

Department of the Interior

SHADOW SECRETARY EDWIN S. RUBENSTEIN

The mission of the Department of the Interior (DOI) is to protect and provide access to our Nation's natural and cultural heritage and honor our trust responsibilities to tribes (<http://www.doi.gov/secretary/mission.html>). Illegal immigration and smuggling activities have threatened this mission.

Managing Border Lands

DOI manages approximately 14 percent of the land on the Canadian border, 31 percent along the southeast border, and 40 percent of the southwest border. This area includes 17 border parks, 6 along the United States–Canada border, 4 in south Florida, and 7 on the United States–Mexico border. <http://www.doi.gov/ocl/2005/BorderSecurity.htm>

The parks along the United States–Mexico border share approximately 365 miles of land and 72 miles of seashore with Mexico that are directly impacted by increased illegal border activity. Big Bend National Park alone shares 245 miles of border with Mexico, nearly 13 percent of the entire United States–Mexico border. In 2004, the U.S. Border Patrol documented that over 1 million illegal immigrants were apprehended while attempting to enter the United States, with approximately 14,000 apprehended in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument (NM).

Two units of DOI—the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the National Park Service (NPS)—are responsible for managing public lands, including those along the southern border.

The role of illegal aliens in preventing DOI

from achieving its mission is summarized in congressional testimony by Michael D. Snyder, a regional NPS director:

“Parks in border areas were originally established to preserve some of this country's natural and cultural resources, irreplaceable treasures contained in unique environments. The unchecked movement of significant numbers of humans, vehicle traffic, and contraband across the borders negatively impacts natural and cultural resources, causing considerable resource degradation, soil compaction, and endangering sensitive or threatened wildlife and plant species. Drug and immigrant trafficking patterns impact parklands many miles from the actual borders. These parks continue to work to provide a safe and memorable experience for their visitors. However, because of these illegal activities, there have been times when we have had to close sections of parks to visitors out of concern for visitor safety.” [http://](http://www.doi.gov/ocl/2005/BorderSecurity.htm)

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Immigration Fiscal Impact Statement

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) investigates numerous incidents of drug and alien smuggling annually along the southern border. DHS's records do not record the land ownership of the locations where these incidents occur, so BLM has no reliable gauge of the volume of border-related illegal activity occurring on the public lands under its jurisdiction. However, the presence of trash on remote trails and roads indicates that such activity is an ongoing and increasing problem on BLM lands in the border area. http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/law_enforcement/major_issues_of_national.html

Patrolling the border is like squeezing a balloon: applying pressure at one end increases pressure at the other. Thus, since the construction of a fence along the Mexican border just east of San Diego, illegal crossings have been pushed further east, into the wilderness areas of the California–Mexico

border. This means an increase in trash dumping and other ecologically damaging activities within that area.

Eventually the combined efforts of the Border Patrol, BLM, and other resource and law enforcement agencies resulted in a decrease in illegal immigration in California. More recently, those numbers have risen again as the infrastructure along the border in Arizona and elsewhere was put in place and border security strengthened in those areas. <http://www.blm.gov/nhp/news/legislative/pages/2006/te060805.htm>

As a result, the illegal inflow along the California border is again increasing. Immigrant trails are increasingly being used, trash and human waste along these trails and at campsites is increasing, and escaped campfires lit by immigrants continue to be a major threat to wildlands along the border. The increased frequency of wildland fires is a primary issue for resource management along the border and is having a serious impact upon certain unique species of flora. <http://www.blm.gov/nhp/news/legislative/pages/2006/te060805.htm>

The Cost of Undoing the Damage Done by Illegal Aliens

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the National Park Service (NPS) are the units of DOI responsible for land management. Outlays for BLM and NPS are estimated at \$1.756 billion and \$2.135, respectively, in fiscal year (FY) 2007. Their combined spending—\$3.891 billion—represents about 35 percent of all DOI outlays.

In the four years following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, Congress appropriated nearly \$87.6 million in one-time funding and over \$36.4 million in recurring funding to the NPS directly related to homeland security costs.¹ The \$87.6 million included \$53.1 million for construction projects related to homeland security, including \$17.8 million for the vehicle barrier at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument—a popular border crossing point. The \$87.6 million also included \$33.8 million in operational increases dedicated to security for border parks. <http://www.doi.gov/ocl/2005/BorderSecurity.htm>

Interest in mitigating the damage done by illegal immigrants along the southwestern border was stimulated by a study pushed forward by Congressman Jim Kolbe (R-Arizona) and released jointly in 2002 by the Interior Department, INS, and Environmental Protection Agency.

“As a result of the vast amount of smuggling of humans and controlled substances in southeast Arizona,” said the study, “the extremely valuable, and sometimes irreplaceable, natural and cultural resources...are in jeopardy.” <http://www.doi.gov/ocl/2005/BorderSecurity.htm>



Clothing, bicycles, human waste, and assorted litter left by illegal aliens are environmental hazards all along the southern border.

“Report to the House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations on Impacts Caused by Undocumented Aliens Crossing Federal Lands in Southeast Arizona” included a draft plan to mitigate damages caused by smugglers of controlled substances and undocumented aliens in southeast Arizona. Estimated funding needs for the first year of implementation was \$23.5 million and more than 90 full-time equivalents (FTEs). The first-year estimate for BLM was \$3.8 million and 24 FTEs.

