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NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION • NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION •
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NORTH AMERICAN BUTTERFLY ASSOCIATION: INTERNATIONAL BUTTERFLY PARK •
PUBLIC EMPLOYEES FOR ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY •
RIO GRANDE RESTORATION • RIO GRANDE VALLEY NATIVE PLANT PROJECT •
RIO GRANDE VALLEY NATURE COALITION • RIO GRANDE WILDERNESS SOCIETY •
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SOUTHWEST CONSOLIDATED SPORTSMEN • SOUTHWEST ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER •
TUCSON AUDUBON SOCIETY • VALLEY NATURE CENTER •
VALLEY INTERNATIONAL COLD STORAGE • THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY •
THE WILDLANDS PROJECT • WORLD WILDLIFE FUND

June 20, 2007

Dear Representative:

We are writing to you to express our strong support for H.R. 2593, the Borderlands Conservation and Security Act of 2007. The legislation would amend existing border security law to help alleviate the devastating impacts of illegal immigration and border enforcement activities on public lands, wildlife, and borderland communities, while providing the Department of Homeland Security (“DHS”) with the flexibility it needs to effectively secure the borders. We urge you to cosponsor this timely and important legislation, and to support its passage by the U.S. House of Representatives.

Illegal immigration and border enforcement activities are causing tremendous damage to protected lands, sensitive habitats, and local communities along the border. Nearly one-third of the 1,950 mile U.S.-Mexico border lies within military, tribal, and public lands, including hundreds of miles within the National Park system. Much of this country’s most spectacular wildlife, including jaguars, Sonoran pronghorn, and hundreds of bird species, depend upon protected public lands along the border for migration between countries. Local communities also rely on protected natural areas for clean water, recreation, economic development and quality of life.

Unfortunately, steps taken recently by Congress to provide for increased border security will only make matters worse. The recently enacted Secure Fence Act would require the construction of a double-layer, reinforced wall along large sections of the southern border, stretching from just outside San Diego all the way to Brownsville, Texas, less than 30 miles from the Gulf of Mexico, totaling over 700 miles. Local communities, state officials, conservationists, the military, and even area border patrol officials have all expressed

concern that the Secure Fence Act embodies an inflexible and reactionary approach to border security.

H.R. 2593 would address these concerns by allowing DHS to use its expertise to build fencing in appropriate areas, while providing the agency with flexibility to rely on “virtual fencing” and other low-impact border security methods in remote stretches of the southern border where fencing would make little sense. Rather than Congress indiscriminately mandating hundreds of miles of fencing in specific areas, our homeland security officials would be given the discretion to craft appropriate border security solutions. Additionally, the bill would require DHS to consult with federal land managers, local law enforcement, and other officials to ensure that border security is undertaken in a manner that best protects the local economy, culture, and environment.

The effects of large scale border wall construction on wildlife, clean water, clean air, and human health and safety could be serious and lasting, especially since the REAL ID Act, passed by Congress in 2006, allows the DHS to waive any and all federal, state, and local laws to construct walls, roads, and other barriers in the vicinity of the borders, north and south. The waiver authority has already been invoked twice, once in California and once in Arizona. Another waiver is expected soon for south Texas, even though the legislative history of the REAL ID Act clearly shows that the sponsors of the bill were principally focused on completion of a small section of border fencing near San Diego, CA. H.R. 2593 would instead require DHS to follow all laws intended to protect health, the environment, and worker safety.

In sum, the Borderlands Conservation and Security Act of 2007 would help alleviate the problems caused by existing law’s inflexible approach to border security. It would:

1. Provide experts at DHS the ability to decide whether fences, vehicle barriers, or virtual fences would be most effective in securing the border.
2. Give land management agencies, Native American tribes, and local communities a voice in border construction and decision-making.
3. Require compliance with laws meant to protect the air, water, wildlife, culture, and the health and safety of people in borderland communities.
4. Provide resources to help mitigate damage to borderland wildlife and resources.

We all support national security, and we can have intelligent security without harming our precious borderlands, wildlife, and border communities. Again, we strongly urge you to cosponsor H.R. 2593, and support its passage by the U.S. House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

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