

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Issue 2 • May 2004

Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument Environmental Assessment Update for Border Enforcement Activities

From the Superintendent

As the new Superintendent of Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument, I would like to introduce myself and to give you an update on the Border Patrol Strategy/Environmental Assessment (EA) process. With the scoping period ending on April 21, we are now in the process of analyzing the many letters and emails that we have received from other federal, state, and local officials, and concerned citizens such as yourself. We will be using this information to identify any additional issues and ideas associated with the project, and to develop a range of reasonable alternatives that will address the serious problems of resource damage and border security within the monument.

The development and analysis of alternatives is a regular process used by federal agencies to assess the solutions to issues which confront them. It's important to remember that these steps will be as sensitive as possible to park resources and that no decisions have yet been made. The scoping period was the first step in getting input from as many people as possible to arrive at a solution.

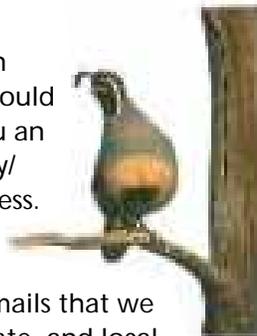
The following steps will be taken in the EA process:

- The National Park Service (NPS) and the Border Patrol will continue to work together to outline a broad range of strategies and actions that could be taken to address border security and protect resource values.
- The Border Strategy Analysis/EA process will include analysis of each of the public scoping comments and incorporation of new ideas and concerns in the issues and alternatives sections.
- The NPS will also work with input from other federal agencies, state and local governments in developing the Border Strategy and the full range of alternatives it considers.
- Once the EA is developed, the document will be made available for public review and comment for a 30-day period. Any additional public involvement, such as public meetings, will be announced at a later date as such information becomes available.

I look forward to your participation in this ongoing environmental assessment process.

Sincerely,

Kathy Billings
Superintendent



Background:

Since the late 1990s the park has become an increasingly popular border crossing for drug smugglers and illegal entrants. The Border Patrol estimates that 500 people per day, or 180,000 per year, cross through the park as illegal entrants. It also estimates that 700,000 pounds of drugs entered the US illegally through the park in the year 2000. Some steps have already been taken to address these issues including: remote cameras and sensors; increased patrols; and a vehicle barrier along the entire length of the park's border with Mexico.



The level of environmental damage on Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument and other public and tribal lands is staggering. The thousands of illegal entrants, including drug and human traffickers, are causing significant harm to sensitive ecosystems. Hundreds of illegal roads and trails scar pristine lands, tons of trash left behind present risks of biohazards to humans and wildlife, risk of wildfire increases significantly with fires set by illegal entrants, and endangered species and their habitat are threatened.

The environmental assessment process will help ensure that we develop a border strategy in partnership with the Border Patrol that addresses the serious degradation of park resources and allows an effective means of combating their root causes – drug traffic and illegal entry.



This newsletter may also be viewed at <http://www.nps.gov/orpi/pphtml/documents.html>