March 12, 2026

The Honorable Susan Collins
Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
The Capitol, S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Vice Chair
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
The Capitol, S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Tom Cole
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol H-307
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Rosa L. DeLauro
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
U.S. House of Representatives
1036 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Katie Britt
Chair
Appropriations Homeland Security
Subcommittee
United States Senate
The Capitol, S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Chris Murphy
Ranking Member
Appropriations Homeland Security
Subcommittee
United States Senate
The Capitol, S-128
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mark Amodei
Chairman
Appropriations Homeland Security
Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
2006 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Henry Cuellar
Ranking Member
Appropriations Homeland Security
Subcommittee
U.S. House of Representatives
1036 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Prevent Border Wall Construction in Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park

Dear Chairs Collins, Cole, Britt, Amodei; Vice Chair Murray; Ranking Members Murphy, DeLauro, Cuellar,

On behalf of our 132 organizations, businesses, and millions of members and supporters nationwide, we urge all appropriations leaders to include language in any Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appropriations bills to prohibit any federal funding from being used—including from Public Law 119-21—for physical border barrier construction within Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park in Texas. Building a border wall through one of the nation's crown-jewel national parks and Texas' largest state park would be wholly

unprecedented, and the resulting damage to public recreation, wildlife, rural economies, cultural resources, and the integrity of our natural heritage would be irreversible.

Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park preserve more than 1.1 million acres of public land along Texas' Rio Grande—much of which is a congressionally designated Wild and Scenic River. These parks protect vast landscapes that sustain a wide range of native wildlife, preserve thousands of years of archaeological and Native American cultural history, and encompass iconic canyons where sheer limestone cliffs tower 1,500 feet above the flowing Rio Grande. The parks are major destinations for public access and recreation, including world-class whitewater boating, backcountry hiking and backpacking, bird and wildlife watching, fishing, and primitive off-road vehicle travel. In 2024, Big Bend National Park welcomed 561,459 visitors who spent an estimated $56.8 million in surrounding communities, generating $63.7 million in total economic output.[1] For Brewster County, Texas, and nearby gateway communities, tourism associated with the park is a primary economic driver.[2]

DHS released new border barrier planning maps in late February 2026 to show newly proposed physical wall segments bisecting both the state and national parks.[3] If built as shown in that map, the barriers would completely sever public access to nearly all reachable stretches of the Rio Grande in the region, exempting only the steepest canyon walls where DHS indicates "detection technology" is planned. A week after DHS released the map showing walls in Big Bend National Park, and following significant public opposition from local sheriffs, residents, elected officials, and business leaders, DHS revised the map on March 5, 2026, to include only "detection technology" in the national park, with border walls still planned in much of the state park.

On March 6, 2026, a DHS spokesperson told Marfa Public Radio that border barriers in "the Big Bend National Park and State Park are still in the planning stages,"[4] indicating that future map changes remain possible and that Big Bend National Park is still under threat of physical border wall construction. Because DHS can revise this map at any time without public notice or congressional approval, the change provides no durable protection for Big Bend National Park. Under either plan, wall construction would block popular campsites, river access points, and trailheads. The barriers would fragment intact habitat, disrupt genetic exchange, and restrict wildlife movement to the Rio Grande, the primary and often only reliable water source for many species. Absent intervention from Congress, the national and state parks remain in the crosshairs.

On February 17, 2026, DHS issued a Federal Register waiver expediting border barrier construction in the Big Bend Sector by waiving federal environmental and cultural resource protection laws.[5] In the waiver publication, DHS asserted that the Big Bend Sector constitutes an "area of high illegal entry." Yet recent data show the opposite trend. In October 2025, DHS announced that border apprehensions were down nationally 95 percent to the lowest levels in 55 years.[6] The entire Big Bend Sector, which encompasses more than one quarter of the total U.S.-Mexico border, accounted for just 1.3 percent of total Southwest border apprehensions. In January 2026, DHS made only 151 apprehensions in the entire 517-mile sector. [7] These facts do not remotely justify the irreversible destruction of Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park.

