

Refusal to Correct Misinformation on Immigration Numbers from ESA

BY JACK MARTIN AND DICK SCHNEIDER

In late 2009, our attention was called to a letter by Hiding (2009) in *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* that gave a very misleading view of the role of immigration in population growth and environmental problems. This journal is published by the Ecological Society of America.

We dug into the government data banks, did some calculations, and eventually drafted a short letter correcting the most egregious claim Hiding had put forward. This claim was that population growth of cities in the Southwest was “mostly [i.e. >50 percent] due to immigration from other areas of the U.S.”

Our letter showing that to be a gross overestimate was submitted to *Frontiers* in January 2010, and is given verbatim below. It was immediately rejected on the grounds that they “already have a response by Dr Stuart Hurlbert appearing in the March issue”, had too many other letters “queued up,” and “cannot devote any more space to this subject.”

We believe that if our short letter had pointed out a material error of fact in a research article published in *Frontiers* concerning something other than immigration’s impact on population increase, sufficient space would have been found to print it. But, because our letter concerned the controversial subject of the domestic impact of international migration, the editors chose not to publish our correction. They therefore deliberately let stand erroneous information that could cloud the judgment of ecologists on the actual sources of population growth in the Southwest. Our original letter follows below.

Dear Editor,

We applaud attention being called to the environmental damage being done in border regions by illegal immigration in Lori Hiding’s recent letter (“To fence or not to fence,” September 2009). One datum she presents, however, struck us as improbable: her claim that population growth of “cities in the desert Southwest...[is] mostly due to immigration from other areas of the U.S., rather than from across the border.”

In fact, neither of these causes is the primary source of growth in the Southwest. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2009a), between 2000 and 2009, the population of the Southwest — which we define as AZ, NV, UT, NM, TX, and CO — grew by 7,505,211, or 20.7 percent over the 2000 population. Natural increase, that is, births minus deaths of Southwest residents, was responsible for 48 percent of the growth, net domestic migration from non-Southwest states for 30 percent, and net interna-

tional migration for 21 percent. Only for two states, Arizona and Nevada, was net domestic migration the largest source of growth, and only for Nevada more than half.

Immigrants also contribute to natural increase and domestic migration. When these shares are estimated and added to newly arriving immigrants, then immigration accounts for about a third of overall Southwest growth since 2000. Even more important, immigration is projected to become far and away the dominant source of U.S. growth over the next 40 years, accounting for 79.5 percent of the projected U.S. population increase of 128.8 million people from 2010 to 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau 2009b). The Southwest can be expected to be impacted by a significant fraction of this growth.

Human population growth in the Southwest since 2000 has occurred at an average annual rate of 2 percent per year. A continuation of this rate implies a doubling of the population in the next 35 years. If one accepts the premise that rapid population growth in a water-limited region with ecosystems that have already suffered significant damage is an issue of major concern, then continued high levels of immigrant settlement in the region must also be recognized as an issue of importance. ■

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References

Hidinger, L. 2009. To fence or not to fence. *Frontiers in Ecology and the Environment* 7:350-351.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2009a. Population Division. Table 4: Cumulative Estimates of the Components of Resident Population Change for the United States, Regions, States,

and Puerto Rico: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2009 (NST-EST2009-04). U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.

U.S. Census Bureau. 2009b. Population Division. Table 1: Projections of the Population and Components of Change by Net International Migration Series for the United States: 2010 to 2050 (NP2009-T1). U.S. Census Bureau, Washington, D.C.

Trashing the U.S. Border

Migrants Leave Tons of Waste on a Daily Basis Crossing the Mexico-U.S. Border



According to Leo W. Banks of the *Tucson Weekly*, over the years illegal aliens have left an estimated “24 million pounds [of trash]” during border crossings “from the Colorado River to the New Mexico line. The federal Bureau of Land Management made that estimate in 2007 and called it conservative. The agency uses a formula of eight pounds of trash dropped per day, per person.... For example, at the peak of traffic in 2004 and 2005, the Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge near Sasabe, southwest of Tucson, was getting 2,000 crossings a day, and that translates to 16,000 pounds of trash a day.”

