

March 5, 2018

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Chairman
Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S-128, Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Pat Leahy
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
S-146A, Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
H-305, Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nita Lowey
Ranking Member
House Committee on Appropriations
United States House of Representatives
1016 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Please Oppose Border Wall Funding in FY 2018 Omnibus Appropriations

Dear Chairman Cochran, Ranking Member Leahy, Chairman Frelinghuysen and Ranking Member Lowey:

As organizations representing civil rights, faith, animal protection, environmental, indigenous, and border communities, we urge you to reject funding for new border wall construction in the final FY 2018 omnibus appropriations bill, including bollard fencing, levee wall and the conversion of existing vehicle barriers to border walls and to oppose the waiver of federal laws along the border.

As you know, the false narrative of a violent and insecure border region has long been used to justify and advance anti-immigrant, anti-border, pro-criminalization, and anti-environmental legislation that has negative economic and civil rights impacts on border communities. The wall, increased militarization of the southern border, the criminalization of immigrants and the destruction of wildlife habitat are actions that do not improve security of the border region (which continues to be one of the safest regions in the country). A bipartisan omnibus appropriations bill should not include funding that would draw resources away from urgently needed infrastructure – including schools, roads, and health clinics – for structures that are widely opposed by border communities, unnecessary, and show disrespect for the rights of Native Americans and frontline Latino border communities and that also guarantee excess flooding, private property seizures, and devastating environmental damage. Limited border security resources would be much more wisely invested in modernizing the infrastructure and technology at our ports of entry, which would enhance national security, accelerate drug interdiction, and facilitate efficient commerce with our third largest trading partner. We urge you to reject any additional amounts of funding for border wall construction.

Nowhere have the impacts of the border wall galvanized so much public outcry as in the communities of South Texas. The budget request for FY 2018 and the Senate draft and House Department of Homeland Security appropriations bills include \$1.6 billion for the construction of 60 miles of new pedestrian bollard wall and levee wall in the Lower Rio Grande Valley in Texas. Construction of these walls would further damage and fragment fragile South Texas borderlands and border communities who have already witnessed the devastation caused by existing fence structures

and the loss of key protections for property, water, land, wildlife and the environment through the waiver of critical laws. This funding will be used to wall off and destroy the incomparable Santa Ana National Wildlife Refuge, a biological treasure that provides habitat for more than 400 species of birds, more than 300 species of butterflies and at least 8 species protected under the Endangered Species Act, including the critically imperiled ocelot. The Refuge is also the centerpiece of nature tourism in the Rio Grande Valley which provides \$463 million per year¹ in economic benefits for the local communities who are opposed to construction of the wall.

Walls are a fiscally irresponsible and wasteful use of resources. Last, year the Government Accountability Office (GAO) concluded that Border Patrol “cannot measure the contribution of fencing to border security operations.”² Moreover, in 2017, Border Patrol recorded the lowest level of unauthorized migration across the southern border on record.³

As of today, border walls, fencing, and other barriers already exist along nearly 700 miles of the Southern border. These walls stand as hateful symbols of division in otherwise connected borderlands communities, dividing neighborhoods, blocking wildlife and disrupting the flow of water, with devastating impacts.

Multiple studies have documented negative impacts to native species such as bighorn sheep, coati, puma and cactus ferruginous pygmy owl from current structures, including pedestrian fencing, mesh wall/fencing, levee walls and bollard fencing.⁴ Border walls also undermine binational conservation efforts to manage protected areas and recover endangered species like jaguar, Sonoran pronghorn and ocelot that rely upon cross-border habitat and movement.

Existing border walls have been designed and constructed with no environmental review, as otherwise required by federal law, because of the authority to waive and federal, state, or local law granted to the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security by Congress under the Real ID Act of 2005. The result has been devastating not just to wildlife, but to local communities that have experienced deadly flooding and lost access to important cultural heritage sites due to poorly designed and impenetrable fences and walls.⁵

It is long past time to put an end to border security measures that waste limited federal resources, inflict harm on border communities, destroy habitat, divert water resources, and harm people and wildlife. Except for vehicle barriers, which create the least impediment to the movement of wildlife

¹ Woosnam K.M. et al. 2012. Economic Impact of Nature Tourism on the Rio Grande Valley: Considering Peak and Off-Peak Visitation for 2011. Texas A&M University.

