

FUNDING DAMAGING BORDER WALL CONSTRUCTION

Passed 212-203

SUMMARY:

The House passed an appropriations bill that would allocate \$600 million in funding for damaging new border wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, thereby harming border wildlife, border lands, and border communities while also failing to provide \$225 million requested by the president for activities to mitigate impacts related to border wall construction. (*June 28, 2024, Roll Call No. 333*)

BACKGROUND:

Nearly one-third of the 1,953-mile U.S.-Mexico border lies within military, tribal, and public lands, including wilderness areas, national wildlife refuges, national forests, national monuments, state parks and hundreds of miles within the national park system. Much of this country's most spectacular and imperiled wildlife, including Mexican wolves, jaguars, ocelot, bighorn sheep, Sonoran pronghorn, and hundreds of bird species, depend upon protected public lands along the border for intact habitat and survival.

Former President Trump spent billions of dollars to build hundreds of miles of wall along the U.S.-Mexico border, most with funds diverted from the Department of Defense (DOD). Prior to the Trump administration, nearly 700 miles of wall had been built along the border, primarily under President George W. Bush's administration. Construction of the border wall and related infrastructure can be exempted from all federal, state, or local laws under waiver authority provided to the Secretary of Homeland Security by the 2005 REAL ID Act. Secretaries of Homeland Security have used this authority to waive a combined total of 84 federal laws plus all related state and local laws for wall construction under the Trump, Bush, and Biden administrations, waiving many of these repeatedly for various sites, including the Endangered Species Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Water Act, and the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act.

The damage that has been done and will be done to the people, communities, land and wildlife along the border is incalculable. The wall bisects some of the most sensitive and biodiverse habitat in the United States including many of our nation's most prized national wildlife refuges, forests, parks and wilderness areas and encompassing the ranges of more than 1,500 plants and animals including 83 species listed under the Endangered Species Act. Walls block wildlife migration routes, trap and drown animals during floods, increase mortality of endangered and vulnerable species, and fragment habitat. More than 2,700 scientists from 43 countries declared the wall a disaster for biodiversity in a peer-reviewed article.

The FY 2025 Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, H. R. 8752, would expand on that disaster by allocating \$600 million in new wall funding, restricted to construction of 18-to-30-foot bollard pedestrian walls with anti-climb and anti-dig features which would prevent any adaptation of wall design that would help mitigate impacts of construction to border communities or the border environment including wildlife, lands, and water resources. The bill requires obligation of these funds no later than 120 days after enactment. H.R. 8752 also fails to meet the president's FY 2025 budget request for statutory language authorizing the transfer of up to \$225 million in funding

from the Department of Homeland Security to the land management agencies for environmental and other mitigation activities, including land acquisition, related to border wall construction.

OUTCOME:

On June 28, 2024, the House passed H.R. 8752, 212-203. “No” was the pro-conservation vote.