

The Border and Wilderness

The Tumacacori Highlands Wilderness Proposal

The Tumacacori Highlands proposed wilderness shares 5.25 linear miles along the United States/Mexico border of far southern Arizona, adjacent to 4 miles of international border and the existing Pajarita Wilderness, designated in 1990. This area of pristine and unique habitat combines the rugged terrain and biodiversity of the Sierra Madre and Rocky Mountains, and Sonoran and Chihuahuan deserts, to provide a rich diversity of plants and animals, and opportunities for quality hunting and quiet recreation. The proximity of the border is an issue of public concern, as increased densities of traffic affect wildlife, habitat and personal perceptions of solitude and safety.

Wilderness Does Not Affect Border Security

Some people have claimed that wilderness designation might adversely affect border security. **This is not true.** We say this based on three factors:

1. The land itself is a natural deterrent.
2. Existing roads patrolled by Border Patrol remain open.
3. Border Patrol's own agreements with the Departments of Interior and Agriculture ensure that border security operations are effectively conducted on public (National Forest) lands.

A Natural Barrier

The Tumacacori Highlands is an exceptionally rugged piece of southern Arizona - as described by Border Patrol officials when they note there are parts of the border almost-impossible to get to. While there is illegal cross-border activity almost everywhere along the Arizona border, the activity is much higher in the flatter, lower areas close to existing roads and highways. The proposed Tumacacori Highlands wilderness area is some of the most rugged terrain along the border. That's an obstacle in itself.

The rugged terrain of the Tumacacori Highlands is prohibitive for migrants and others to move through the area. Border Patrol often patrols on horseback and helicopter because of the extreme rugged nature of the Highlands. These patrols are not affected by wilderness designation.

Border Patrol Access

The only through-road in the area is Ruby Road, a graded dirt road running east-west a few miles north of the border. Ruby Road and every existing Forest Service road south of it will remain open to Border Patrol vehicular travel under wilderness designation for the purposes of patrolling and public safety, in addition to access by horseback and helicopter.

Border Patrol's Procedures

The Tumacacori Highlands Wilderness proposal explicitly refers to Border Patrol's own procedures, signed by Secretary Chertoff and authorized by the Department of Homeland Security in 2006 to ensure they can continue to aggressively pursue and capture illegal immigrants and drug smugglers in wilderness areas.

Those procedures are detailed in an inter-agency Memorandum Of Understanding (MOU) titled "Regarding Cooperative National Security and Counter terrorism Efforts on Federal Lands along the United States' Borders" between the Department of Homeland Security, the Department of the Interior, and the Department of Agriculture - and signed by DHS Secretary Chertoff on March 24, 2006. This MOU details procedures to be followed on federally-managed public lands, and specifically in designated wilderness areas, including the following:

Section IV, B, 4: "Nothing in this MOU is intended to prevent CBP-BP agents from exercising existing exigent/emergency authorities to access lands, including authority to conduct motorized off-road pursuit of suspected CBVs [cross-border violators] at any time, including in areas designated or recommended as wilderness..."

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Specific Points:

Our Position

We strongly oppose illegal cross-border activity in southern Arizona and support a comprehensive solution that eliminates that activity.

Border Patrol Access

Border Patrol will continue their patrols after wilderness designation.

Wilderness is Compatible with Border Security

The Department of Homeland Security (Border Patrol) has already worked out how they will accomplish what they need to do in wilderness, and elsewhere, with the Department of Agriculture (Forest Service). Secretary Chertoff has signed off on that.

Dual Protection

We need border security that secures our borders and protects our natural American heritage too. We can - and should - have both.

Maintaining Wilderness Character

Notes on Border Related Trash

Some people argue that the Tumacacori Highlands are degraded by border trash. **This is also not true.**

The Tumacacori Highlands do not have the frequent traffic and subsequent trash left by illegal border crossings that can be seen to the east and west of the proposed area... yet. Photos of trash-littered desert washes do not occur within the proposed wilderness area, but they are an example of what could occur without protecting our public lands.

Due to the ruggedness of the terrain and remoteness from travel routes and roads, the Tumacacori Highlands have kept the relatively untouched wilderness character of the American West. Through cooperative efforts with Border Patrol and others, we can do our duty to protect our public wild lands. Sky Island Alliance, together with the Arizona Game and Fish Department, Arizona Hunters Who Care, local ranchers, environmental groups, off-duty border patrol officers and University of Arizona student organizations, can come together in common ground for clean land.

Volunteer!

If you are interested in helping to keep nearby border areas free of trash, the Arizona Game and Fish Department and Arizona Hunters Who Care host regular Trash Pick-up events. To learn more contact:

Tucson Game and Fish Department Office - 520-628-5376
Arizona Hunters Who Care - azhunterwhocare@hotmail.com

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Email: info@tumacacoriwild.org or visit: www.tumacacoriwild.org

Sky Island Alliance is a grassroots organization dedicated to the protection and restoration of the rich natural heritage of native species and habitats in the Sky Island region of the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. Learn more at www.skyislandalliance.org.



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and Desert Seas