and migration of important species."

The report identifies four challenges associated with undocumented crossings, including: damage caused by roads and foot trails created by migrants, smugglers and law enforcement agencies; trash left behind by migrants; impenetrable fencing that blocks wildlife migration and fragments habitat; and lack of collaboration across agencies with responsibility for border security, land management and environmental protection. Recommendations for addressing these challenges include using technology rather than new roads and barriers to achieve security goals, establishing a federal office dedicated to analyzing and communicating impacts of

border security on the environment, and strengthening communication and outreach to the public to enable greater interaction with appropriate land management agencies and the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The report also recommends that DHS take appropriate steps to identify important or sensitive natural resources along the border and avoid, minimize or mitigate impacts whenever possible.

As for the proposed 700-mile fence authorized by the Secure Fence Act, the report calls for public participation in the design and placement of the fence and any related infrastructure that is needed.

"We at Defenders fully agree with the report's assessment that 'securing our borders is important, but environmental protection must not be relegated to a second-class seat behind the security policy-making table. Strong security and strong environmental protection along the U.S.-Mexico border can go hand in hand,'" said Schlickeisen. "Like the report's authors, we hope that the recommendations in this excellent report 'will help move that win-win process forward,'" he concluded.

Defenders of Wildlife has been a leader on wildlife border issues. In 2006, the organization released "On the Line: The Impacts of Immigration Policy on Wildlife and Habitat in the Arizona Borderlands." The report outlines the impacts of border security on our nation's wildlife. Segments of the Defenders report were cited in the EPA Good Neighbor Report.

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