

Fears that construction is continuing at Trump's border wall despite Biden ordering halt

Community, tribal and environmental organizations in the US borderlands petitioned Biden administration on Wednesday to remove sections of wall to mitigate harm to wildlife, ecosystems and sacred sites

<https://www.independent.co.uk/climate-change/news/biden-trump-mexico-border-wall-b1807213.html>

[Louise Boyle](#), Senior Climate Correspondent, New York. 2 hours ago

There are concerns that construction is continuing along the US-Mexico border on the wall which [Donald Trump](#) promised his supporters but never finished.

On his first day as president, [Joe Biden](#) paused all wall construction within seven days, after vowing to voters not to build “another foot” of it. The executive order said taxpayer money would no longer fund the project as “a massive wall that spans the entire southern border is not a serious policy solution”.

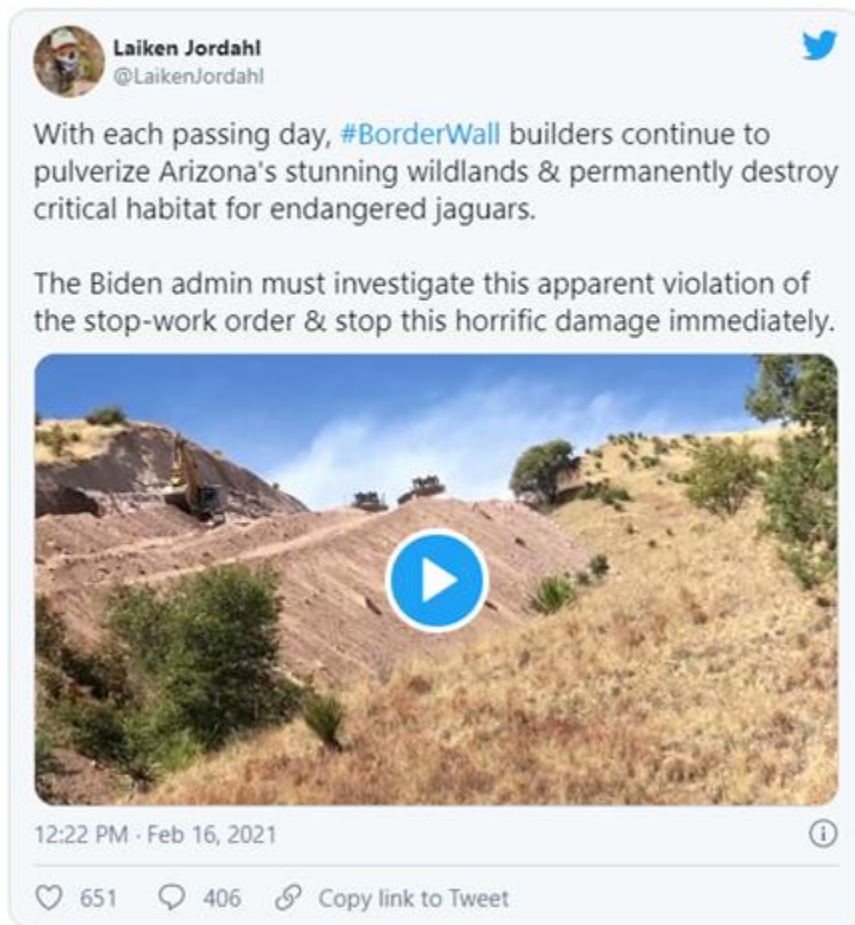
President Biden gave his administration two months to determine how much it would cost to cancel construction contracts and devise a plan on how to redirect the money.

As of mid-January, the government had spent \$6.1 billion of the \$10.8bn in work it signed contracts to have done, [AP](#) reported.

During the 2016 presidential race, Mr Trump vowed to build a “big, beautiful wall” that would run 1,000 miles along the southern border. The former president raced to complete his wall before he left office, eventually finishing more than 400 miles (644km) - but this included construction in places where barriers already stood.

Despite President Biden's stop-work order, reports have emerged that construction is still taking place.

Earlier this month the [Tucson Samaritans](#), a group which provides humanitarian aid to migrants in distress, captured footage of what appeared to be bulldozing taking place in the Arizona mountains.



Laiken Jordahl, borderlands campaigner for the Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), told *The Independent* that the video "showed obvious construction activity, likely in violation of Biden's stop work order".

