



PRESS STATEMENT:

April 2, 2020

CONTACT: Emily Burns, Program Director, Sky Island Alliance
emily@skyislandalliance.org
(415) 342-3200

Conservation scientists launch binational effort to document wildlife in the path of Trump's border wall

New study fills gap left by waiver of environmental laws at the U.S.-Mexico border

Tucson, AZ—Sky Island Alliance announced the launch today of an unprecedented [study to document the diversity of wildlife](#) threatened by the U.S.-Mexico border wall. The Trump Administration has [waived](#) dozens of laws to fast-track border wall construction, and is set to build 30-foot tall steel walls in sensitive wildlife areas without any meaningful environmental review or mitigation.

“With border wall already under construction in Southern Arizona, it’s a race against time to document wildlife living in unwalled stretches of the international border,” said **Emily Burns, Ph.D., lead scientist on the project and Program Director at Sky Island Alliance.** “We don’t even have a complete list of species that live in these beautiful grasslands and forests, so we can’t even begin to estimate the toll of border wall construction on the remarkable animals of this region.”

Sky Island Alliance is partnering with Mexican nonprofit Naturalia and U.S. nonprofit Patagonia Area Resource Alliance to contribute vital science to fill the monumental information gap created by the Trump administration’s refusal to follow environmental laws. The study detects data using wildlife **camera array along 34 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border in Southern Arizona and Northern Sonora, Mexico.**

Sky Island Alliance has already installed over 50 wildlife cameras across the Patagonia Mountains, San Rafael Valley, and Huachuca Mountains over the past few weeks, with more on the way. Capturing photos and video 24/7, the project will generate thousands of images weekly. Sky Island Alliance and partners plan to use this information to both document the incredible diversity of wildlife in this rugged and remote area—and advocate for the urgent protection of vital wildlife corridors in the face of border wall construction.



PRESS STATEMENT:

April 2, 2020

"The remarkable wildlife of the border region deserve a voice in the decisions being made in Washington D.C. that will damage their habitat and sever their migration corridors," says **Louise Misztal, Sky Island Alliance Executive Director**. "We want to ensure the American public understands the enormous harm to wildlife and local communities from the border wall. We hope this study will catalyze efforts to protect our region."

"For more than 15 years, our organization and Mexican environmental federal agencies have made extraordinary efforts to maintain the great biological corridors of the borderlands and to conserve priority species present on both sides of the border," says **Gerardo Carreón, Conservation Director of Naturalia, AC**. "In Sonora and particularly in the Los Fresnos conservation area on the border, there are extensive areas of passage for wildlife through permeable fences that must remain so. In this region there are Mexican records of black bear, jaguar, cougar, bobcat, beaver, pronghorn, mule deer, white-tailed deer, javelina, and an enormous diversity of migratory birds such as the bald eagle, ducks, and grassland birds. We are happy to participate in this important border wildlife study."

The study is already detecting a remarkable diversity of wildlife species - more than 27 species within just days of camera installation. Wildlife detected include: mountain lion, white-nosed coati, ringtail, bobcat, gray fox, javelina, kangaroo rat, white-tailed and mule deer, Montezuma quail, American kestrel, Northern harrier, Mexican jay, and red-tailed hawk.

"We've studied wildlife movement in the Sky Island region for decades and know that it can take two years to document a complete list of species in a given area," Burns said. "To have detected so many species this quickly highlights the incredible diversity here and the critical need to protect the connected border landscapes that these iconic animals depend on."

The U.S.-Mexico border region is a diverse mosaic of ecosystems from deserts to grasslands and oak forests—and **home to more plant and animal species than anywhere else in inland North America**. Border wall construction will stop many wildlife species in their tracks, preventing the recovery of iconic species such as jaguar, wolves, and ocelots in the U.S., and putting numerous species like pronghorn, black bears, pygmy owls, box turtles, and white-nosed coati at risk.

Despite calls to halt border wall construction to ensure community safety during the coronavirus pandemic, the Trump administration is continuing to advance more than 150 miles of new border walls in California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, using



PRESS STATEMENT:

April 2, 2020

more than \$3.8 billion taken from Department of Defense projects. If completed, 30-foot tall border walls would block nearly the entire Southern Arizona border with Mexico and cut the Sky Island bioregion in two. Numerous parks, wilderness areas, wildlife refuges, national monuments, sacred Native American sites, and beloved cultural sites across the southern border region will also be harmed.

Sky Island Alliance

Sky Island Alliance is a regional nonprofit conservation organization dedicated to protecting and restoring the diversity of life and lands in the Sky Island region of the U.S. and Mexico. Sky Islands are mountain ranges primarily in Arizona and Sonora that rise out of arid grasslands and desert seas and provide vibrant habitat for plants and wildlife. Since 1991, we have engaged volunteers to study where wildlife species travel across our landscape to help protect pathways for jaguar, ocelot, mountain lion, bobcats, black bear, and many other species that need wild open space to roam between the U.S. and Mexico. We rally communities to heal springs and streams, improve habitat for native species, and develop a deeper connection to the region and its innate capacity to sustain and enrich our lives.

Naturalia

Naturalia AC, is a Mexican nonprofit with the mission of conserving the ecosystems and wild species of Mexico. It was created in 1990 and since then has focused much of its efforts on identifying priority regions for conservation in the Sierra Madre Occidental. In 2004 Naturalia created the Northern Jaguar Reserve where the northernmost reproductive population of jaguars on the American continent is located. In 2011, in collaboration with academic institutions and environmental authorities in Mexico, Naturalia carried out the first reintroduction of the Mexican gray wolf in the Sierra Madre Occidental region of Sonora. Naturalia works for the conservation and livestock management of native grasslands and their wildlife. In 2013 Naturalia created the ADVC (Area Voluntarily Destined for Conservation) Los Fresnos, with certification and recognition as a protected natural area by the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas (CONANP).

Patagonia Area Resource Alliance

Patagonia Area Resource Alliance (PARA) is a grassroots, community-driven nonprofit located in Patagonia, Arizona. PARA has spent almost a decade monitoring the wildlife



PRESS STATEMENT:

April 2, 2020

and water found in the Patagonia Mountains and protecting the area's rich biodiversity from environmental damage. As a watchdog organization, PARA critically analyzes the activities of industries like hardrock mining, as well as government agencies, to make sure their actions have long-term, sustainable benefits for Patagonia's public lands, watersheds, and local communities. PARA is also committed to offering outreach and education on the potential impacts industries like mining could have on ecosystems and ecotourism-based economies in the Sky Islands.

###