



The Berkshire Eagle

Thom Smith | NatureWatch: Proposed border wall will impact 93 endangered and threatened species

Thom Smith

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I have a friend that I have known since he was a young lad attending nature classes I conducted in the early 1970s. As a youngster, he was more than interested in rocks and minerals, and geology in general. As he grew older, he became obsessed with spelunking and has continued to this day, honing his skills at discovering caves, many of them new entrances to well-known marble caverns, and a few new discoveries of impressive subterranean marvels yet to be fully explored.

I have thought that this friend might readily get work with border security, sniffing out tunnels between California, Arizona, Texas and Mexico, and from what I have learned, the more the wall between the United States of America and our brothers and sisters to the south becomes a reality, so, too, will be the tunneling beneath it.

My real concern though is the effect this "wall" will have on already endangered wildlife.

A new study by the Center for Biological Diversity in Tucson, Ariz., claims President Trump's border wall threatens 93 endangered and threatened species, including jaguars, ocelots, Mexican gray wolves and cactus ferruginous pygmy owls.

The study also found that 25 threatened or endangered species have designated "critical habitat" on the border, including more than 2 million acres within 50 miles of the border.

"Trump's border wall is a disaster for people and wildlife alike," said Noah Greenwald, endangered species director at the center. "It could drive magnificent species, like the jaguar and ocelot, to extinction in the United States."

The new study identified all threatened, endangered and "candidate" species (those being considered for protection) that have ranges near or crossing the border. These include 57 endangered species, 24 threatened species, 10 species under consideration for protection and two species of concern, golden and bald eagles. Construction of Trump's 1,200-mile wall — along with related infrastructure and enforcement — will have far-reaching consequences for wildlife, including cutting off migration corridors, reducing genetic diversity, destroying habitat, and adding vehicles, noise and lights to vast stretches of the wild borderlands". Noah Greenwald, ngreenwald@biologicaldiversity.org.

On July 24, 2018, Nicole Javorsky of The Atlantic's CityLab reported, "More than 2,500 scientists have co-signed a paper describing the "significant" harm to wildlife posed by

infrastructure on the U.S.-Mexico border."

And Krista Schlyer, writing for National Audubon Magazine, wrote "The irreplaceable riches of our borderlands. These lands are home to Sonoran pronghorn, prairie dogs, black bears, and gray wolves; they contain some of the most biodiverse ecosystems on the continent. More than 450 rare species live here — some cannot be found anywhere else on the planet. At least 700 neotropical birds, mammals and insects migrate through the borderlands each year. Like the human migrants, who pass through this world between worlds, they seek safety, a future, survival.

"But all these borderland's treasures have been facing the eroding consequences of policies that prioritize large-scale construction of walls and other infrastructure, and that disrupt lives and divide the landscape. Abundant evidence has shown over the past decade that these barriers do not stop people. But they have destroyed and fragmented rare habitats, blocked migration corridors for endangered species, undercut the borderlands economy, and, along with a policy of militarization that dates to the early 1990s, they have led to the deaths of more than 6,000 human migrants."

Speaking of the wall, according to David Shaw, director of San Diego's Homeland Security Investigations, the unit that investigates cross-border crimes, such as human trafficking, money laundering and drug smuggling, says, "Cartels operate like a business. If you put up one wall, they find a way to get around it."

As fences and walls have gone up, and border patrols increased, smuggling has taken to air and sea and ports of entry in ingeniously hidden compartments in vans, trucks, and 18-wheelers. And let us not forget tunnels often dug by hand, although some are more sophisticated and have even been equipped with elevators, tracks and lighting. One, I read about lately was 70 feet below ground. At least 200 tunnels have been discovered, one source reports. Among them, "Border patrol agents have uncovered a tunnel leading from the kitchen of an old KFC restaurant to a trap door in a bedroom in Mexico. Officials believe the tunnel between San Luis, in Arizona, and San Luis R o Colorado, in Sonora, was used for smuggling drugs." (US News).

A variety of sources, including Gustavo Solis, The Desert Sun; Nick Oza, USA Today Network, and Sarah Tory, High Country News Magazine, provided good information, such as "U.S. agents have uncovered a narrow cross-border tunnel complete with a rail system that was used to transport tons of cocaine and marijuana from Mexico to an exit covered by a trash bin in California."

And while tunnels may also be used to enter the U.S., and not only by "gangs" and rapists," as we hear about from the White House, they are also the last resort for many honest Mexicans, who would be hard workers in the U.S.A. if they had the opportunity.

The following excerpt of a commentary by David Bier on "Why the Wall Won't Work" appeared in the May 2017 issue of Reason Magazine (<https://reason.com>): "Donald Trump captured the imagination of many American voters with a single campaign promise. 'I will build a great, great wall on our southern border,' he boasted in June 2015. For good measure, he added, 'And I will

have Mexico pay for that wall.' The twin pledges — which followed a tirade about Mexican rapists and drug dealers — neatly captured everything that was either attractive or repulsive to voters in the real estate mogul's presidential run: bravado, nationalism and controversy." Go to cato.org/publications/commentary/why-wall-wont-work for the rest of the commentary. (The Cato Institute, a think tank)

And now we know that Mexico will not pay for it; we will.