Opposition to physical border walls in Big Bend is widespread and nonpartisan among local elected officials and law enforcement leaders. On March 9, 2026, all five border sheriffs in the Big Bend Sector issued a bipartisan joint statement opposing physical wall construction in the Big Bend region, stating, "Based on decades of combined experience working this terrain, we believe that construction of a continuous physical border wall in the Big Bend region would not represent the most practical or strategic approach to border security in this area." The statement continues: "Steep mountain ranges, deep canyons, expansive desert landscapes, and the Rio Grande itself create formidable natural barriers that significantly limit large-scale movement… Border security is not a one-size-fits-all proposition." [8] Republican State Representative Wes Virdell has said that permanently damaging the Big Bend landscape with a wall "is a terrible idea."[9]

Congress retains clear authority to determine how appropriated funds may be obligated and expended, and appropriations directives remain one of the primary tools available to prevent irreversible harm to national and state parks and the natural heritage they protect. DHS has already exercised its waiver authority to expedite border barrier construction in much of the Big Bend region, setting aside multiple federal environmental and land management laws. Without those statutory safeguards, appropriations limitations are one of the only remaining mechanisms available to prevent irreversible damage within the national and state parks. Accordingly, we urge Congress to:

1. **Prohibit the obligation or expenditure of federal funds**—including from Public Law 119-21—from being used for the planning, construction, or installation of physical border barriers, roads, lighting, or associated infrastructure within the boundaries of Big Bend National Park or Big Bend Ranch State Park;

2. **Prohibit the use of federal funds** for physical border barrier construction activities that would impair public access to the Rio Grande within these park units.

These targeted funding limitations would preserve congressional oversight while safeguarding one of the most iconic and ecologically important landscapes in the country. We urge Congress to unequivocally protect Big Bend National Park and Big Bend Ranch State Park.

Sincerely,

Adventure Terlingua, Terlingua, TX
Agave Terlingua, Terlingua, TX
Allegheny-Blue Ridge Alliance (ABRA)
Angell Expeditions, Redford, TX
Animal Welfare Institute
Area 118 Hotel, Terlingua, TX
Archaeology Southwest
Association of National Park Rangers
Astro Mucho Astronomy LLC, Terlingua, TX
Basecamp Terlingua, Terlingua, TX

Best Bet Consulting, Southlake, TX
Big Bend Boating and Hiking Company, LLC
Big Bend Citizens Alliance
Big Bend Leasing and Logistics, Terlingua, TX
Big Bend Observatory
Big Bend Tourism Alliance, Terlingua, TX
Big Bend Vacation Rentals, LLC, Terlingua, TX
Cigar Mountain House, Terlingua, TX
Californians for Western Wilderness
Center for Biological Diversity
Chihuahuan Desert Research Institute (CDRI)
Cinnabar Theatre, Terlingua, TX
Climate Communications Coalition
Climate Hawks Vote
Climate Justice Alliance
Coalición de Derechos Humanos
Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
Conservation Northwest
Cuenca los Ojos
Deep Rock Dystopia, Terlingua, TX
Dolores River Boating Advocates
Earthjustice Action
El Gordo's Grill, Terlingua, TX
Elders Climate Action
Elope Big Bend Photography, Terlingua, TX
Endangered Species Coalition
Environmental Protection Information Center (EPIC)
Explore Big Bend Outfitters, Terlingua, TX
Eve's Garden Bed And Breakfast, Marathon, TX
Far Flung Observatory
Far Flung Outdoor Center, Terlingua, TX
Far West Texas Outfitters, Presidio, TX
Flack Electrical Services, Brewster County, TX
Friends of Big Bend Ranch State Park
Friends of International Friendship Park
Friends of the Bitterroot
Fork Tailed Media, LLC
Frontera Federation
Further Adventures, Terlingua, TX
Gallatin Wildlife Association
Grackle Art Gallery, Fort Worth, TX
Ghost Town Hotel, Terlingua, TX
Ginchy Gas House, LLC, Terlingua, TX
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
GreenLatinos
High Sierra Bar and Grill, Terlingua, TX

