

Otay Mountain Wilderness Area (OMW), near San Diego, California, was created by Congress in 1999 and encompasses some 18,500 acres. This rugged mountain area, adjacent to the United States- Mexico border, is internationally known for its diversity of unique and sensitive plants, and is considered one of the last remaining pristine locations in western San Diego County. It is managed by the Bureau of Land Management out of the Palm Springs Field Office.

DHS Proposal: Tactical infrastructure (TI) is to include 3.6 miles of wall starting at Puebla Tree and ending at Boundary Monument 250, and over 5.2 miles of access road. The majority of the primary pedestrian wall will be within the Roosevelt Reservation, but 1300 feet will extend into the OMW. The wall is to be 15-18 feet high, and comprised of concrete filled steel tubes, spaced to “prevent even the passage of small animals.” Nearly half of the access road will be within wilderness boundaries, penetrating as much as ½ mile north.

The rugged terrain will require the blasting and removal of 530,000 cubic yards of rock, and extensive grading and leveling in order to build the wall and the accompanying road. To facilitate construction, Road 250 (which runs perhaps three miles from the Marron Valley Preserve to Boundary Monument 250), was re-graded and re-opened after being washed out some 20 years ago.

Impacts: According to the draft EIS prepared prior to the waiver of law was invoked, construction of the TI will have long-term, adverse impacts on plant, animal, and hydrological resources of the area. OMW represents a unique ecosystem, home to twenty sensitive plant and animal species, including the endangered quino checkerspot butterfly, the only known stand of Tecate cypress, as well as the only known population of the Mexican flannel bush. Sediment threatens to overwhelm the Tijuana River watershed, which provides drinking water to the city of Tijuana and is home to the endangered arroyo toad.

Opposition: National and local environmental groups and local residents who fear that the fence will serve to funnel migrants through their property. This can only lead to conflict. The US Environmental Protection Agency also expressed serious concerns in response to the draft EIS.

Alternatives: The 2006 Secure Fence Act states: "If the topography of a specific area has an elevation grade that exceeds 10 percent, the Secretary may use other means to secure such area, including the use of surveillance and barrier tools."

OMW has gradients exceeding 40% . As Richard Kite, San Diego Sector spokesman for the Border Patrol stated, "It's such harsh terrain it's difficult to walk, let alone drive. There's no reason to disrupt the land when the land itself is a physical barrier." Indeed, the fencing may increase the burden on individual agents. With the steep terrain of the mountain itself acting as a barrier, migrants were forced to use three canyons (Mine, Buttewig and Copper) to journey North. They were easily tracked, and apprehended as they exited. They will now be dispersed to points further east.

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Photo links: <http://tinyurl.com/OMWpics1> <http://tinyurl.com/OMWpics2>