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## LOCAL news

### Feds planning nearly 25 miles of new border wall near Coronado National Forest

Environmentalists decry project in Southeastern Arizona as 'ecological catastrophe'

Posted Apr 14, 2025, 5:07 pm

Paul Ingram  
TucsonSentinel.com



Paul Ingram/TucsonSentinel.com



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**U.** S. Customs and Border Protection plans to build nearly 25 miles of new border wall in the San Rafael Valley, sealing up the "biological hotspot" in Southern Arizona as part of a wider push to close gaps left during the last Trump administration.

CBP officials are planning to construct approximately 24.7 miles of "new primary barrier" to close a gap just south of the Coronado National Forest in Cochise County. The new project would span across a valley of protected grasslands, which represents one of the few areas without a border barrier.

corn/sharer.php?report/041125\_border\_wall/feds  
Despite a series of lawsuits and public outcry, CBP contractors built nearly 452 miles of new wall during the Trump administration, much of it across protected landscapes in Arizona, including the Cabeza Prieta National Wildlife Refuge, the Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, and the San Bernardino National Wildlife Refuge. In some remote, rugged areas contractors carved their way through mountainsides, often using explosives to cut through the rock, leaving huge scars in the wilderness. 5 miles of new border wall near Holbrook/popout?  
In 2019, the Sierra Club sued the Trump administration challenging how the administration sought to easily bypass the Department of Interior's quiet about border barriers in Arizona. As part of a settlement, a CBP official said the agency is still considering "proposed amendments" to a settlement agreement over the agency's command of the Santa Cruz River and Coronado National Memorial and may open additional 2.5 miles of new border wall near Sonoita watergates in Arizona and New Mexico.  
National Forest%OA--  
The official who was not named in a portion of the email shown to Tucson Sentinel—said the agency was also considering future projects as part of a separate lawsuit launched by Republican-led states after Protection plans to build nearly 25 miles of new border wall near the Sonoita station, which had halted border wall construction.

In the email, the Customs and Border Protection (<https://www.tucsonsentinel.com/tag/cbp/>) official confirmed the agency was seeking to build a new barrier near the Border Patrol's Sonoita station. "The new barrier will close a gap in the existing barrier that starts near Border Monument 102 and extends east for approximately 25 miles."  
CBP officials said "east," however, the border wall will extend westward across the San Rafael Valley. The agency's plan of a series of concrete blocks, help mark the U.S.-Mexico border and Monument 102 sits at the base of the Arizona trail near Montezuma Canyon Road, about 72 miles southeast of Tucson. Feds planning nearly 25 miles of new border wall near National Forest%OA--  
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"The proposed border wall in Arizona's San Rafael Valley isn't just another political project—it's an ecological catastrophe," said Erick Meza, with the Sierra Club. "This valley represents Southern Arizona's last major biodiversity hotspot—a critical wildlife corridor in the middle of the Sky islands and birthplace of the Santa Cruz river, where species like the endangered jaguar, ocelot, black bear and other species roam."

"Blocking 25 miles of this landscape will sever connectivity for countless animals, pushing already vulnerable species closer to extinction," he said. "Walls don't address migration—they exacerbate human suffering and ecological collapse. The San Rafael Valley's unique ecosystems are irreplaceable."

"Another useless multimillion dollar waste of money by the administration with the help of the waivers ignoring again all environmental laws," Meza added.

A state park since the late 90's, the San Rafael Valley is part of the larger Madrean Sky islands—known as a refuge for dozens of species—and represents what state officials (<https://azstateparks.com/san-rafael/about-the-ranch/park-history>) call the "finest stands of native grassland" in Arizona.

The 90,000 acre valley lies at the headwater of the Santa Cruz River between the Patagonia Mountains, Huachuca Mountains, and the Canelo Hills, and is considered important because it is "an intact landscape, un-fragmented and relatively undisturbed from the mountain ridges down to the valley bottom."

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In the last days of the first Trump administration, contractors used dynamite to carve a road for vehicles to access the steep mountain, leaving what the Sky Island Alliance called an "abandoned network of dangerous and ugly road cuts" that "now mauls the foot of the Huachuca Mountains and the Monument." As part of the effort, the first mile of the Arizona Trail was closed to the public for more than a year.