² Government Accountability Office (Feb. 2017). Southwest Border Security: Additional Actions Needed to Better Assess Fencing’s Contributions to Operations and Provide Guidance for Identifying Capability Gaps. (GAO Publication No. 17-331). pg. 25.
<https://www.gao.gov/assets/690/682838.pdf>.

³ U.S. Customs and Border Protection (Dec. 5, 2017). CBP Border Security Report FY 2017, pg. 1.
<https://www.cbp.gov/sites/default/files/assets/documents/2017-Dec/cbp-border-security-report-fy2017.pdf>.

⁴ Flesch, et al, ‘Potential Effects of the United States-Mexico Border Fence on Wildlife,’ Conservation Biology, 2009.; Lasky, et al, ‘Conservation Biogeography of the U.S.-Mexico Border: A Transcontinental Risk Assessment of Barriers to Animal Dispersal,’ Diversity and Distributions, 2011.; McCallum, et al, ‘Conservation on International Boundaries: The Impact of Security Barriers on Selected Terrestrial Mammals in Four Protected Areas in Arizona, USA, Plos One, 2014.

⁵ Brady McCombs, *Report: Faulty dam design turned border fence into dam*, Arizona Daily Star (August 15, 2008), http://tucson.com/news/local/border/report-faulty-design-turned-border-fence-into-dam/article_fc6f1f2f-5820-5c08-be14-cf037a69ace8.html; Julian Aguilar, *Anti-wall activists march to protect church in Rio Grande Valley*, Texas Tribune (August 12, 2017), <https://www.texastribune.org/2017/08/12/opposition-trumps-wall-increases-rio-grande-valley/>.

and water across the border, funding for the addition or conversion of all other current barriers constitutes new border wall.

Again, we urge you to reject any funding for the construction of additional border wall, fence, or levee wall or conversion of vehicle barriers to wall in the final FY 2018 omnibus appropriations bill. Limited border security resources would be much more wisely invested in modernizing both infrastructure and technology at our ports of entry – measures which would actually enhance both national security and trade.

Thank you for your attention. Our millions of members and supporters nationwide are counting on you.

Sincerely,

Adelita San Vicente Tello
Alaska Wilderness League
American Forests
American Rivers
Animal Welfare Institute
Borderlands Restoration Network
Born Free USA
Center for Biological Diversity
Clean Water Action
Climate Hawks Vote
Colibrí Center for Human Rights
Cruzando Fronteras, Border Action Network
Defenders of Wildlife
Delaware Ecumenical Council on Children and Families
Earth Law Center
Earthjustice
Earthworks
Eastern Coyote/Coywolf Research
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Protection Information Center
Franciscan Action Network
Friends of Blackwater
Friends of Friendship Park
Friends of the Sonoran Desert
Friends of the Wildlife Corridor
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Green Science Policy Institute
GreenLatinos
Hip Hop Caucus
Hispanic Federation
Klamath Forest Alliance
League of Conservation Voters
Mennonite Central Committee U.S. Washington Office
National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights

National Parks Conservation Association
Native Plant Conservation Campaign
Natural Resources Defense Council
New Mexico Environmental Law Center
PICO National Network
Power Shift Network
Rachel's Action Network
Rachel's Network
Rocky Mountain Wild
San Juan Citizens Alliance
San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council
Sierra Club
Southwest Environmental Center
St. Mark's Presbyterian Church
Texas Border Coalition
The Rewilding Institute
The Wilderness Society
Together Colorado
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Upper Gila Watershed Alliance
White Mountain Conservation League
WildEarth Guardians
Wildlands Network
Wolf Conservation Center