



**THE 2,000-MILE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER PASSES** through several conservation hotspots where the United States and Mexico have significant investments in conservation lands and collaborative projects to protect endangered and threatened species and other wildlife. Texas has two hotspots: the Big Bend area along the Rio Grande to the west and the Lower Rio Grande Valley on the Gulf Coast in the east.

Extending the border wall in these areas would have devastating consequences:

- Further imperil rare, endangered and threatened species and their habitat.
- Make it impossible to maintain the large areas of connected habitat necessary to maintain healthy cross-border populations of jaguars, ocelots and other species.
- Waste billions of taxpayer dollars that could help conserve these species.
- 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 Big Bend...**

The Rio Grande loops through the Big Bend region, cutting a green path through the fragile Chihuahuan Desert, the most biologically diverse desert in the Western Hemisphere. The Chihuahuan is home to 446 bird, 3,600 insect, 75 mammal and more than 1,500 plant species.

The 4,687 square-miles of national and state protected areas on the border include Big Bend National Park in the U.S., and Parque Nacional Cañon de Santa Elena, Área de Protección de Flora y Fauna Ocampo and Maderas del Carmen Área de Protección de Flora y Fauna in Mexico. In recognition of their global ecological importance, the United Nations designated Big Bend National Park and Maderas del Carmen “Man and the Biosphere” reserves.

### **Examples of collaborative conservation**

- The Mexico-based, global cement company, Cemex, is teamed with Conservation International, the WILD Foundation and others on the El



Anti-wall protestors unite in Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, a top U.S. birding spot that contributes more than \$35 million per year to the local economy.

**“Putting the border wall in the Santa Ana would be like dropping a bomb on it.”**

—Kurt Naville, refuge volunteer

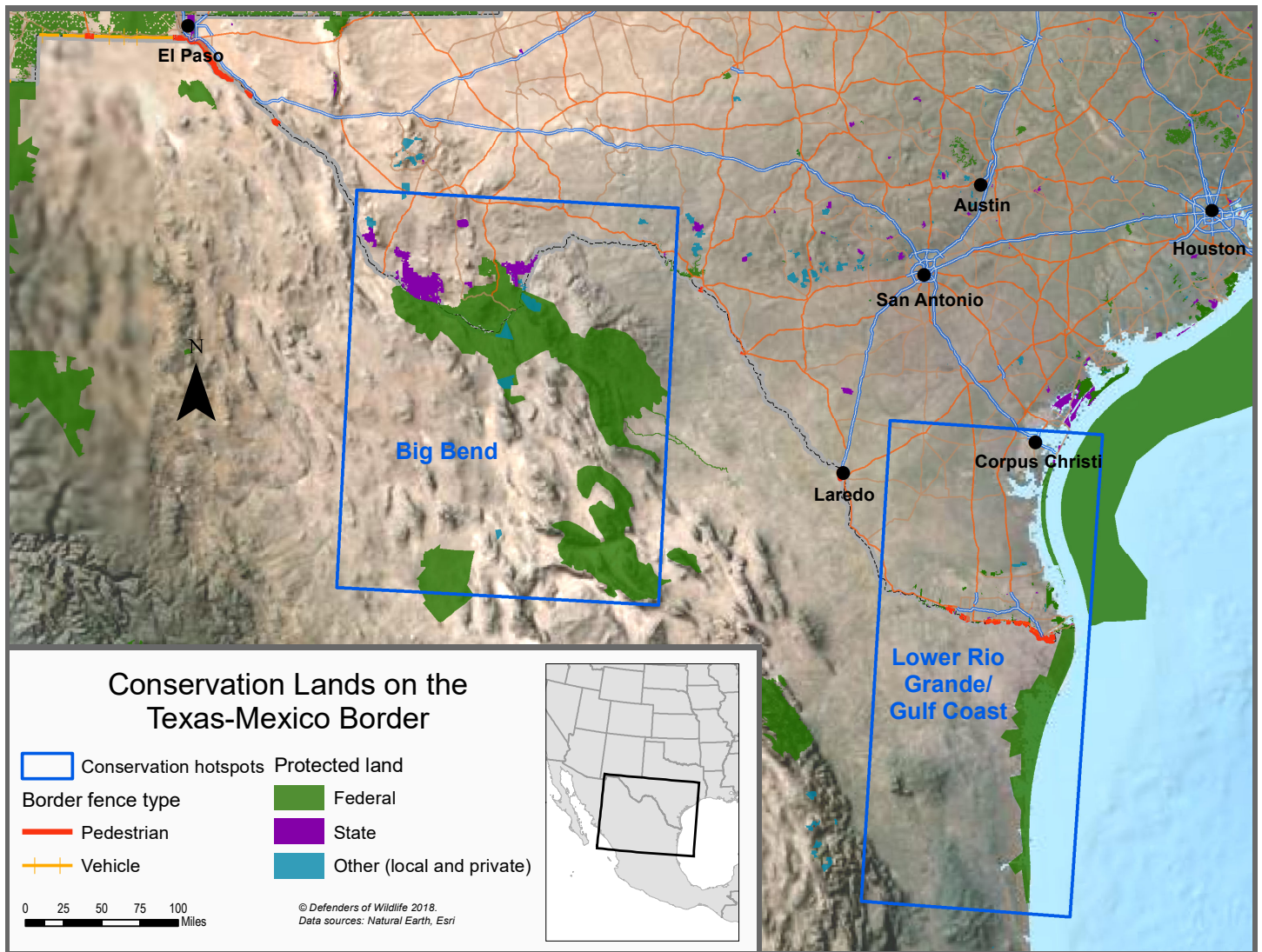
Carmen-Big Bend Conservation Corridor Initiative, an effort to acquire and protect 500,000 acres of land on both sides of the border.

