

Safe Borderlands



People do not realize that 40 percent of the border is under the jurisdiction of the Department of the Interior with a number of National Parks, Wildlife Refuges, and Native American Tribes on that border. I will tell you that it is, without question, a challenge.

*Secretary of the Interior, Dirk Kempthorne
March 8, 2007*

The 2009 budget request includes an \$8.2 million increase for a multi-bureau effort to improve border safety for Interior and tribal lands along the southwest border with Mexico. The initiative will:

- Protect employees, visitors, and residents from the impacts of illegal activity along the border.
- Mitigate environmental damage caused by that illegal activity.
- Improve communication and coordination to more effectively address these issues in partnership with the Department of Homeland Security and others.

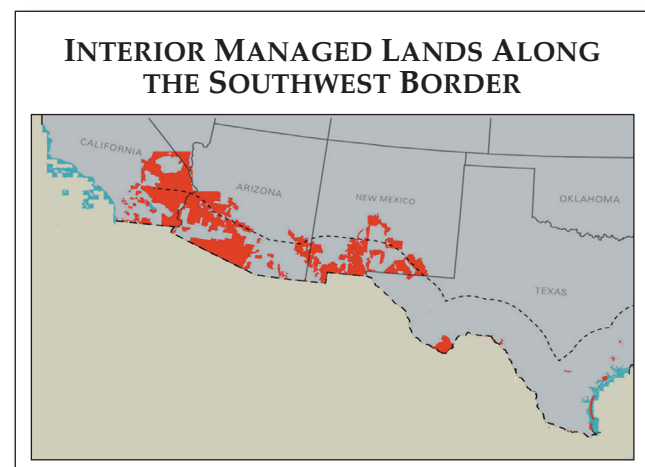
THE SOUTHWEST BORDERLANDS

The Department of the Interior's land management bureaus manage lands along 793 miles, or 41 percent, of the southwest border. This includes seven national wildlife refuges, six national parks, lands managed by the Bureau of Reclamation along 12 miles of the border, and public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management along 191 miles of the border. In addition, five Indian Reservations are on the international boundary with Mexico.

These remote lands were once pristine landscapes, home to endangered species such as the Sonoran pronghorn and pima pineapple cactus. They are home to ancient Indian communities kept alive through shards of pottery and timeless rock drawings. They contain thriving riparian areas that provide water for wildlife; recreational opportunities that include hunting, camping, hiking, and bird

watching; and untouched wilderness areas that are threatened by illegal activities.

Times have changed along our international border with Mexico. There are risks for the employees and visitors to these parks, refuges, and public lands. Areas are closed to visitors because there is a high likelihood that they will encounter illegal activities, trash, or other impacts. Employees that live on site and residents of Indian communities contend with the potential threat of vandalism, theft, and confrontation with illegal activities. Wildlife populations and their habitats and cultural resources are affected and damaged by these activities.



The impacts on Interior and tribal lands are startling. This Administration has already taken aggressive steps to add resources to reduce the flow of illegal drugs and aliens across the border into the U.S. The initial focus of the U.S. Border Patrol to control

traffic through urban ports of entry has resulted in substantially improved control in those areas. However, as security at urban points of entry improves, illegal entry to the United States is shifting to more rural, less-populated areas along the border. As a result, Interior's lands along 793 miles of border are increasingly impacted by illegal activities.



In 2007, nearly 200,000 illegal aliens crossed public lands along the southwest border, up from 17,800 in 2001—an 11-fold increase. Drug cartels run violent, drug-smuggling operations across the border, as evidenced by the 2,700 pounds of cocaine and 742,000 pounds of marijuana seized in 2007. There has also been loss to human life, with the homicides of five illegal aliens at Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge in 2005 and the death of park ranger Kris Eggle, who was shot and killed at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument by a drug runner. These homicides underscore the constant danger faced by Interior employees, visitors, and residents. In addition, these illegal activities generate significant environmental damage. As a result, portions of our land along the border have been closed to visitors, and in some cases even to employees, in order to ensure safety.



Overall, illegal traffic presents an increased risk of harm to visitors to our public lands and the employees who work there. Where public lands remain open, Interior dedicates as much as 50 percent of the budgets for national parks, wildlife refuges, and public lands along the border to pay for security and law enforcement activities. Interior employees are concerned that they are under constant surveillance by drug smugglers who establish observation posts on our lands and are equipped with assault weapons, encrypted radios, night vision optics, and other sophisticated equipment. The illegal traffic has also resulted in significant physical damage to public land resources, sensitive fish and wildlife habitats, and valuable archaeological sites.



SAFE BORDERLANDS INITIATIVE THE DETAILS

Interior must take action to address these dangers. In 2009, Interior is requesting \$56.1 million, an increase of \$8.2 million over the 2008 enacted level to enhance the safety of public land visitors, residents, and employees and reduce the impacts affecting Interior-managed lands along the southwest border.

