

Greens slam continued border wall construction in Ariz.

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A section of the border wall outside Nogales, Ariz. Avery Ellfeldt/E&E News

Environmentalists are calling on the White House to move more aggressively to terminate work on barriers along the nation's southern edge, saying there is new evidence that related road construction work continues nearly a month after President Biden ordered a halt to projects along the 2,000-mile border.

The Center for Biological Diversity released video, filmed by the humanitarian organization Tucson Samaritans, that shows large construction equipment operating Wednesday in the Pajarito Mountains of the Coronado National Forest.

"The Biden administration should investigate this immediately and stop any construction that's still occurring," Laiken Jordahl, CBD's borderlands campaigner, said in a statement.

Last month, Biden signed an executive order reversing former President Trump's national emergency declaration — which was used to reroute billions in taxpayer dollars for border wall construction — and issuing a 60-day pause on new construction ([*Greenwire*](#), Jan. 22).

The order also mandated an assessment of the contracting methods used to construct the wall and potential fallout from terminating those contracts.

"Pausing work on the wall isn't enough. The new administration must cancel these contracts for good and work with border communities and tribal nations to repair all that Trump destroyed," Jordahl added.

Environmentalists have noted that the continued construction west of Nogales, Ariz., is located in critical habitat for jaguars and other species.

Jordahl told E&E News that the construction work includes excavating and grading for a road, rather than the border wall itself.

"There is no use for a road here other than accessing and [patrolling] the planned wall," Jordahl said.

The Army Corps of Engineers defended the continued work in a statement and noted that "all bollard barrier and gate construction" activity has ceased.

"Under this suspension, contractors are still required by the terms of their contracts to maintain safe and secure jobsites, but all work in furtherance of construction has been suspended," the agency stated.

Permissible work includes "safety and security-related activities," the statement continued, such as securing equipment and materials, trench-related work, erosion control, and blocking access roads.

"Most of these minimum safety and security-related activities, which are designed to protect life, health and safety, will be visible to the public," the agency stated.

Asked whether the road construction in the Pajarito Mountains qualified as erosion control or another safety and security measure, U.S. Customs and Border Protection Arizona spokesman Rob Daniels told E&E News, "The efforts appear to be part of making the site safe, without any border wall construction."

The Army Corps offered a similar defense last month when activists with the Arizona-based Sky Island Alliance likewise criticized continued work in the Coronado National Memorial.

Although Biden's executive order included a seven-day grace period for construction to wind down, environmentalists documented nearly 70 feet of new border wall established during that time, which they argued violated the spirit of the order ([Greenwire](#), Jan. 27).