**D R A F T D R A F T D R A F T #1**

 We write to strongly urge that Congress not include any funding for construction of more border wall system in the final fiscal year 2021 appropriations. Specifically, we urge Congress to stop funding President Trump's border wall and reject the proposed $1.96 billion contained in the Senate's Homeland Security appropriations bill that would bankroll 82 more miles of Trump's costly and harmful wall.   We also wish to express strong support for $75 million provided in the House version of the Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill to begin to address damage by border wall construction on public lands.

 By January 20, 2021, the Trump administration will have foisted well over 400 miles of border wall in California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas.  While media reports have often characterized much of this construction as “replacement” barriers, in fact, the 30 foot wall is new, impenetrable to most wildlife, and significantly more destructive than the vehicle barriers that were in many of those locations earlier.  The construction of this 30 foot wall has torn apart and blasted some of our nation’s most spectacular lands, literally blown up Native American burial sites and other important sites for Native American tribes, destroyed mountains in national monuments and other public lands, torn homes, farms and ranches away from landowners, negatively impacted border communities and local economies, irreversibly harmed wildlife and fragile ecosystems, and significantly jeopardized water availability in the most arid parts of the United States.

While the country reels from a pandemic, U.S. taxpayers have footed the bill for this destruction, most of it through funds that President Trump raided from funds that Congress appropriated for the Department of Defense and the Department of the Treasury. Wall construction continues at a rapid pace and at phenomenal costs as high as $41 million a mile.  All federal and related state and local environmental and public health laws have been waived, along with all laws protecting Native Americans, the Religious Freedom Act, historic preservation laws and procurement laws.  And as the Inspector General of the Department of Homeland Security recently determined, U.S. Customs and Border Protection has not demonstrated the needed capabilities in the context of the border wall, did not conduct an analysis of alternatives to assess appropriate and affordable solutions, and relied on prior outdated border solutions.   *CBP Has Not Demonstrated Acquisition Capabilities Needed to Secure the Southern Border*, OIG-20-51, July 14, 2020.

Moreover, much of the new wall construction has taken place on some of our nation’s most fragile and biodiverse habitat, including national wildlife refuges and other public lands.  As noted earlier, we strongly support statutory language included in the House Department of Homeland Security Act, H.R. 7669, that directs the transfer of up to $75 million to the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service for mitigation activities, including land acquisition, related to the construction of border barriers on Federal lands – lands which belong everyone in our nation. This is just a needed first step in beginning to address the appalling damage from this unnecessary and destructive wall. We urge that this language and funding be retained in the final bill.

 President-elect Biden has stated that, “there will not be another foot of wall constructed in my administration” and that he would stop the condemnation lawsuits that the federal government has filed to seize land for border wall construction. Vice President-elect Harris has stated that the wall is a complete waste of money and has supported a bill rescinding President Trump’s executive order directing construction of the wall.  Congress should halt border wall funding now and begin focusing on mitigating the damage done to Native Americans, border communities, public lands and wildlife.

 Sincerely,