"The reality is that until the Biden administration sends staff down here to monitor these sites and enforce the order, we have no idea if the damage is continuing," he said.

Mr Jordahl said that hundreds of construction workers and heavy machinery remain at the border.

He said that an attempt to inspect a site on Monday found there was no active construction activity.

However, he added: “Security guards wouldn’t let us access the site even though it’s public land and they don’t have the authority to police or control it. It’s hard to get a sense of whether or not the construction is continuing.

“We’ve heard some reports from Texas, that [construction workers] were still installing panels and border wall after the (executive) order went into place.”

The US Army Corps of Engineers, which is overseeing border wall construction, did not respond to an email seeking comment from *The Independent*. The Corps said previously that while construction was suspended, crews were contractually obliged to “maintain safe and secure job sites”.

Mr Trump’s first campaign centered on a crackdown on migrants and building a wall at the southern border which he said would be “virtually impenetrable” and paid for by Mexico. This did not come to pass, although his harsh “zero tolerance” immigration policies, like family separation, has left hundreds of children apart from their parents.

And while the wall is more formidable in places than the barriers it replaced, smugglers are able to guide people over or through it. Ladders have been used and portions can be sawed with power tools bought at DIY stores.

What the wall did provide was a brutal scar across hundreds of miles of wilderness, carving up habitats for dozens of endangered and threatened species.

West of the Arizonan city of Nogales, part of the wall stretches through remote, mountainous terrain. The area is one of the last remaining corridors where the North American jaguar travels between the US and Mexico. Populations of the big cat, protected by the Endangered Species Act, have slowly been returning in the US after they were hunted into extinction in the 1960s.

In order to get his wall built, Mr Trump green-lit federal agencies to bypass the act along with other environmental protections.

Environmentalists have warned that the wall is depleting water resources and destroying aquifers in areas prone to drought and increasingly high temperatures caused by global heating.

Native American burial sites have been desecrated, according to tribal communities. Last year, contractors working for Customs and Border Protection used dynamite to blow apart the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, a UNESCO-recognised natural reserve.



Raul Grijalva, a Democratic congressman, described it as “sacrilegious” to [The Intercept](#) and said the Tohono O’odham Nation, whose ancestral homelands lie there, had not been consulted.

“Much of the Borderlands is protected public lands,” Mr Jordahl told *The Independent*. “Wildlife refuges, national monuments, designated wilderness areas, even a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve. So when we talk about the impact of the wall, it’s being built through some of the most pristine, beautiful and biologically important places in the American southwest.”

“These areas are also deeply rich with millennia of cultural history. Indigenous people, like the Tohono O’odham, have inhabited these lands from time immemorial.”

He added: “[The wall] is a very potent symbol of Trump’s immigration policies. But on the ground, it has almost no impact on security and has had devastating impacts on the environment.”

On Wednesday, a **coalition** of dozens of community, tribal and environmental organizations petitioned the Biden administration to remove specific sections of wall in Arizona, California, New Mexico and Texas, where they pose most harm to wildlife corridors, sacred sites, water supplies and the larger ecosystem.

The petition, viewed by *The Independent*, also calls for all contracts to be cancelled and remaining funds to be diverted to other purposes, including mitigating damage caused by the wall.

Bryan Bird, from Defenders of Wildlife which lead the crafting of the petition, told *The Independent*: “Using input from local communities and wildlife experts, we’ve identified the places where the border wall is causing the most harm.

“With our criteria and priority sites, the Biden Administration can easily divert construction funds and immediately begin remediation.”

The Biden administration did not respond to a request for comment from *The Independent* as to whether it intends to parts of the wall. The president’s executive order did not mention removing the wall.

The Trump-era wall will remain a contentious issue for the new administration. It is not clear how the government will extricate itself from existing construction contracts, and some Republicans, particularly those focused on garnering the support of the Trump base for the 2022 midterms, could find a *cause célèbre* in any decision to remove sections.

Mr Jordahl was optimistic that landscape scarred by construction could be rehabilitated, and “fully expected” the Biden administration to consider the petition.

“It’s very clear that they are going in a vastly different direction to the Trump administration when it comes to border policy,” he said. “They are rising to the occasion in many ways to meet the threat of climate change and environmental degradation at large.”

But he added: “And, of course, I think the Biden administration realizes that it was border and tribal communities in Arizona that put them over the top and gave them the win here, and got them into the White House. So I certainly think that they’ll listen to us down here in the borderlands.”