In 2003, as a result of the report, the House Appropriations Committee approved a \$1 million appropriation for federal lands in southeastern Arizona to begin mitigating impacts from smuggling and immigration. After conference and rescission, the final amount received was \$695,000 in March 2003. Thereafter, BLM received these amounts for

the mitigation of impacts caused by illegal smuggling:

FY2003 \$ 695,000

FY2004 \$ 790,000

FY2005 \$ 986,000

FY2006 \$ 971,000

Bottom line: BLM has received less than one-quarter of the estimated \$3.8 million the Kolbe report says was needed to mitigate the damage illegal aliens do along a portion of the Arizona–Mexico border.



The scope of the environmental damage caused by illegal aliens is detailed in a Bureau of Land Management report http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/az/pdfs/undoc_alien.Par.62736.File.dat/complete_summary_03-05.pdf which we excerpt here:

Litter: Thousands of acres are covered by trash. It has been estimated that each immigrant ...discards at least eight pounds of trash on his/her journey through southern Arizona. This anecdotal figure feels correct to many individuals involved in removing trash. On this basis, with over 3,200,000 immigrants apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) since FY2000, almost 25,000,000 pounds of trash could have been left, 86 percent on federal and tribal lands in southern Arizona. Add to this the number of illegal immigrants that were not apprehended but left trash on these lands as they crossed, and we now have an understanding of the scope of the litter...What's in the litter?....Essentially, litter includes:

- **Containers and Bottles:** Thousands of

plastic water bottles from 1-gallon size to pint size, broken glass jars, electrolyte bottles, juices, milk containers, baby bottles, soda and beer bottles (many beer bottles shot to pieces).

- **Personal Hygiene Items and Medications:** Razors, combs, brushes, shampoo, toothpaste, mouthwash, soap, makeup, toothbrushes, medications (Naproxin, Advil, Aspirin, stomach meds, electrolytes), vitamins.

- **Clothing and Shoes:** Pants, sox, underwear, shirts, hats, caps, gloves, coats; high heels, shower shoes, boots, tennis shoes, sandals and thongs.

- **Food and food cans:** food cans (tuna, beans, juices, etc), mostly from Mexico, food cans opened with a pocketknife, leaving ragged edges and torn metal lids; tortillas, baby foods; food items in American store containers and bags.

- **Jewelry:** Watches, necklaces, bracelets, knives, and key chains.

- **Paper:** Many items originate from other countries besides Mexico. Forms from maquiladore factories; airline and bus ticket stubs; phone cards, Social Security cards, identification cards; pay receipts from the US; photographs, letters, books, promissory notes, paper money; toilet paper, sanitary pads, disposable diapers.

- **Fabric and plastic:** Back packs by the hundreds; blankets, towels, table cloths, serapes, rags, rope, string, wire, lots of plastic bags used for carrying food, or large ones for use as raincoats; fanny packs, shoulder packs, wallets, and gloves.

- **Miscellaneous:** Batteries, cell phones, radios, home-made weapons

- **Human Waste:** the accumulation of dis-

integrating toilet paper and human feces represents both health and safety concerns and is unsightly to visitors.

Illegal roads and trails and damaged infrastructure and improvements: Thousands of roads and trails are being illegally established. Illegal roads and trails fragment habitat, destroy vegetation, cause erosion and leave unsightly scars which, if not rehabilitated, will last

for decades in areas which were pristine less than a decade ago. Legal roads become unusable due to illegal vehicle traffic and required law enforcement use. Paths made by thousands of feet cross sensitive areas such as archaeological sites, riparian zones and springs. Gates are rammed and range improvements are damaged. Fences are cut, run over, left open or removed. Water tanks for cattle and wildlife are emptied of water or destroyed, adding to the critical shortage in severe drought conditions.



Abandoned vehicles and bicycles: Bicycles began to emerge as a significant item in 2003 and some use may stem from transporting drugs as well as humans. The Tohono O'odham Nation reports that bicycles are used at night across the reservation. Hundreds of smuggling vehicles have been abandoned and tires, batteries, gas cans and seats scattered across the landscape. Abandoned and often burned vehicles are difficult and costly to remove with great care needed to avoid further damage by the removal. Even though hundreds of vehicles have been removed, hundreds need removal.

Campfires and escaped fires: The impacts of warming and cooking fires by illegal immigrants cannot be overlooked in southern Arizona where the drought is a serious issue with no end in sight. Fires not only escape and destroy vegetation and wildlife habitat, and cause a safety hazard to people, but they increase the costs of suppressing fires and increase the requirements for prescriptive burns.

Vandalism, Graffiti and Archaeological Site

Damage: New images scratched or spray painted on trees, boulders and sites sometimes mark the path and sometimes indicate time spent in passing or waiting. Historic and prehistoric sites are covered with litter, trampled or have paths cut through them.

Public lands are cleaner because of the money spent by BLM to mitigate the environmental damage done by illegal border crossers. The cleanup also makes it easier to spot new incursions, thereby increasing apprehensions. A cleaner border is, in many ways, a safer border.



But the border cleanup program is still woefully underfunded:

It is also true...that some areas have yet to receive any attention due to the funding levels or to remoteness and steepness and the crews on the ground are just barely keeping ahead of the litter and constant damages to infrastructure. *"If we didn't have this funding ... to do the work, we would be buried in trash. This has been absolutely beneficial and remains extremely important."* Bill Childress, [BLM] Manager, San Pedro Riparian Natural Conservation Area, February 2006. http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/az/pdfs/undoc_aliases.Par.62736.File.dat/complete_summary_03-05.pdf ■

End Notes

1. The author has been unable to find figures showing more recent appropriation amounts for this purpose.