

# IN THE SHADOW OF THE WALL

CONSERVATION HOTSPOTS AT RISK IN THE ARIZONA BORDERLANDS



## THE 2,000-MILE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER

passes through many conservation hotspots. These are areas important to endangered and threatened species and other wildlife and in which the United States and Mexico have significant investments in conservation lands and collaborative projects. Arizona has two borderlands conservation hotspots: the Sonoran Desert and the Sky Islands. Extending the border wall in these areas would:

- Further imperil already rare, endangered and threatened species and wildlife habitat in the United States and Mexico.
- Make it impossible to maintain the large areas of connected habitat necessary to maintain healthy cross-border populations of Mexican wolves, jaguars, bighorn sheep, ocelots and other species.
- Waste billions of taxpayer dollars that could otherwise be spent on conservation or other worthwhile endeavors.
- Hurt local economies dependent on ecotourism and outdoor recreation.
- Stymie bilateral efforts essential for successful borderlands conservation.

### Conservation lands and collaborations on the line *In the Sonoran Desert...*

The Sonoran Desert and its forested mountains support 60 species of mammals, 350 birds, 20 amphibians, 100 reptiles and 30 native fish. Protected public lands on the U.S. side of the desert include Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge in the Altar Valley, and Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge—home of a captive-breeding program for the rare and endangered Sonoran pronghorn. On the Mexico side of the border, El Pinacate Biosphere Reserve protects a mosaic of intact desert habitats, including large caves crucial for endangered lesser long-nosed bats.

Examples of collaborative conservation in the Sonoran Desert include:

- The Altar Valley Conservation Alliance, formed by landowners in south-central Pima County has directed more than \$4 million to improving grazing lands to the benefit the watershed and native species.



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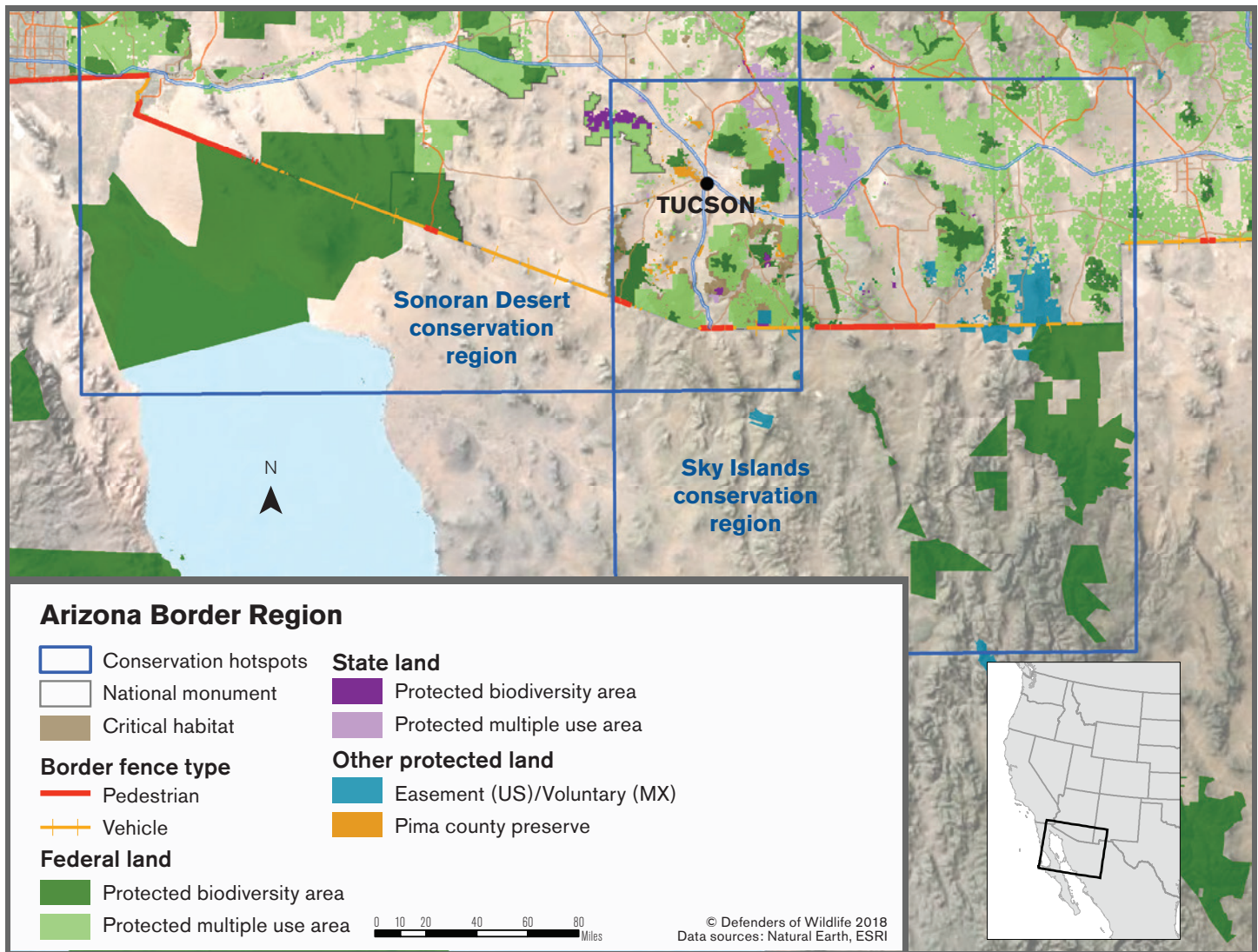
**“If we don’t collaborate, we will keep losing wildlife populations, impoverishing the borderlands regions from a biological perspective.”**