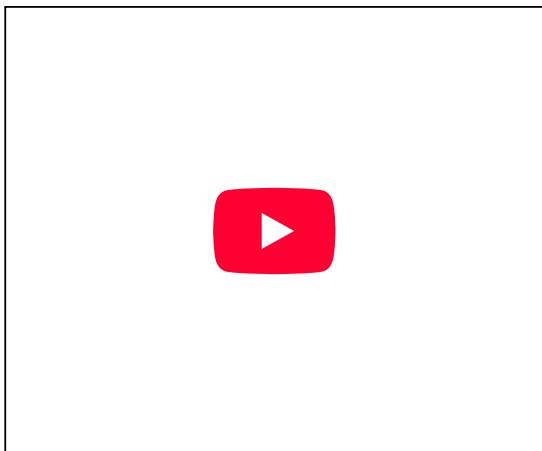
"Trump is posed to rip a 25-mile border wall as high as a three-story building through some of the last remaining wild places in Arizona's borderlands," said Russ McSpadden, with the Center for Biological Diversity (<https://www.tucsonsentinel.com/tag/center+for+biological+diversity/>). "It'll sever a vital corridor for endangered jaguars and ocelots."

"This isn't border security, it's ecocide," McSpadden said.

## Container wall

In late 2022, environmentalists successfully thwarted an effort by then-Gov. Doug Ducey to block the San Rafael Valley by building a wall of used shipping containers.

During his last few months in office, Ducey ordered state officials to build makeshift walls ([https://www.tucsonsentinel.com/local/report/021123\\_container\\_wall\\_removed/after-duceys-container-wall-dismantled-enviro-groups-push-remediation-border/](https://www.tucsonsentinel.com/local/report/021123_container_wall_removed/after-duceys-container-wall-dismantled-enviro-groups-push-remediation-border/)) of stacked shipping containers along Arizona's border with Mexico in an attempt to stymie asylum seekers. Despite widening controversy and complaints from the federal government that the project was interfering with a plan by CBP to close those gaps with new barriers, Ducey launched the effort to place nearly 2,800 40-foot steel cargo boxes along a 10-mile stretch of the border at a cost of \$95 million.



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The Biden administration pushed back, saying the move violated laws regarding the Roosevelt Reservation – a border easement owned by the federal government for more than a century.

On Friday, Trump demanded several agencies start militarizing the easement, escalating his administration's use of the U.S. military amid an immigration crackdown, States Newsroom reported ([https://www.tucsonsentinel.com/nationworld/report/041225\\_border\\_takeover/trump-orders-us-military-occupy-federal-land-along-southern-border/](https://www.tucsonsentinel.com/nationworld/report/041225_border_takeover/trump-orders-us-military-occupy-federal-land-along-southern-border/)). Under the memorandum, the Interior Department will allow the Defense Department to have jurisdiction over portions of the easement excluding Native American reservations like the Tohono O'odham Nation.

By creating a military buffer zone that stretches across the U.S.-Mexico border in Arizona, California and New Mexico, the order means any migrant crossing into the United States would be trespassing on a military base, allowing active-duty troops to hold them until U.S. Border Patrol agents arrive.

While contractors attempted to complete the project, a small band of environmentalists and local residents—including McSpadden—successfully protested the construction in the Coronado Forrest, often occupying roads and staging sites to halt the construction effort, including intentionally blocking trucks. By mid-December, federal officials filed a lawsuit, asking a judge to block construction and rule the projects along the border were an "unlawful trespass" that violated the U.S. Constitution.

A week after the feds sued, Ducey retreated, telling the court the state would halt placing the shipping containers, and begin removing those already installed on federal lands by January. Ducey's successor Gov. Katie Hobbs sold around 447 containers and repurposed some to serve as cooling centers ([https://www.tucsonsentinel.com/local/report/062024\\_cooling\\_centers/arizona-repurposes-2-containers-from-border-barrier-serve-as-tucson-cooling-centers/](https://www.tucsonsentinel.com/local/report/062024_cooling_centers/arizona-repurposes-2-containers-from-border-barrier-serve-as-tucson-cooling-centers/)), though hundreds remain in state hands.

## CBP outlines future projects

Late last year, a CBP official outlined a series of new border wall projects designed to close dozens of gaps across the Southwestern border as part of a legal filing. In 2021, Republican-led states challenged then-President Joe Biden's move to halt border wall construction, and as part of the lawsuit, CBP officials said they would move forward with construction, but also asked the court to allow them to build infrastructure to protect the barriers already built in the previous years.

U.S. District Court Judge Drew Tipton, a Trump-era appointee, ruled against the Biden administration and ordered Homeland Security officials to spend Congressionally-appropriated funds from 2020 and 2021 to build new border wall projects.

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As part of the lawsuit, the judge ruled CBP needed to use the funding for the "construction of physical barriers, such as walls, fencing, buoys, etc." and prohibited the agency from using funds for mitigation or remediation efforts, including repairs of existing barriers.

DHS officials later asked Tipton to restructure how to spend the funds, arguing that while they planned to build 40 miles of new border wall across California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, they needed to be able to use the funding for drainage and erosion features to protect Trump-era projects.

"The inability to fund drainage and erosion features from the fiscal year 2020 and 2021 barrier system appropriations—the only available source of funding—harms border security and public safety by preventing DHS from responsibly building new barriers in priority areas along the southwest border most in need of new security infrastructure," DHS officials argued.

