

Park and Recreation Infrastructure

Section 9

Immigrants account for 13 percent of the U.S. population. It would be wrong, however, to attribute a like percentage of national park usage to the foreign-born. National parks do not draw immigrants in as great a proportion as they do the native-born.

Park system recreational infrastructure was designed for an earlier time, when the nation was less diverse. The Army Corps of Engineers manages recreational infrastructure within the park system. More than 90 percent of its facilities were constructed prior to 1980. In fact, 40 percent of those projects were built before 1960.

Years of heavy use and deferred maintenance have taken a toll. The American Society of Civil Engineers' (ASCE) 2005 Report Card estimated the maintenance backlog for national park facilities at \$6.1 billion, noting that many of America's parks, beaches, and recreational harbors "are falling into a state of disrepair." ASCE assigned these tourism and economic development resources a grade of C-.

But no matter how much is spent on maintenance, existing infrastructure may not be up to the job:

Further, modern recreational equipment and recreational use patterns of today's diverse population no longer fit Corps recreational areas. Equipment has changed drastically both in size and in infrastructure requirements. New uses for Corps' lakes like sail board-

ing were never anticipated when Corps' facilities were designed. Even more significant is the rapid diversification of this nation's population. While we know that use patterns and recreation preferences vary according to popu-

lation segments, Corps' facilities continue to provide recreation for the much less diverse population of the 1960s.²

Rising transportation costs and a weak economy have reduced visits to national parks by 1 percent since 2006. State parks have filled the void. They represent less than 2 percent of total outdoor recreational acreage but serve more than 29 percent

Public Parks by the Numbers

- 84.3 million acres of National Park land (2007)
- 270.4 million recreation visits to national parks (2008 forecast)
- 2 percent of total outdoor recreational area in state parks
- 15,000 miles of roads (paved and unpaved) in national parks (2007)
- 1.8 million acres of privately owned land within national park boundaries
- 39 percent of southern border managed by the National Park Service
- 500 illegal immigrants enter the U.S. daily through Organ Pipe National Monument in Arizona (Border Patrol estimate, 2007)

Park and Recreation Infrastructure Needs (a)
2007: \$7.8 billion (\$25.74 per capita)

2050 Projections (b)
\$11.6 billion: at current population trends
\$10.0 billion: at 50-percent reduction in immigration
\$7.8 billion: at zero population growth

Notes:
a. Backlog of deferred maintenance and preservation needs in 2007 dollars.
b. Projected maintenance and maintenance backlogs assume per-capita amounts stay at 2007 levels and U.S. population grows per the Pew Research Center's February 2008 forecast.¹

Sources:
American Society of Civil Engineers, National Parks Conservation Association, National Parks Service.

of visitors at outdoor recreational areas, state or federal.

While most big national parks are in remote wilderness areas, many state parks are located close to large, often blighted, urban areas. These projects are funded by a diverse range of resources, including government subsidies, corporate donations, and private foundations. Their success has turned around entire communities, demonstrating what some believe to be an ideal cost-sharing model for infrastructure renewal.



In the mid-1980s, the Statue of Liberty received an extensive restoration, including a new torch.

Unfortunately, there are too few such success stories.

Protecting the Parks

Securing park infrastructure in places like the Grand Canyon, Gettysburg, and the Statue of Liberty for future generations has been the top priority of the National Park Service since its inception. This stewardship goes hand-in-hand with interpretation, as the agency seeks to inspire and educate nearly 300 million visitors annually.

But 9/11 forced the agency to consider the protection and interpretation of many park sites differently. When the Department of Homeland security tightened control over heavily trafficked border areas, less protected landscapes such as the national parks suddenly became popular ports of entry for illegal crossers—including drug smugglers.

The physical dimensions of government-owned border lands are eye-popping. The Department of the Interior (DOI) manages approximately 14 percent of the land along 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.³

The parks along the United States-Mexico border share approximately 365 miles of land and 72 miles of seashore with Mexico that are directly



A sign greets visitors to Soldiers' National Cemetery within Gettysburg National Military Park, a national landmark among Civil War battle sites.

affected 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 apprehended over 1 million illegal immigrants attempting to enter the United States. Of these, approximately 14,000 were seized in Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, New Mexico.

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 NPS from achieving its stewardship 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.⁴

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) investigates numerous incidents of drug and alien smuggling annually along the southern border. DHS' 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.⁵

Patrolling the border is like squeezing a balloon: applying pressure at one end increases pressure at the other. Thus, the construction of a fence along the Mexican border just east of San Diego pushed illegal crossings further east, into the wilderness areas of California and Arizona. This means an increase in trash, human waste, and other ecologically damaging activities within that area.



