

IN THE SHADOW OF THE WALL

CONSERVATION HOTSPOT AT RISK IN THE NEW MEXICO BORDERLANDS



LIKE MANY REGIONS ALONG THE 2,000-MILE U.S.-Mexico boundary, the borderlands of New Mexico are a conservation hotspot, an area with rich biological diversity and high numbers of threatened and endangered species protected by significant binational investment in conservation.

In 2019, the Department of Homeland Security issued a waiver of 25 U.S. laws to replace 25 miles of existing vehicle barriers in Doña Ana County with “primary pedestrian bollard wall,” vertical fixed posts up to 30 feet tall. It has further plans to replace an additional 70 miles of vehicle barriers in the ecologically valuable Bootheel region in the southwest corner of the state. Removing the existing barrier and replacing it with more obtrusive bollard wall will further stress sensitive ecosystems and the relationships vital to binational conservation and threaten the investment the United States and Mexico have made in protecting wildlife and habitat.

Conservation lands and collaborations

The New Mexico border with Mexico is 180 miles long and bisects stretches of the vast **Chihuahuan Desert** and the rugged **Sky Islands landscape**. The Chihuahuan Desert has extraordinary diversity of succulents and cactuses, including the largest assemblage of endangered cactuses in America. This desert is also part of the historical range of the **Mexican gray wolf**, a species only recently reintroduced to the United States. In 2017, a Mexican wolf was tracked moving from Mexico to the United States and back in an area where new bollard wall is now being installed.



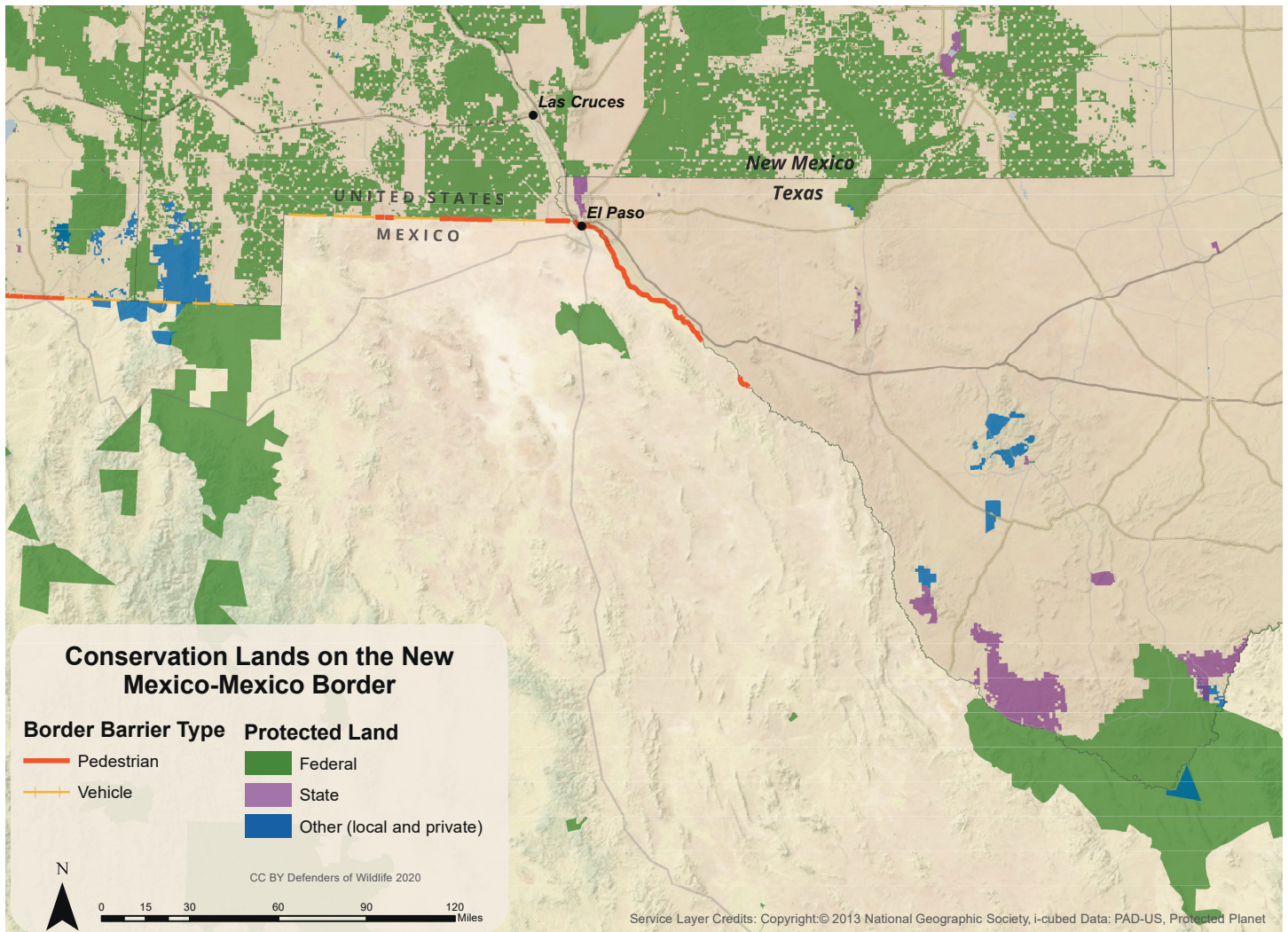
Bollard wall (right) is replacing existing vehicle barriers (left) on the U.S.-Mexico border. (Photos not to scale.)

The Chihuahuan region is also the site of the newly designated **Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument** in New Mexico and the **Médanos de Samalayuca Natural Protected Area** in Mexico.

The Sky Islands region—named for the scattered peaks that rise from its desert flatlands—lies mostly in Arizona, but a portion extends into the “boot heel” of New Mexico. Temperate and subtropical climates converge in the Sky Islands, making it one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world. Jaguars and black bears coexist along the U.S.-Mexico border, and the world’s northernmost population of military macaws nest near bald eagles in Sonora’s **Northern Jaguar Reserve**, 120 miles south of the border.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has designated 110,438 acres in the boot heel as critical habitat for the jaguar. Protected lands on the Mexican side include the huge **Janos Biosphere Reserve**, where bison and black-footed ferrets from U.S. source populations were reintroduced in the last decade, and the reserves created by Cuenca Los Ojos, a private foundation.

LEFT PHOTO: MAWI ALBRECHT/U.S. CUSTOMS & BORDER PROTECTION; RIGHT PHOTO COURTESY OF SOUTHWEST ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER



The looming threat of the wall

The border wall and associated infrastructure and activity put wildlife, habitat and conservation investment at risk along the entire U.S.-Mexico border by:

- Further imperiling already rare species in which the United States and Mexico have significant investments.
- Making it impossible to maintain the large connected, cross-border populations important for the genetic health and persistence of populations of Mexican wolves, **jaguars, bighorn sheep, bison, ocelots** and other species.
- Wasting billions of dollars that could otherwise be spent on conservation and other worthwhile endeavors.
- Affecting aesthetics and consequently diminishing revenues in municipalities with economies based

on ecotourism or outdoor recreation.

- Cooling the relationships that drive the binational cooperation essential for successful conservation in the borderlands.

We cannot allow a wall to put our long, rich history of conservation across the international border with Mexico at risk. There are far better uses for taxpayer dollars.



MEXICAN GRAY WOLF © WOLF CONSERVATION CENTER



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