Last November, Paul Enriquez, the director of CBP's Infrastructure Portfolio, told the court that following the judge's ruling, the agency began planning for new border barriers funded by congressional appropriations in 2020 and 2021.

"CBP focused its efforts on identifying areas along the southwest border without current pedestrian barrier, in U.S. Border Patrol's highest priority areas, that would benefit from the construction of new physical barriers," Enriquez wrote. "Among other things, CBP conducted site visits and surveys of potential construction sites in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas."

"Further, CBP considered the improvements to border security and public safety likely to result from new barrier construction, focusing on areas without current pedestrian barrier that have experienced high levels of migration traffic," he said, adding the projects would cover about 40 linear miles in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas.

In Arizona, CBP officials will move to close seven gaps between 40 and 240 feet in Yuma County, around 20 miles east of the San Luis border crossing along the Barry M. Goldwater bombing range, he said.

That project is already underway as construction crews began filling seven "vulnerable gaps" in the border wall, said CBP. The gaps are in a remote desert area south of Wellton, Arizona—and the exact number of miles to be completed remains unclear, the Arizona Republic reported (<https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/politics/border-issues/2025/03/24/border-patrol-begins-filling-gaps-in-border-wall-near-yuma/82642843007/>) in March.

They will also move to close two gaps in Santa Cruz County, including a .2-mile gap about 10 miles east of Nogales, Ariz. and 2.1 mile gap about 15 miles south of Sierra Vista, Ariz.

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Under the plan, CBP will also move to close three gaps near Jacumba Hot Springs—where hundreds of migrants crossed to seek asylum—east of San Diego, California. One project would cover 2.1 miles, while the other two projects would close three gaps totaling under a half-mile.



A project in Doña Ana County, New Mexico will cover 7 miles. Officials will also move to close at least 26 miles of gaps in Texas' Rio Grande Valley, including the installation of nine gates spanning 40 to 150 feet.

The project will move forward even after apprehensions have collapsed across the U.S.-Mexico border in March.

"U.S. Border Patrol's apprehensions along the southwest border for the entire month of March 2025 were lower than the first two days of March 2024," said Pete Flores, the acting CBP commissioner. "This is a testament to the tireless dedication and vigilant service of the men and women of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, who work every day to keep our country safe. Their commitment on the front lines plays a vital role in securing our borders and protecting American communities."

## Noem waives environmental laws

While federal construction projects have to follow a series of federal laws regarding the environment and cultural artifacts, the secretary of Homeland Security can waive these rules under the 2005 act, this includes the Endangered Species Act, the Clean Air Act, the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act, and the Safe Drinking Water Act.

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Following the law's passage, then-Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff used the authority at least five times from 2005 to 2009 to "waive in their entirety" more than 37 federal laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act, to build more than 550 miles of border wall and roads along the southern border.

Chertoff, and his successor under the Obama administration Jeh Johnson, waived the environmental impacts of new construction and border enforcement throughout the southwest, including protected federal lands like Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and Big Bend National Park.

The first Trump administration's round-robin of Homeland Security secretaries used waivers at least 29 times, and as late as April 2020, DHS was issuing new waivers for construction for around 15 miles of border wall in the Rio Grande Valley.

Last week, DHS head Kristi Noem issued her first waivers to clear construction projects near San Diego, (<https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/national-media-release/dhs-issues-waiver-expedite-new-border-wall-construction-california>) including the 2-mile project near Jacumba Springs, a 350-foot section near Smugglers Gulch, and two unnamed gaps of 600 and 1,500 feet.

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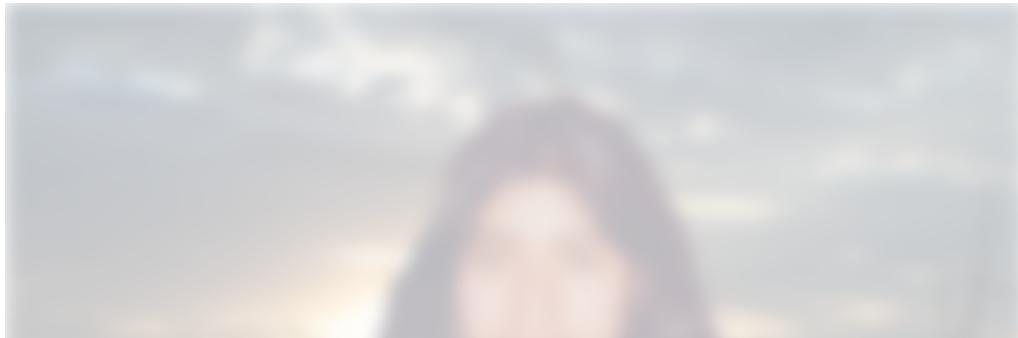
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