

NEWS RELEASE

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Agency Coordination Improves Border Security and Public Lands Protection

New Report Presents Case Studies, Other Examples of Successful Agency Efforts

A new research report released today documents how interagency cooperation along the U.S.-Mexico border has improved both border security *and* the protection of wilderness areas and wildlife refuges adjacent to the border. “**Interagency Cooperation on U.S.-Mexico Border Wilderness Issues**,” authored by Dr. Kirk Emerson, environmental mediator and research associate at the University of Arizona’s School of Government and Public Policy and the Udall Center for Studies in Public Policy, overviews numerous successful cooperative inter-agency activities occurring along the southwestern U.S. border in wilderness and other protected areas despite challenges that can make such cooperation difficult.

The report includes six border area case studies—from Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, and California—and numerous other examples of successful collaboration to meet the twin goals of national security and public lands stewardship by agencies within the U.S. Departments of Homeland Security, Interior, and Agriculture, with an emphasis on U.S. Border Patrol (USBP) and federal land management agencies. The report is based on research Dr. Emerson conducted during the summer of 2010, including over 50 interviews with border security professionals, land management agencies, and border areas.

Recent media reports have emphasized—and in some cases sensationalized—the challenges of meeting these twin goals and cases where total success has been elusive. However, the reality is that, after much trial and error, cooperation among federal departments and agencies charged with protection of the border and public land management has improved and led to many successes in the past few years. This report generally corroborates the results of a recently issued GAO report on interagency cooperation that found increased collaboration among the Border Patrol and federal land management agencies.

“Close collaboration between the Border Patrol and the Department of the Interior on many stretches of the border, including wilderness areas, has improved border security while sustaining land protections and community livelihoods,” said Lynn Scarlett, former deputy secretary of the Department of the Interior under President George W. Bush.

The report provides examples of this cooperation in a variety of contexts including interagency communications, enhanced joint capacity, border security assistance by land management agencies, assistance in mitigation and restoration, and joint efforts to protect public health and safety.

“There can be no compromise in securing America against those who would do us harm. But, common sense solutions can be achieved,” said Ron Colburn, former deputy chief of the U.S. Border Patrol who worked

at the agency for over 31 years. “I believe that the collaborative process has produced and will continue to produce righteous outcomes in protecting America while also protecting our pristine wild lands.”

One of the report’s case studies analyzes the consultative and stakeholder process behind the proposed Organ Mountains–Desert Peaks Wilderness Act (S. 1689). The provisions of this bill would create new wilderness and protected areas near the border that, according to Commissioner Alan Bersin of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, “would significantly enhance the flexibility of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) to operate in this border area.”

Dr. Kirk Emerson is also the former director of the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution of the Morris K. and Stewart L. Udall Foundation. She has authored several peer-reviewed publications and book chapters on collaborative resource management and environmental conflict resolution (see http://home.mindspring.com/~kirk_emerson). This research report was completed for the New Mexico Wildlife Federation and the New Mexico Wilderness Alliance.

“Interagency Cooperation on U.S.-Mexico Border Wilderness Issues” can be found online at: http://kirk_emerson.home.mindspring.com/Interagency_Border_Cooperation.pdf.

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