



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
Washington, DC 20240

APR 14 2015

The Honorable Louie Gohmert
Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight & Investigations
Committee on Natural Resources
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Thank you for your letter of March 27, 2015 requesting information about Department of Homeland Security (DHS) access to Department of the Interior (DOI) lands in the four southwestern states bordering Mexico. The Secretary has asked that I provide this response to you on her behalf.

We are very encouraged with the progress we have made with DHS to secure our nation's borders while at the same time protecting the valuable natural resources that occur in the region pursuant to our statutory responsibilities. We are confident that we have and will continue to accomplish both of these important tasks. We have worked closely with U.S. Customs and Border Protection for years to rapidly provide access to DOI lands where needed.

A recent example is the placement of Ground Based Observation and Surveillance antennas at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument. When the National Park Service was informed of the possibility of deploying these units, Monument staff worked to expedite the process and there were no delays resulting from environmental review. All four antennae that were available are now deployed and are acting to deter and interdict illegal activity on DOI lands. We agree wholeheartedly with your comment that a safe and secure border will benefit DOI lands. We have seen the benefits of improved border security on DOI lands all along the border. This is one example of how we have been able to speed review times to address border security needs but there are many more. We would welcome the opportunity to brief you and your staff on the accomplishments we have been able to achieve working with DHS.

Concerning mitigation or other payments made by DHS, payments were initiated during the Bush Administration and are consistent with Congressional direction at the time and a Letter of Commitment for up to \$50 million dollars signed by Secretary Dirk Kempthorne and Commissioner Ralph Basham of U.S. Customs and Border Protection in 2010. To date we have received over \$20 million dollars under this agreement and we are continuing our on-going collaboration with DHS. We have worked in close cooperation with DHS to direct these funds in areas where they can do the most good to conserve natural resources while assuring that the work conducted will not impact border security activities. We will continue to search our records to identify all such funds and provide a summary as soon as possible.

Establishment of the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument was preceded by extensive public involvement. In addition, discussions with DHS, particularly the U.S. Border Patrol, resulted in changes to the original proposal to address border security concerns.

In sum, we are proud of the work we have been able to accomplish in cooperation with the Department of Homeland Security. The 2006 Memorandum of Understanding has served us well and we have been able to provide critical access for border security purposes. Indeed, we have provided DOI lands for construction of Forward Operating Bases, facilities for horse patrol units and for equipment storage in a number of locations close to the border. Providing access in close proximity to the border enhances the capability of DHS to respond to illegal activity and also improves safety for the visiting public. In addition, we are working diligently to assist DHS in the placement of surveillance towers in Arizona and South Texas, some of which will be on DOI lands and we are confident that the environment will benefit and the border will be more secure.

We have begun our search for records pursuant to your request. Again, we would welcome the opportunity to brief you and your staff on the work we have done with DHS.

We appreciate your interest in this matter. If you or your staff has additional questions, please feel free to contact Mr. Jason Powell, Office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, at (202) 208-4946.

A similar letter is being sent to Representative Rob Bishop, Chairman of the Committee on Natural Resources, who cosigned your letter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Thorsen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kim Thorsen
Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public
Safety, Resource Protection, and Emergency
Services

cc: Gil Kerlikowske, Commissioner, Customs and Border Protection
Michael Fisher, Chief, U.S. Border Patrol



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