

THE SACRAMENTO BEE

Trump's proposed border wall would be a disaster for endangered species, lawsuits say

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The proposed border wall championed by President Donald Trump would pose an ecological disaster threatening “dozens of sensitive plant and animal species that are listed as ‘endangered,’ ‘threatened,’ or ‘rare,’” according to a lawsuit filed against the U.S. government by 16 attorneys general, including California Attorney General Xavier Becerra.

California's lawsuit argues in part that the state's border with Mexico is already barricaded so extensively that the Trump administration cannot extend existing walls without harming rare butterflies, sheep and shrubs.

San Diego County shares a 60-mile border with Mexico, with 46 miles of that length “already lined with primary fencing,” according to the complaint.

In Imperial County, 59 miles of that county's 70-mile border with Mexico are already covered by barrier.

The only places where new border walls can be built, the complaint states, are in the Otay Mountain and Jacumba Wilderness Areas, “home to more than 100 sensitive plant and animal species,” according to the complaint.

That includes the Quino checkerspot butterfly, the Mexican flannel bush, the Tecate cypress and the peninsular desert bighorn sheep.

The Mexican flannel bush and Tecate cypress “are so rare they can only be found in these wilderness areas,” according to the complaint.

In New Mexico, another plaintiff in the lawsuit, the endangered Mexican gray wolf, which nearly went extinct by the 1970s, also could be impacted by a wall, the complaint states.

Trump declared a national emergency Friday after weeks of sparring with Congress over funding for the project. He called the U.S.-Mexico border “a major entry point for criminals, gang members, and illicit narcotics.”

Illegal border crossings have steadily decreased since 2007, according to the Pew Research Center. The Cato Institute, a libertarian think tank, reported in a February 2018 study that arrest rates are far higher for American citizens than for immigrants who entered the country illegally.

Trump's declaration allows him to redirect money that Congress had allocated for other projects, such as military construction, to pay for the border wall he promoted during his 2016 presidential campaign. His administration identified as much as \$8 billion it believes it can spend to build about 200 miles of additional barriers on the border.

Conservation groups including the Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife and the Animal Legal Defense Fund also have sued Trump over his declaration.

Brian Segee, an attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity, said in a statement that “Trump’s authoritarian attempt to build his destructive border wall is a flagrant abuse of that constitutional structure. If he gets his way, it’ll be a disaster for communities and wildlife along the border, including some of our country’s most endangered species.”

Trump responded to the lawsuits on Twitter early Tuesday.

“As I predicted, 16 states, led mostly by Open Border Democrats and the Radical Left, have filed a lawsuit in, of course, the 9th Circuit,” Trump tweeted. “California, the state that has wasted billions of dollars on their out of control Fast Train, with no hope of completion, seems in charge!”