- The Big Bend Conservation Cooperative involves over 30 U.S. and Mexican agencies, conservation groups, corporations and universities in projects like controlling invasive plants along the river, reintroducing the Rio Grande silvery minnow, Sonoran pronghorn and other species; and restoring habitat on public and private lands.
- The Greater Big Bend Coalition supports restoration projects and is building momentum for establishing Big Bend International Park.

### **In the Lower Rio Grande Valley...**

At the turn of the 20th century, subtropical riparian forest lined the banks of the Rio Grande. Today, less than 5 percent of this forest remains in the United States, 1 percent in Mexico. Most of the remaining land is privately held, making the protected borderlands in the valley all the more precious.

The Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge draws 165,000 visitors annually, generating over \$35 million for the local economy. The 98,000-acre Laguna Atascosa National Wildlife Refuge borders Laguna Madre, the



coastal lagoon that hosts hundreds of thousands of shorebirds and extends into Mexico, where it is part of the 1.4 million acre Laguna Madre and Delta del Rio Bravo Natural Protected Area. Lower Rio Grande National Wildlife Refuge is a collection of more than 100 small tracts strung along a 100-mile stretch of the river acquired with the ambitious goal of protecting an essential wildlife corridor along the Rio Grande. A border wall through these wild lands would decimate vital habitat for threatened and endangered species.

### Examples of collaborative conservation

- A binational team of agencies and volunteers dedicated to the recovery of endangered Kemp’s Ridley sea turtles moves eggs from vulnerable nest sites to protected hatching corrals.

- Experts from the U.S. and Mexico are implementing a jointly developed ocelot recovery plan with the goal of ensuring that the cats can freely cross the border to interbreed, a requirement for healthy, sustainable populations (FWS 2016).
- The U.S.-based Coastal Bend, Bays and Estuaries Program works with schools and nonprofits to protect birds in the Laguna Madre in Texas and in Mexico.

The Trump administration’s border wall would jeopardize wildlife, habitat and years of conservation progress and collaboration between the United States and Mexico. We cannot allow that to happen. There are 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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