

**U.S. House of Representatives**  
**Committee on Natural Resources**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

March 18, 2021

The Honorable Alejandro Mayorkas  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
245 Murray Lane, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Mayorkas,

Last month, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) encountered 100,441 people attempting entry through the Southwest border, reflecting a 28 percent increase in illegal crossings since January 2021.<sup>1</sup> The surge of illegal border crossings continues, with CBP reporting just a few days ago that “agents apprehended 134 illegal aliens” near Lomas, Texas, and then hours later, another “113 illegal aliens comprised of families and unaccompanied alien children (UAC)” near La Grulla, Texas.<sup>2</sup> On his first day in office, President Biden took administrative action to reverse many of President Trump’s immigration policies, including halting construction of the wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.<sup>3</sup> These decisions have opened the United States’ Southern border to human traffickers and drug cartels.<sup>4</sup> In addition to health and safety concerns, illegal immigration has a severe impact on the environment.

The environmental consequences of illegal immigration are well documented. Both of us have personally witnessed scattered trash and damage to our lands during official tours of the Southern border. Deserts are used as dumping sites<sup>5</sup> and vegetation is destroyed.<sup>6</sup> For example, between 2007 and 2018, 460,000 pounds of trash discarded by illegal migrants were collected along the 370 miles of the Arizona-Mexico border.<sup>7</sup> Based on past cleanups, the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality estimates that each border crosser leaves “approximately six to eight pounds of trash in the desert during their journey.”<sup>8</sup> The trash left behind by illegal

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<sup>1</sup> Press Release: U.S. Customs and Border Protection, CPB Announces February 2021 Operation Update (Mar. 10, 2021), *available at* <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/cbp-announces-february-2021-operational-update>.

<sup>2</sup> Press Release: Large Groups Continue to Flow Into the RGV (Mar. 15, 2021), *available at* <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/local-media-release/large-groups-continue-flow-rgv>.

<sup>3</sup> Proclamation No. 10142, 86 Fed. Reg. 16, 7225.

<sup>4</sup> Steven Groves, *Have a Care for U.S. Sovereignty*, THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION (Feb. 12, 2021), <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/commentary/have-care-us-sovereignty>.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Birmingham, *N4T Investigators: Border Trash*, News4 Tucson (May 13, 2019), <https://kvoa.com/news/2019/05/13/n4t-investigators-border-trash/>.

<sup>6</sup> ARIZONA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY, Arizona Border Trash, <https://www.azbordertrash.gov/about.html>.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *Id.*

migrants includes human waste, backpacks, medical products, plastic, vehicles, and clothing, all of which pose risks to wildlife.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to jeopardizing the safety of wildlife, their habitats are decimated as well. Six hundred ninety-three miles of the Southern border is federal or Indian-owned land,<sup>10</sup> some of which the United States has designated as protected areas. Illegal migrants do not respect these protections. For example, delicate sites such as the Sonoran Desert National Monument and Ironwood Forest National Monument required habitat restoration and mitigation after being used as major illegal smuggling corridors.<sup>11</sup> The Natural Resources Committee also heard testimony in previous hearings of various examples of illegal migrant destruction of federal land, including:

- significant destruction of Organ Pipe National Monument and the creation of illegal trails throughout Buenos Aires National Wildlife Refuge;<sup>12</sup>
- campfires causing more than 370 acres of the Cleveland National Forest to burn in 2005;<sup>13</sup> and
- adverse impact to approximately 203 threatened, endangered, or sensitive species in the Coronado National Forest.<sup>14</sup>

Not only are they destroying wildlife habitats, illegal migrants are also vandalizing American citizens' properties.<sup>15</sup> As the number of illegal migrants crossing the border increases, greater damages to federal lands are anticipated.

Decreasing illegal crossings protects our border environment, and while a border wall serves as an effective deterrent,<sup>16</sup> the expansion is no longer under construction. We cannot ignore the environmental impact of illegal migrants when devising immigration enforcement policy. Therefore, to assist us with our oversight activities, please produce the following, as soon as possible, but no later than 5:00 p.m., April 1, 2021:

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<sup>9</sup> *Id.*

<sup>10</sup> Memorandum from Carol Hardy Vincent, Specialist in Natural Resources Policy, Congressional Research Service, to Staff, Oversight and Investigations Subcomm., H. Comm. on Nat. Res. (Nov. 9, 2017) (on file with Comm.).

<sup>11</sup> *Southern Arizona Project, 2016 Border Report*, BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT, U.S. DEP'T OF THE INTERIOR, available at <https://www.blm.gov/sites/blm.gov/files/documents/files/SAP%202016%20%28508%20Final%29.pdf>.

<sup>12</sup> *Enhancing DHS' Efforts to Disrupt Alien Smuggling Across Our Border: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Border, Maritime, and Global Counterterrorism of the H. Comm. on Homeland Security*, 111th Cong. (2010) (statement of Janice L. Kephart, Director of National Security Policy, Center for Immigration Studies).

<sup>13</sup> *The Costs of Denying Border Patrol Access: Our Environment and Security: Hearing Before the Subcomm. on Oversight and Investigations of the H. Comm. on Nat. Res.*, 115th Cong. (2018) (statement of Hon. Andrew R. Arthur, Resident Fellow in Law and Policy, Center for Immigration Studies).

<sup>14</sup> *Id.*

<sup>15</sup> *Texas Rancher Says Illegal Immigrants Are Repeatedly Causing Property Damage and Trashing His Land*, THE DAILY CALLER (Mar. 12, 2021), [https://www.ntd.com/texas-rancher-says-illegal-immigrants-are-repeatedly-causing-property-damage-and-trashing-his-land\\_579995.html](https://www.ntd.com/texas-rancher-says-illegal-immigrants-are-repeatedly-causing-property-damage-and-trashing-his-land_579995.html).

<sup>16</sup> Press Release, Department of Homeland Security, The Border Wall System is Deployed, Effective and Disrupting Criminals and Smugglers (Oct. 29, 2020), available at <https://www.dhs.gov/news/2020/10/29/border-wall-system-deployed-effective-and-disrupting-criminals-and-smugglers>.

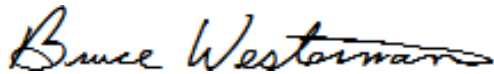
1. All documents referring or related to the environmental analyses conducted for the El Paso, Rio Grande Valley, and Laredo border sectors for FY17 through FY19.
2. A document describing anticipated environmental damage due to the February 2021 surge of illegal border crossings on the Southern border.

Please also provide a briefing, as soon as possible, but no later than March 25, 2021, from the CBP Wall Team for Republican Committee staff on the environmental impacts of halting construction of the border wall.

Please deliver your response to room 1329 of the Longworth House Office Building. An attachment contains additional instructions for responding to this request.

Please contact the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Minority staff at (202) 225-2761 with any questions about this request. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Bruce Westerman  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Natural Resources



Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.  
Ranking Member  
Oversight and Investigations  
Subcommittee

cc: The Honorable Debra Haaland, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior  
The Honorable Raúl Grijalva, Chair, Natural Resources Committee

Enclosure