

The Sonoran Desert Borderlands



ABOUT

The United States-Mexico border is roughly 3,219 kilometers (2,000 miles) long, stretching from the coast of the Pacific Ocean to the Gulf of Mexico. The Sonoran Desert is located on both sides of the border and covers more than 258,999 square kilometers (100,000 square miles) in the U.S. states of California and Arizona and the Mexican state of Sonora. The Sonoran Desert is a rich, diverse, and delicate ecosystem, home to a highly diverse array of plant and animal species, some of which are critically endangered. Conservation efforts in the Sonoran Desert have involved organizations in both Mexico and the United States working together to connect habitat and migrations paths for animals.

HUMAN IMPACTS

In this fragile and diverse borderlands ecosystem, one of the most severe human impacts is the existing barrier (a combination of wall and fencing) that marks the U.S.-Mexico border. There is currently no continuous wall or fence marking the border, but there are segments of the border where there is a near-continuous barrier; one such area is the Sonoran Desert. Construction of a border barrier is ongoing, posing additional ecological concerns for the region. But it is not only the wall that impacts the region; the wall brings with it other human impacts, such as light pollution from stadium security flood-lights that illuminate the border at night and destruction of ecosystems as a result of construction, traffic, and patrolling of the border.

IMPACTS TO WILDLIFE

Walls and fencing—especially long, continuous barriers—are devastating to the survival of many wild species. These barriers can stop the migration of certain species as they prevent animals from moving along their critical migration routes. Lights at the border disorient migrating birds, derailing their migration journeys. The construction and maintenance of this barrier leads to the destruction of the delicate ecosystem and habitat where animals live and/or rest and refuel during migration.

MAPPING

Create a map that shows the boundaries of the Sonoran Desert. Mark the U.S.-Mexico border clearly on your map. Use Google Earth to explore the satellite image of the border that cuts through the Sonoran Desert. What signs of human impact do you see? These might include a wall or fence, lights, active construction, roads, traffic, human settlements (towns, houses/buildings). Determine which human impacts exist in this area and add these to your map. Make sure to include a key on your map so that people looking at your map will know what your symbols and lines mean.