TO: My Peers

FROM: Kathryn Cunningham

DATE: September 21, 2020

RE: Endangered Species & Conservation

**Proposal**

The cost of the US-Mexican border wall is much higher than just how much it costs the economy. A more significant toll that you do not see talked about in the news is the environmental one. The area around the border wall is home to 1,506 native terrestrial and freshwater animal and plant species (Peters et al., 2018). If we continue wall construction, we could disconnect more than 34% of U.S. nonflying native terrestrial and freshwater animal species (Peters et al., 2018). I propose that we should change the rules for how this wall is getting built.

Currently, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is hiding behind the Real ID Act of 2005. This act provides a waiver for the Endangered Species Act of 1973 (ESA) and the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) to the extent the Attorney General determines necessary to ensure construction of barriers and roads (Garcia et al., 2005). They are using this to propel the construction of the wall forward by waiving laws that would otherwise slow it.

The EPA put laws in place to help protect the environment long before the Real ID Act was instated. The ESA was put in place in 1973 to conserve threatened plants and animals and the habitats in which they are found (US EPA, 2013). By using the Real ID Act to waive this law, it puts endangered animals such as the Mexican gray wolf and Sonoran pronghorn to have to search for new birth sites. This could cause them to bolster small existing populations in an area that will not be able to support a larger number of inhabitants.

NEPA was one of the first laws ever written that establishes the broad national framework for protecting the environment (US EPA, 2013). NEPA’s basic policy is to assure that all branches of government give proper consideration to the environment prior to undertaking any major federal actions that significantly affect the environment (US EPA, 2013). In 1969 they knew that setting these kinds of ground rules would be necessary because as the nation would continue to grow, there would not always be a focus on our environment. For the DHS to use the Real ID Act to negate these kinds of protective foresight shows that they are more interested in their agenda then our long-term wellbeing.

I understand that the DHS wants to full fill its job of protecting the American people and they rationalize that by putting the wall over the environment. However, if we see the loss of endangered species like the Peninsular Bighorn Sheep or the Sonoran pronghorn antelope, you hurt the communities that enjoy and rely on these animals. Groups like nature lovers, hunters, and native American groups. These groups provide an economic benefit. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service estimated that hunting, fishing, and wildlife-watching contributed nearly $26 billion to border state economies in 2011 (Stanford University, 2018).

I think there needs to be a compromise; if we can’t keep the government from building the wall, then they should at least do it on more environmentally friendly rules outlined by the EPA. This, of course, becomes a political issue as this whole project is because President Donald Trump promised his supporters that he would build the wall and that’s one of the reasons they voted him into office. It’s important for him to do this is save face with his supporters but it’s controversial because there are polarizing opinions on if it should even be built. The Bureau of Land Management could have scientists find the area that is typical migration land and keep that area of the wall open. Guards and cameras can also be put in that area to keep an eye out for immigrants; this way it can be a win-win for both parties.

**References**

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