The Safe Borderlands initiative provides a holistic approach to the growing problems caused by increasing illegal border crossings, with resources targeted to multiple bureaus and high-priority areas. The Department will coordinate border efforts among the land management bureaus and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

SAFE BORDERLANDS INITIATIVE (dollars in millions)			
	2008	2009	Change from 2008
BLM	7.2	8.2	+1.0
FWS	17.1	18.1	+1.0
NPS	10.9	16.1	+5.2
BIA	12.2	13.2	+1.0
OS	0.5	0.5	0
Total	47.9	56.1	+8.2

The comprehensive Safe Borderlands initiative focuses on four high-priority components:

- Enhance safety for visitors, employees, and residents.
- Mitigate environmental damage.
- Improve interoperable communications.
- Enhance interagency coordination.

Interior’s bureaus are participating in border task forces to accomplish common goals. A number of successful projects have been completed as a result of the increased cooperation. However, challenges remain. Moreover, the U.S. Customs and Border Protection agency is augmenting its infrastructure, technology, and personnel along the border as part of its Secure Border Initiative, with implications for public land managers and Tribes. These efforts will require Interior resources to coordinate with the Department of Homeland Security on:

- Ongoing law enforcement operations to ensure officer safety.
- Joint enforcement and investigative efforts affecting Interior lands.
- Environmental considerations, such as wilderness protection requirements and Endangered Species Act consultations.
- Educate border patrol agents on environmental sensitivities, such as wilderness protection requirements and identification of endangered wildlife and vegetation.
- Technical assistance and training.

Border issues are having a pronounced impact on Interior lands. Public land managers already must restrict access to portions of Interior lands near the border; for example, portions of Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument have been closed due to border dangers. To protect visitors and employees, the Department may need to close additional portions of the parks, refuges, and public lands to visitors. The budget increases will provide Interior with necessary resources to help protect people and lands, as well as manage resources.



Enhancing Safety for Visitors, Employees, and Residents—The Safe Borderlands initiative focuses on five high-priority areas, with two in Texas, and one each in New Mexico, Arizona, and California. In these areas, Interior proposes to invest a \$5.8 million increase to deploy 52 additional law enforcement personnel in areas with the highest safety risks. This funding will complement a \$3.2 million investment in 2008 for BLM and the Fish and Wildlife Service to deploy 11 officers. The Department’s focus will be on Interior responsibilities, including safety of visitors and employees on public lands.

Interior funding is intended to complement, not duplicate or substitute for, Department of Homeland Security efforts. These additional officers will patrol campgrounds, recreational areas, and other lands where smuggling activities threaten visitors. They will also deter illegal activity in employee housing areas and provide security for employees conducting fieldwork, such as biologists conducting wildlife surveys and monitoring activities. Additionally, they will educate visitors and employees on border security risks and safety measures and coordinate with partner agencies to enhance Interior’s efforts.

The funding for the Bureau of Indian Affairs will support additional law enforcement officers to address illegal smuggling of drugs and immigrants on reservations on or near the Mexican border. These efforts will assist law enforcement agencies that have jurisdiction at the international borders.

These additional officers will assist the Department in meeting its strategic plan goal of reducing the number of serious offenses that occur on Interior lands and reducing the number of injuries to visitors. This funding will help reduce violent crime on the Indian reservations along the southwest border. The additional law enforcement personnel will decrease criminal activity and help prevent the destruction of priceless natural and cultural resources.



Mitigate Environmental Damage — A significant component of the initiative is a \$2.0 million increase to mitigate environmental damage along the southwest border. Trails and illegal roads made by smugglers are destroying cactus and other sensitive vegetation, impacting the ecologic health of many of the national parks, wildlife refuges, national monuments, and conservation areas Interior manages. This causes a disruption of wildlife and their habitats and the destruction of cultural and historic resources. Projects will include repairing and maintaining roads and trails on BLM lands; improving signage for visitors; assisting with environmental compliance for border infrastructure projects; removing

over 60 tons of abandoned personal property such as vehicles from bureau and tribal lands; and closing abandoned mine lands on BLM lands in New Mexico and California where illegal aliens hide.



Improving Communications — Interior's initiative includes a \$400,000 increase to improve communications and enhance coordination. This funding will increase radio coverage and dispatch capability at the border parks. It will also enhance communication capabilities for field employees and expand encryption to deter criminal eavesdropping.

Enhancing Interagency Coordination — Through this initiative, Interior proposes to enhance coordination with DHS by placing a DHS-funded Interior employee in DHS offices to represent Interior issues as DHS implements its Secure Border initiative. Already, the Interior Department has signed an agreement with DHS to secure cooperating agency status in environmental reviews. Additionally, Interior will enhance coordination with the Department of Justice on drug smuggling and cross-border interdiction efforts through a Memorandum of Understanding with the Drug Enforcement Agency. The outcome will be increased prosecutions of drug smugglers and improved sharing of intelligence information about drugs.