

# Why Walls Won't Work

***Evidence shows that the walls the federal government is building along the U.S.-Mexico border do not improve border security or address undocumented immigration—but they do stop wildlife.***

**B**y all indications, border walls are not significantly decreasing undocumented immigration. In a May 2008 report, the Congressional Research Service (CRS) concluded: ***“The primary fence, by itself, did not have a discernible impact on the influx of unauthorized aliens coming across the border in San Diego.”***<sup>1</sup> This same CRS report states: “As previously noted, the number of [United States Border Patrol] USBP apprehensions in 2004 were almost identical to the number of apprehensions in 1992; the main difference is that San Diego accounted for the majority of apprehensions in 1992, whereas in 2004 Tucson and Yuma sectors accounted for the majority of apprehensions.”<sup>1</sup> These statistics confirm that, if anything, wall segments merely shift unauthorized traffic and enforcement activity into more remote and ecologically sensitive areas. A recent biological opinion from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service states: “Shifting IA activity has already occurred in Arizona and California as a result of fence construction or increased Customs and Border Protection [CBP] staffing.”<sup>2</sup>



Walls do not stop people, but they do stop wildlife by blocking their natural movements. Photo: Matt Clark/Defenders of Wildlife

Between 2005 and 2007, the greatest reductions in apprehensions occurred in sectors that did not yet have walls.<sup>3</sup> Texas' Rio Grande Valley Sector saw a 45.3 percent decrease in apprehensions—a 15-year low. Conversely, “overall apprehensions in San Diego where fences have been in place since 1993—defied the downward trend, jumping by 20 percent in 2007, Border Patrol figures show.”<sup>3</sup> Department of Homeland Security (DHS) estimates up to 57 percent of undocumented migrants have overstayed legally obtained visas. The Government Accountability Office noted in a 2004 report that DHS is underestimating the magnitude of the visa overstay problem.<sup>4</sup> The wall will not address this problem and may actually discourage visa overstays from returning home.



## **Border walls fail to stop smuggling activity**

Most drug smuggling occurs through ports of entry, and a border wall will have no impact on the bulk of it. Limited funding should be invested in modernizing port security. Drug smugglers continue to use underground tunnels and breaches cut into the wall. According to U.S. CBP, a third of all drugs confiscated in 2006 came through San Diego and Imperial County ports of entry, where there is a double-layered border wall, compared to 24 percent the previous year.<sup>5</sup>

**Smugglers and others easily cut holes in parts of the wall.** Photo: Matt Clark/Defenders of Wildlife

<sup>1</sup> Source: Congressional Research Report: Border Security: Barriers Along the U.S. International Border, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/homsec/RL33659.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Source: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service B.O. Tucson West Project;

[http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Documents/Biol\\_Opin/080373\\_SBINet\\_Tucson\\_West.pdf](http://www.fws.gov/southwest/es/arizona/Documents/Biol_Opin/080373_SBINet_Tucson_West.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Source: *New York Times*: *Homeland Security Stands by Its Fence*.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/21/washington/21fence.html?pagewanted=2&sq=May%202008&st=cse&scp=23>

<sup>4</sup> Source: Government Accountability Office Report: Overstay Tracking, <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d0482.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Source: USCBP, [http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/newsroom/news\\_releases/archives/2006\\_news\\_releases/012006/01242006.xml](http://www.cbp.gov/xp/cgov/newsroom/news_releases/archives/2006_news_releases/012006/01242006.xml)

## A billion-dollar speed bump

According to T.J. Bonner, president of the National Border Patrol Council, a union representing patrol agents, **“A fence will slow people down by a minute or two...”**<sup>6</sup> That is not much time, especially in remote areas where it can take hours for the Border Patrol to respond to an alarm triggered by an unauthorized crossing. As Border Patrol spokesperson Mike Scioli sums it up, **“The border fence is a speed bump in the desert.”** While a wall is a speed bump for humans, it is an impenetrable barrier for most wildlife -severing migration corridors and preventing crucial genetic exchange between populations.

The former DHS Secretary Michael Chertoff said, **“[the border] is a much more complicated problem than putting up a fence which someone can climb over with a ladder or tunnel under with a shovel.”**<sup>7</sup>

Current DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano echoed this when she was governor of Arizona: **“You show me a 50-foot wall and I’ll show you a 51-foot ladder at the border. That’s the way the border works,”** said Napolitano.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, this “ladder logic” has turned out to be accurate in the field.

The May 2008 CRS report states that, “...where fencing has been erected, there have been numerous breaches of the border fencing and a number of tunnels discovered crossing underneath the fencing. It stands to reason that even if border fencing is constructed over a significant portion of the land border, the incidences of fence breaches and underground tunnels would increase.”<sup>1</sup> The number of tunnels under the border has grown significantly since wall construction started. Between 1993 and 2001, authorities found only two underground passages across the border.<sup>9</sup> Since 2001, they have discovered 40 such tunnels on the southern border.<sup>10</sup> Breaches made with cutting torches and hacksaws are routinely found. Crews perform the endless, resource-consuming task of patching these holes. The National Guard calls repairs from continual breaches as “a bottomless pit”.<sup>9</sup> America can not afford to perpetually pour precious financial resources into these fundamentally flawed border infrastructure projects.

## A false sense of security

A border wall will not protect America from terrorism. Most of the 9/11 hijackers applied for and received legal visas—and all of these terrorists arrived by air, not by land. Terrorists and cartels are sophisticated, and as such they will not be deterred by low-tech walls. The National Border Patrol Strategy published by U.S. Customs and Border Protection states: **“The Border Patrol recognizes that the geographic distinctions along the Northern Border [U.S.-Canada] yield a much greater vulnerability for terrorist border-crossing attempts.”**<sup>11</sup> Yet, our vast northern border currently receives significantly fewer resources and manpower than our southern border. America needs real solutions to address important border security and undocumented immigration challenges, not an ineffective, fiscally draining and environmentally damaging border wall.



Border-crossers often use ladders to scale walls. Photo: Cecile Lumer

<sup>6</sup> Source: Associated Press on BBC News, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/6090060.stm>

<sup>7</sup> Source: Fox News, <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,287573,00.html>

<sup>8</sup> Source: Associated Press in the Tucson Citizen: *More Fence Doesn't Make Sense, Napolitano Says*, [http://www.tucsoncitizen.com/news/local/122205a11\\_Napolitano-Border](http://www.tucsoncitizen.com/news/local/122205a11_Napolitano-Border)

<sup>9</sup> Source: USA Today, *In the Southwest, fixing the fence never ends*, [http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-09-16-border-fence\\_N.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/news/nation/2007-09-16-border-fence_N.htm)

<sup>10</sup> Source: Reuters, *Tunnel found under Mexico border crossing gate*, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN2521094020070925>

<sup>11</sup> Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection: *National Border Patrol Strategy*, [http://www.cbp.gov/linkhandler/cgov/border\\_security/border\\_patrol/border\\_patrol\\_ohs/national\\_bp\\_strategy.ctt/national\\_bp\\_strategy.pdf](http://www.cbp.gov/linkhandler/cgov/border_security/border_patrol/border_patrol_ohs/national_bp_strategy.ctt/national_bp_strategy.pdf)