



*Via electronic mail*  
Mexico City, January 12<sup>th</sup> 2021

Martha Bárcena Coqui  
U.S. Ambassador to Mexico

Ambassador Esteban Moctezuma Barragán  
U.S. Ambassador appointed to Mexico

Maria Luisa Albores González  
Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources

Roberto Aviña Carlín  
Head of the National Commission of Protected Natural Areas

**Re: Mexico's support urgently needed to oppose further border wall construction**

The undersigned organizations strongly oppose the construction of the border wall that is harming biodiversity, restricting wildlife migrations, and destroying the natural and cultural history of the Mexico-United States borderlands.

Border wall construction is seriously damaging ecosystems and natural resources in both nations. The wall cuts off habitat for wildlife between protected areas like Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge in the U.S. and El Pinacate and Gran Desierto de Altar Biosphere Reserve in Mexico, blocking critical migration routes and preventing the recovery of endangered transboundary species. The damage to El Pinacate and Gran Desierto de Altar Biosphere Reserve imperils the internationally-recognized “outstanding universal values” for which the UNESCO World Heritage Site was designated.

The border wall obstructs the flow of water in cross-border washes and rivers like the San Pedro, which runs through Sonora and Arizona, home to more than 250 species of migratory birds and 84 species of mammals including jaguars, badgers, beavers and bats. The 10-meter-high wall built across this rare desert river will act as a dam when the river floods, clogging with debris, backing up floodwaters in Mexico, and endangering people and wildlife.

To make way for the wall in rugged wilderness areas, the Department of Homeland Security is dynamiting mountains in Guadalupe Canyon, Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge, the Coronado National Memorial, and many other remote regions along the border. The blasting has thrown tons of debris into Mexican territory, destroyed critical habitat for endangered jaguars, and permanently damaged some of the most important cross-border corridors for endangered species such as the jaguar, ocelot, Mexican wolf, and bison. Debris from the blasting at Guadalupe Canyon has been pushed into the Bavispe Flora and Fauna Protection Area, burying and destroying wildlife habitat in Sonora. This destruction is happening even though areas like Guadalupe Canyon are so rugged and remote that they have not been significant corridors for cross-border smuggling or border enforcement activity in recent decades.



Mixing concrete for border wall construction has required the extraction of millions of gallons of groundwater from transboundary border-region aquifers. Groundwater aquifers in this region span the international border and are a binational resource shared by communities and wildlife alike. The extraction of millions of gallons of groundwater to build the wall is harming Mexican protected areas near the border by further drawing down fragile desert aquifers that sustain endangered fish and wildlife. Protecting groundwater resources should be a top priority for both nations as drought continues and climate change intensifies.

Border walls in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and Pinacate desert will also cut off the Tohono O’odham peoples’ access to traditional lands and sacred sites, including tribal members’ ability to conduct their ceremonial salt pilgrimage — an ancient ritual that, according to the O’odham, has occurred since time immemorial. In June 2019, the Traditional O’odham Leaders of Sonora passed a resolution opposing border wall construction in this region stating: “plans for a new wall would make it impossible to carry out the salt ceremony and threaten to end this sacred tradition forever.” As of December 2020, this stretch of wall is nearly complete.

Border walls and fences cause local disappearance of species by impeding mobility essential for dispersal, breeding, migration, and access to food and water. These barriers fragment wildlife populations and can even cause direct mortality. Habitat connectivity is particularly important in the arid desert borderlands, as geography, elevation, and humidity gradients severely limit the range of many species. The species most severely harmed by wall construction are terrestrial species that have restricted habitats, low reproductive capacity, require large territories or exist in low densities. These species include the Sonoran pronghorn, bighorn sheep, jaguar, Mexican Gray wolf, ocelot and many others. Barriers can also affect small creatures such as reptiles, insects and birds, including cactus ferruginous pygmy owls, and even plants by affecting seed dispersal and pollination.

Many of these species are crucial for the ecological balance of the region and also offer enormous potential to generate sustainable development alternatives in some of the most isolated regions of Mexico. Losing these species would bring a significant economic loss for Mexico, as well as the priceless loss of natural heritage that future generations should have the right to enjoy.

We are acutely aware that the destruction of wildlife, ecosystems and shared resources along the border has been ordered and executed unilaterally by the Trump administration, with no consent or consultation with Mexican landowners, conservationists or resource managers. However, incoming President-elect Joe Biden has promised “there will not be another foot of wall construction” under his administration, giving both nations a renewed opportunity to repair ecosystems and relationships, and move towards restoration and justice in the borderlands. Mexico's expertise, encouragement and support would be critical to any binational effort to rehabilitate border-region ecosystems and repair all that’s been destroyed.

It would be significant if the Mexican government, which has invested millions of in the recovery of priority species like the Mexican wolf, golden eagle, jaguar, pronghorn, and bison, worked with the incoming Biden administration to help guide efforts to rehabilitate landscapes



damaged by the border wall and reopen cross-border corridors for wildlife along the border. These efforts should include the creation and maintenance of wildlife corridors along Mexican Highway 2, especially in areas where sections of border wall would be removed. We urge representatives of the Mexican government to raise these issues with the Biden-Harris administration and look forward to working with both nations to protect the spectacular shared wildlife, resources, and natural heritage of the Mexico-United States borderlands.

Sincerely,

Alejandro Olivera,  
Representante en México  
Center for Biological Diversity  
La Paz, México  
cel 612 104-0604  
aolivera@biologicaldiversity.org

In representation of:

Antonio Castillo, COBOSPO AC  
Asociación Mexicana de Mastozoología, A. C. (AMMAC)  
Causa Natura  
Centro Mexicano de Derecho Ambiental A.C.  
Colectivo Ecologista Jalisco, A.C.  
Conservación de Mamíferos Marinos de Mexico COMARINO  
Gente por la Defensa Animal, A.C.  
Greenpeace México  
Fabián García Moya, Profesor investigador Universidad Autónoma Chapingo  
Federación Indígena Empresarial y Comunidades Locales de México. A. C.  
Fundacion BD BioDiversidad Mexicana / Juan Bezaury Creel  
Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda  
Grupo Gema del Mayab AC  
Juzgado Geológico, Monterrey, N.L. México  
Mauricio Limón Aguirre  
Mauricio Macossay Vallado - Kolectivo Rebelde  
Pronatura Veracruz A.C



Proyecto Fronterizo de Educación Ambiental A.C.

Red de Acción en Plaguicidas y sus Alternativas en México (RAPAM)

Reforestamos México

Revive Mexico AC

Sky Island Alliance

Traditional O'odham Leaders of Mexico

Wildlands Network