

Funding for border fences and walls falls far short of faith values

Border walls and other forms of excessive border militarization such as troop deployments are inconsistent with faith principles of compassion, stewardship, solidarity, and justice. **Border walls and fences** are not only an irresponsible use of public funds, but also hurt people and the environment, interfere with the sovereignty of indigenous communities along the border, harm businesses and communities in the border region, involve the confiscation of private land, and further militarize a region that has already seen an erosion of civil rights.

Walls are currently being built with \$1.6 billion in FY2018 funding.

These new structures will slice through private land taken by eminent domain, a state park, the National Butterfly Center and the historic La Lomita Chapel. The chapel itself could be destroyed as it sits within the 150-ft clearing zone for fence construction. Impacts to treasures such as the National Butterfly Center not only imperil wildlife but also severely impact a thriving local tourism industry. **Even a continuation of \$1.6 billion in annual funding for new fences and walls will have devastating impacts on landowners, tourism, wildlife and religious freedom.**



Otay Mountain Wilderness Area, Calif. Credit: Scott Nicol



Credit: Scott Nicol

Walls do not deter migration.

The construction of border walls and fences and increased enforcement tactics focus on the symptoms rather than the causes of migration. Rather than deter migration, the current 650-miles of barrier along the southern border has pushed vulnerable migrants – sometimes at the direction of traffickers – into more dangerous and sometimes fatal routes. This further complicates a complex situation rather than increasing security. As long as poverty, lack of opportunity and violent conflict push people to come to the U.S, there will be migration. **When the legal routes are either not available or severely restricted, as they are in the U.S., people will seek safety and family reunification whatever way they can. And no wall will stop them.**

Walls are an ineffective and immoral use of public funds.

At an estimated initial construction cost of over \$21 billion, a border wall represents irresponsible and wasteful government spending. To date, taxpayers have already paid more than \$2.4 billion for approximately 650 miles of border fencing—and many millions more have been spent on maintenance. This will only increase with further construction. **Such public funds should not be wasted on border fences and walls, but instead dedicated to much-needed disaster response and human needs programs, in addition to addressing root causes in the countries from which people are migrating.**



Credit: Anonymous



La Lomita chapel. Credit: Oneal91

Walls hurt communities, businesses and landowners in the border region.

Over the past twenty years, the federal government has dramatically militarized the U.S.-Mexico border region, infringing on the civil rights of border residents, and sowing distrust and fear between communities and law enforcement entities. Gone largely unchecked, these operations have **stifled the economic vitality and overall wellbeing of U.S. border communities**. Much of the land along the Texas border is in private hands, meaning the government will need to seize this land through eminent domain, leading to lengthy court battles and the loss of private property for hundreds of land owners, including ranchers and farmers.

Walls increase flooding and cause other environmental harms.

Dozens of laws that protect the environment, public health, and sacred lands are being waived to build new fencing and walls. We should not sacrifice clean air, clean water, and decades of investments in our public lands for dubious promises of increased security, particularly not when our border security agencies and border communities tell us such drastic measures are not necessary. New construction, justified by heated rhetoric over border security, will undermine longstanding human health and environmental protections. Nearly one-third of U.S. land along the border lies in public hands, including national wildlife refuges, national parks, and national forests. **Fencing and walls, while doing little to stop human migration, are effectively severing wildlife migration routes and destroying thousands of acres of natural habitat.** Physical barriers have also resulted in extensive flooding and soil erosion. Further construction of fencing and walls along the border will only serve to exacerbate the destruction of God's creation.



Wall-induced floods devastate Nogales, Mexico.
Credit: U.S. Customs and Border Protection

Walls infringe on the rights of indigenous border communities.

Border fences and walls would further divide tribal lands and communities; prevent indigenous community members from making border crossings for domestic, ceremonial, and religious purposes; and disturb or even destroy Native archeological, sacred sites, and human remains. Any border security measures—including patrols and checkpoints—affecting or accessing tribal lands must involve meaningful consultation, collaboration, and direct participation by all affected tribes and indigenous peoples. We have already seen a lack of meaningful consultation in the current and ongoing construction. **Proceeding any further without consulting affected tribes is a violation of the trust responsibilities Congress has with tribes.**

Border enforcement policies have torn families and communities apart, contributed to the deaths of thousands of migrants, harmed wildlife and border ecosystems, and violated the rights and humanity of U.S. citizens and immigrants alike. **Government spending should protect the dignity and worth of every person, protect creation, and advance the common good. Funding for further border militarization falls far short of these values.**

Fences = Walls

Most barriers constructed on the U.S.-Mexico border could be characterized as “fences” rather than “walls” as they are not solid concrete but are structures that can be seen through. However, **the impacts on landowners, wildlife, indigenous communities and flood risk** (debris backs up behind fences) are the same.



For all practical purposes, a “fence” is the same as a “wall.”

Photo credits: Left: U.S. Bureau of Land Management; Right: Matt Clark