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.⁶

The Cost of Protecting the Parks

Since 2001, the Park Service has received \$35 million in annual money for homeland security projects. Congress also provided \$91 million in one-time funding for icon parks and \$18 million for Organ Pipe's border barrier.

But superintendents say the costs are much higher. Rangers are pulled from other duties to patrol the border. Managers at Organ Pipe, for example, spend about \$100,000 a year from its maintenance budget to repair the vehicle barrier and an adjoining road along the border.

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, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, and the 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."⁷

The Report to the House of Representatives Committee on Appropriations on Impacts Caused by Undocumented Aliens Crossing Federal Lands



The border barrier at Organ Pipe Cactus Monument (left) stretches 23 miles along the southern boundary with Mexico. A sign in Spanish at Organ Pipe (above) cautions illegal aliens of the dangers associated with exposure to the elements.

in Southeast Arizona included a draft plan to mitigate damages caused by smugglers of controlled substances and undocumented aliens in southeast Arizona. The estimated funding needs for the first year of implementation was \$23.5 million and more than 90 full-time equivalents (FTE). The first-year estimate for BLM was \$3.8 million and 24 FTEs. Full-time equivalents are the number of full-time employees needed to do the work of the actual (full- and part-time) workforce. Thus, two employees working half-time are equal to one FTE.



Estimates on the volume of trash that illegal aliens leave across Arizona's southern border are as high as 25 million pounds of garbage over a six-year period (1999-2005).

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:

- FY 2003 \$695,000
- FY 2004 \$790,000
- FY 2005 \$986,000
- FY 2006 \$971,000

Bottom line: BLM has received less than one-fourth 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 BLM report, which we excerpt here:⁸

Litter: Thousands of acres are covered by trash. It has been estimated that each immigrant... discards at least eight pounds of trash on his or her journey through southern Arizona. This anecdotal figure feels correct to many individuals involved in removing trash. On this basis, with over 3.2 million immigrants apprehended by the U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) since FY 2000, almost 25 million

pounds of trash could have been left, 86 percent on federal and tribal lands in southern Arizona. Not included in this estimate is the number of illegal immigrants who were not apprehended but who left trash on these lands.

What is in the litter? Essentially, it includes the following:

- **Containers and bottles:** thousands of plastic water bottles from one-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 medications, electrolytes), vitamins.

- **Clothing and shoes:** pants, socks, underwear, shirts, hats, caps, gloves, coats, high heels, shower shoes, boots, tennis shoes, sandals, and thongs.

- **Food and food cans:** food cans, 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:** forms from maquiladore factories; airline and bus ticket stubs; phone cards, Social Security cards, identification cards; pay receipts from the U.S.; photographs, letters, books, promissory

notes, paper money; toilet paper, sanitary pads, disposable diapers.

- **Fabric and plastic:** backpacks 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.



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

- **Miscellaneous:** batteries, cell phones, radios, homemade weapons.
- **Human waste:** disintegrating toilet paper and human feces, which accumulates and represents both health and safety concerns and is unsightly to visitors.

Damage to Infrastructure and Improvements

Thousands of illegal roads and trails fragment the habitat, destroy vegetation, cause erosion, and leave unsightly scars that, if not rehabilitated, will last for decades in areas considered 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 have been scattered across the landscape. Abandoned and often burned vehicles are difficult and costly to remove, and great care is needed to avoid further damage. Even though hundreds of vehicles have been removed, hundreds more 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 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 waiting. Historic and prehistoric sites are covered with litter, trampled, or cut through with paths.

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 dam-

ages to infrastructure. 'If we didn't have this funding to... to do the work, we would be buried in trash.' This has been absolutely beneficial and remains extremely important.⁹ ■

Endnotes

1. <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/729/united-states-population-projectionsforecast>.
2. American Society of Civil Engineers, 2005.
3. <http://www.doi.gov/ocl/2005/BorderSecurity.htm>.
4. <http://www.doi.gov/ocl/2005/BorderSecurity.htm>.
5. http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/more/law_enforcement/major_issues_of_national.html.
6. <http://www.blm.gov/nhp/news/legislative/pages/2006/te060805.htm>.
7. <http://www.doi.gov/ocl/2005/BorderSecurity.htm>.
8. http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/az/pdfs/undoc_alien.Par.62736.File.dat/complete_summary_03-05.pdf.
9. Bill Childress, BLM manager, San Pedro Riparian Natural Conservation Area, February 2006. http://www.blm.gov/style/medialib/blm/az/pdfs/undoc_alien.Par.62736.File.dat/complete_summary_03-05.pdf.