—Rurik List, ecology professor,  
*Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*

- The Mexico Program of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife works with Mexico’s Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources and other partners on both sides of the border to monitor, protect and recover at-risk species like the Chiricahua leopard frog, flat-tailed horned lizard, Sonoyta mud turtle, lesser long-nosed bat, cactus ferruginous pygmy-owl and Sonoran pronghorn.
- The Sonoran Joint Venture administers a competitive grant program that supports 19 U.S. and Mexican organizations conducting projects like bird surveys, habitat monitoring and public education and outreach.

### *In the Sky Islands...*

Temperate and tropic conditions meet in the Sky Islands, making it one of the most biologically diverse regions in the world. Named for the scattered mountains rising from its desert flatlands, the Sky Islands region spans Arizona, the southwestern corner of New Mexico and two Mexican states. The Lower San Pedro—the last undammed river and most important bird migration flyway in the U.S. Southwest—flows north from Mexico through the region. Conservation lands on the U.S. side include the private Diamond A Ranch, the San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge and several designated wildernesses and wilderness study areas.



Mexican borderlands reserves include the huge Janos Biosphere Reserve the Northern Jaguar Reserve and lands set aside by Cuenca Los Ojos, a private foundation.

Examples of collaborative conservation in the Sky Islands include:

- Numerous partnership projects address specific conservations goals. A multi-million-dollar project run by the University of Arizona monitors jaguars and other border cats with trail camera. Agencies and groups on both sides of the border jointly work on efforts to re-establish a cross-border bison herd, to recover endangered Mexican wolf and Sonoran pronghorn populations, to restore grasslands and streamside habitat, and to a build ponds for endangered longfin dace.

- Cuenca Los Ojos, a Mexican foundation, restores grasslands and wetlands on the damaged lands it acquires and works closely with adjacent San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge on many projects.
- The Arizona Malpai Borderlands Group, holds conservation easements on 78,000 acres of border ranchlands and has restored habitat for jaguars, leopard frogs, long-nosed bats and other species.

The Trump administration’s border wall would put wild-life and habitat and collaboration between the United States and Mexico at risk. We cannot allow that to happen. We can find far better uses for taxpayer dollars than walling off our southern border. Nothing less than our nation’s natural heritage is at risk.



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