Humane Borders
Inland Ocean Coalition
Keep Big Bend Wild
Kettle Range Conservation Group
Kids for Saving Earth
La Kiva Restaurant and Bar, Terlingua, TX
Lajitas Stables, Lajitas, TX
Last Minute Low Budget Productions, Terlingua, TX
Latino Outdoors
League of Conservation Voters
Lily Paws, Terlingua, TX
Long Draw Pizza, Terlingua, TX
Lucky Sun Jeep Tours & Rentals, Terlingua, TX
Madrean Archipelago Wildlife Center
Magic Mesa Massage, Terlingua, TX
Mel's Place Cabin and Camp, Terlingua, TX
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.
Milky Way Treats, Terlingua, TX
Montanans for Wildlife and Wilderness
National Parks Conservation Association
New Mexico Wild
Next 100 Coalition
No Big Bend Wall Coalition
No Border Wall Coalition Laredo
Northern Jaguar Project
Nuevo Terlingua
Ohm Electric Co., Terlingua, TX
Quicksilver Ghostown Rentals, Terlingua, TX
Planet Earth Adventures
Public Justice
Public Land Solutions
Presente.org
RESTORE: The North Woods
Rewilding Institute
Rio Bravo Restoration
Rio Grande International Study Center
Roadrunner Travelers, Terlingua, TX
San Pedro 100
Save Big Bend Coalition
Sierra Club
Sky Island Alliance
Southern Border Communities Coalition
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Sunrise Movement Rio Grande Valley
Sunrise Movement Tarrant
Starlight Theatre Restaurant and Saloon, Terlingua, TX

Terlingua Area Realtor Kate Keenan, Terlingua, TX
Terlingua Ghost Town Rentals, Terlingua, TX
Terlingua Hospitality Group, Terlingua, TX
Terlingua Mini Storage, Terlingua, TX
Terlingua Real Estate, Terlingua, TX
Terlingua Te Amo Rentals, Terlingua, TX
Texas Conservation Alliance
Texas Impact
Tiny Terlingua, LLC, Terlingua, TX
The Boathouse Bar, Terlingua, TX
The Enviro Show
The Ocean Project
The Texas Showdown Series Adventure Cycling Race
The Perch Vacation Rentals, Terlingua, TX
The Wilderness Society
Venga Café, Terlingua, TX
Villa Terlingua, LLC, Terlingua, TX
Vista De Las Montañas Campground, Terlingua, TX
Voces Unidas RGV
Washington Wild
West Texas Plants, Terlingua, TX
Western Watersheds Project
Western Wildlife Conservancy
Wet Salon West, Terlingua, TX
Wild Cumberland
Wild Dogs Wrenching Auto Repair, Terlingua, TX
Wilderness Watch
Wildlands Network
Wright Bee Mountain Cabins, Terlingua, TX
Yellow Mountain Retreats, Terlingua, TX

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[1] National Park Service (2026). Visitor Use Statistics, Big Bend National Park
[2] National Park Service (2026). Visitor Spending Effects - Economic Contributions of National Park Visitor Spending
[3] Department of Homeland Security (2026). Smart Wall Map - U.S. Customs and Border Protection
[44] Marfa Public Radio (2026). Trump administration removes some Big Bend area projects from "Smart Wall" plan
[5] 91 Fed. Reg. 7297 (Feb. 17, 2026). https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/FR-2026-02-17/pdf/2026-02994.pdf
[6] Department of Homeland Security (2025). Lowest Fiscal Year for Border Patrol Apprehensions Since 1970
[7] Department of Homeland Security (2026). Southwest Border Total Encounters
[8] Border Sheriffs of the Big Bend Region (2026). Joint Statement re: Big Bend Border Barrier issued by sheriffs of Brewster, Presidio, Culberson, Hudspeth, and Terrell Counties, Texas
[9] Texas Monthly (2026), Texans Love Big Bend for Its Wildness. Trump Wants to Put a Wall Through It